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ERROR ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN ENGLISH PARAGRAPH (A CASE STUDY ON ZARQA UNIVERSITY)

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ABSTRACT

Writing is very important for learners; it is a dynamic and creative skill. The objectives of this study are to investigate the errors of students' writing and to discover the reasons behind these committed errors. This research is a qualitative case study. The researcher asked the participants to write a paragraph in 100-150 words about one of the following topics (Your Best Friend, A Nice Place to Visit, Your City, and Your Neighborhood). The paragraphs were collected from the 2nd semester 2017-2018 final exam. Then the researcher interviewed 10 students to discover the causes behind these errors. 60 English paragraphs were written by 60 (Male & Female) participants at Zarqa University. The participants are in the first year and studying English Language Literature. Their paragraphs were collected, then analyzed. The researcher analyzed the data based on Chanquoy (2001) classification of writing errors. The results showed that students had committed different grammatical, spelling, pronouns, and capitalization errors. Also, the study revealed the reasons for these errors. Therefore the researcher suggests some solutions to prevent these errors.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

English is considered an essential language globally; it is used in different disciplines and fields such as arts and sciences (Al-Khasawneh, 2014). It is also used when people travel or communicating with others (Latifah & Hani, 2017). There are four primary skills in English: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Brown, 2000). Speakers need to gain all the skills to communicate effectively Heusser (2014). Language, in general, refers to a means of communication. Language is used among people to express their ideas, thoughts, and feeling (Hamza, Khan, and Abbasi, 2017).

In Jordan, English is considered a foreign language for all educational systems (Al- Khasawneh, 2014). For instance, Jordanian students at all levels are still considered as a low proficiency in learning the language. They are still weak in writing skills (Al-Khasawneh, 2014; and Zawahreh, 2012). On the other hand, Hamdan and Abu Jaber (2009) found that Jordanian students who use computers in their writing have positive attitudes towards writing.

Problem statement

Different researchers such as (Al-Ghabra & Najim, 2019; Nuruzzaman, Islam, & Shuchi, 2018; Latifah & Hani, 2017; Al-Khasawneh, 2014; Huwari & Al-Khasawneh 2013; Ingels, 2006; and Harris & Cunningham, 1994) said that EFL students have a problem when they write a sentence or a paragraph in English. They claimed that writing skill is the most challenging task. While (Hammad, 2012) claimed that we need to focus on and understand Through the literature, the researcher found that most of the research articles done on this field were mostly on EFL/ESL learners, but very few studies discussed such issues in the Jordanian context. Therefore, this study attempts to fill a gap among Jordanian undergraduate students at Zarqa University (ZU).

Research questions

1. What types of common errors committed by undergraduate students at ZU committed when they write a paragraph?
2. What are the reasons behind such errors?

Research objectives

- 1- To discover the types of common errors committed by undergraduate students at ZU committed when they write a paragraph.
- 2- To discover the reasons behind these errors.

Significance of the research

The results of this study would benefit education stakeholders: students, instructors, and curriculum designers. For students, students will look at the types of errors that they made and trying to avoid them. Teachers and curriculum designers will be aware of the types of errors and frequency of errors that students made. Besides, teachers and curriculum designers can use different classroom methods to enhance students' writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of writing

Writing is the most critical skill in any language, as it is an active and creative part. It is also vital in the educational system. Academic writing has been a contested area of tertiary English-language education throughout the world (Moody, 2010). Learners face difficulties in writing effectively because it required thinking and cognitive processes. Writing has different stages that

learners should go through, such as pre-writing, free-writing, and re-rewriting. The process of writing was described by Zamel (1983, 19) as "non-linear, exploratory, and generative, which involves the sub-processes of planning, collecting data, drafting, revising, rewriting and editing." To be a successful writer, the writers need to focus on different aspects such as organization, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, coherence and cohesion, and others (Al-Ghabra & Najim, 2019).

Different researchers such as (Byrne, 1996; White and Arndt, 1991; and Zamel, 1983) attempt to define writing. For example, Byrne (1996, 6) defines writing as "encoding a certain message or idea by writing it in a shape of a sequence of sentences together in a systematic way". Besides, writing was also defined by (White & Arndt, 1991,13) 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".

Writing is the most challenging skill compared with reading, listening, and speaking because it needs a high level of language control, problem-solving form, generating ideas, planning, goal setting, monitoring, and assessing what has been produced (Al-Ghabra & Najim, 2019). Moreover, a paragraph means a group of sentences on one topic (AlTameemy & Daradkeh, 2019). A good paragraph should have a particular structure, unity, coherent, single idea, topic, support, concluding sentences, and writers should avoid mistakes.

Error analysis

Error analysis was first established in the 1960s by Corder. Corder is known as the "Father" of Error Analysis. Corder (1974) divided the error analysis into two main parts: the theoretical type, which focused on understanding the language and the applied type, which focused on effectively learning the language. Corder (1967) believes that errors are not always viewed negatively as he said learning a second language goes into different stages; it's like learning the first language.

The linguistics field is the most area that uses error analysis recently. For ESL/EFL learners, error analysis becomes the most famous tool in their studies on the types of error analysis such as (Ghabra & Najim, 2019; Alsied, Ibrahim, and Pathan, 2018; Althobaiti, 2014; Wu & Garza, 2014; and Zawahreh, 2012). Nzama (2010) said that the numbers of studies using error analysis were increased recently due to the function of error analysis. In addition, error analysis discovers the causes and strategies.

Mostly all scholars and researchers claimed that error analysis is essential and significant in the learning process (Kwok, 1998). Corder (1974) stated that EA provides the researcher with a good picture of how linguistics developed and clarifies the view of learning process. Hasyim (2002) claimed that EA was established to carry out (a) how well someone knows a language, (b) how a person learns a language, and (c) to obtain information on common difficulties in language learning. Kwok (1998) stated that EA is useful for the students,

teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers to show them which strategy learners use to learn the second language. EA is also useful for linguists to train teachers to categorize learners' writing errors, and also to use a proper manner of strategy.

There are two main classifications of errors, as Richard and Schmidt (2002) indicated. The first part is interlingual errors. Learners' mother tongue can cause it. Some of the errors are lexical errors, grammatical errors, or pragmatic errors. Simultaneously, the second part is intralingual errors, which can be attributed to the ignorance of rule restrictions, imperfect implementation of rules, and false concepts assumed, which all lead to overgeneralization.

Definition of error analysis

Many scholars defined error analysis. Crystal (1999, p. 19) defines EA as “the research of the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a language, especially a foreign language”. Moreover, James (2001) defines error analysis as “the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance” (p. 62). AbiSamara (2003, p.6) also defines error analysis as “a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make”. EA is described as “a set of procedures for identifying, describing and explaining learners’ errors” (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 51). EA can also be defined as “a branch of applied linguistics that studies and analyzes errors made by second language learners” (Al-Dubib, 2013, p.10).

Types of error analysis

An error was categorized by Al-Ghabra & Najim (2019) into two main parts or criteria: Recognition and Arrangement Errors. The first category is recognition. The researchers divide it into different sub-categories such as grammar, punctuation, spelling and coherence errors. While the sub-categories for arrangement errors are: capitalization, handwriting, and formatting. These types of errors have direct and indirect effects on the readers' interest and comprehension. If the writer does not work hard to avoid such errors, readers will feel bored to read the manuscripts and will have a wrong impression of the writer.

Past studies

Researches on EA have increased recently among ESL/EFL learners. In the Saudi context, AlTameemy & Daradkeh (2019) discussed the types of errors in writing a paragraph among 80 students at the Preparatory Year, at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. The researchers asked the participants to choose one of the four general topics to write about. These topics were not covered in the classroom. The researchers adopted Liu & Wang (2011) model. This study revealed 264 errors committed by the participants, which were categorized as follows: errors in paragraph development, coherence, unity, and errors in the inconsistency of point of view.

Another study done by Al-Ghabra & Najim (2019) studied the errors in paragraph writing. The participants of this study were 2nd-year students at the department of English, University of Baghdad. Students were taught the structure of writing before the study starts. Then, the researcher asked the students to write a good paragraph about a specific topic. Eighty-seven paragraphs were analyzed to achieve the objectives of this study. The researchers divided them into two main categories which are: Recognition and Arrangement Errors. This study showed that students made errors mostly on seven types of errors: grammar, capitalization, spelling, punctuation, formatting, handwriting, and coherence.

Nuruzzaman, et al. (2018) investigated the types of errors made by 90 Saudi students at the English Language Center at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. The researchers randomly selected the written paragraph from their final exam. The students were given four different topics to write a paragraph ranges between 100-150 words. The researchers used Corder's (1967) taxonomy of writing errors. The researchers found four categories of errors, namely as grammar, lexical, semantics, and mechanics, and these four categories were divided into 18 sub-categories such as noun, verb, pronoun, word order, relative clause, word form, word choice, capitalization, spelling, and others.

An African study done by (Alsied, et al. 2018) discussed the errors among Libyan students at Sebha University. The participants of this study were 70 Libyan EFL undergraduate English students in the first and second years. The researchers asked the participants to write an essay on a specific topic, and then the researchers analyzed their errors. They found that students at Sebha University have different types of errors categorized as grammar, mechanics, discourse lexical and spelling errors. It was also found that the most frequent errors were fragments, s-v agreement, misuse of articles, punctuation, coherence, cohesion, run-on-sentences, poor paragraph development, selection of the lexical items, and omission.

Hamza, et al. (2017) discussed the types of errors made by Pakistani learners of English in their writing and the causes behind such errors. The participants of this study were 20 students from Sindh Madressatul Islam University and Ora soft Training Institute. The researcher used a questionnaire as the main instrument, and then they asked the participants to write a paragraph about The Importance of Education. This research's findings were as follows: Pakistani learners made 111 errors as noun, verb, pronoun, adverb, adjective, Punctuation, Conjunction, phrases, spelling, Preposition, and articles. The researchers attribute such types of errors to different causes, such as the school system, ignoring writing. Students were not taught how to write clearly.

Latifah & Hani (2017) have discussed the types of errors made by students at Fakultas Sastra Universitas Pamulang (UNPAM) in Indonesia. Thirty-five paragraphs were randomly selected and analyzed. The researchers adopted Ferris and Hedgcock model (2005). The researchers found 290 committed errors made by the students. They divide these errors into for main categories: morphological, lexical, syntactic, mechanical error. Then the researcher

divided the sub-categories as a noun, article, word choice, sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. It was found that verbs were the highest frequency of error type.

On Jordanian society, very few studies discussed error analysis on paragraphs which made by Jordanian EFL learners. Al-Khasawneh (2014) identified the types of errors committed by students at Ajloun National University in Jordan. Twenty-six paragraphs were analyzed. The researcher asked the participants to write a paragraph about a specific topic. Students have committed errors in articles, prepositions, s-v agreement, word order, tense, plurality, spelling, capitalization, sentence structure, demonstrative, and irregular verbs. Al-Khasawneh believed that these errors, which were made by the students, were attributed to insufficient exposure to the target language, lack of practice, and interference.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The researcher used a mixed-method design (corpus design and qualitative). Corpus design means the study of language as expressed in corpora (samples) of "real world" text (McCarthy and Sampson, 2005). Moreover, qualitative research is defined by Creswell (2012, p.46) as "a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyzes these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner".

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 60 Jordanian undergraduate students at Zarqa University (ZU) majoring in English language and literature at the 1st of their academic years (2017-2018).

Data collection

The researcher asked the participants to write a paragraph in about 100-150 words about one of the following topics (Your Best Friend, A Nice Place to Visit, Your City, and Your Neighborhood). The researcher collected the samples of paragraphs from the students' final exam. Exams show students real skills and knowledge in writing. Furthermore, the samples of English writing exams provide real pictures of the participants' writing errors.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed some steps to be analyzed, which were mentioned by Corder (1974) as follows: First, the researcher analyzed students' paragraphs word by word and sentence by sentence to find out the types of errors. Second, the researcher categorized these types into different parts using coding and then converted into a percentage to examine the frequency. Third, the

researcher compared such errors with other studies. The researcher analyzed his data based on Chanquoy (2001) classification of writing errors. It includes the following:

These errors include the following:

- 1) Spelling errors: it deals with the errors related to orthography errors.
 - 2) Grammatical errors: it discusses the errors related to gender and number, agreement of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and subject-verb agreement.
 - 3) Punctuation errors: it deals with punctuation and capitalization errors.
- The researcher interviewed 10 participants to discover their perceptions about having such errors. The researcher analyzed the interviews by doing the coding.

Scope and Limitations

The study's scope is a sample of Jordanian undergraduate students at ZU, who are majoring in the English language at the 1st year students only. All of them share the same mother tongue language and the same field of specialization. The study analyzed students' written paragraphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discussed the results of the present study. The questions of the present study will guide the current research.

Types of errors committed by students

The current sub-section provides an answer for the first research question of this study: What types of common errors do undergraduate students at ZU commit when they write a paragraph?

Table 1 shows some errors that students at the English language and literature department at ZU committed, such as grammar, preposition, wrong use of verbs, spelling, articles, punctuation, organization, capitalization, and pronoun errors. Also, they do not consider the right structure of a paragraph, there is no clear topic sentence, and the supporting sentences were not clear and almost not related, the conclusion sentence also does not summarize the whole idea on the paragraph.

Table 1: classification of writing errors

	Types of errors	Frequencies
1-	Grammatical errors	250
2-	Prepositions	200
3-	Wrong use of verbs	110
4-	Spelling	105
5-	Articles	90
6-	Punctuation	85
7-	Organization	70
8-	Capitalization	60
9-	Pronouns	30
	Total	1000

Table 2: Most common mistakes committed by the students and examples

Error Classification	The errors	Errors correction
1. Grammatical	Last summer we go to the dead sea.	Last summer we went to the dead sea.
2. Spelling	I like winter because it is very beutiful	I like winter because it is very beautiful
3. Punctuation	I like winter because;	I like winter, because
4. Pronouns	My favorite season is winter because when he comes	My favorite season is winter, because when it comes
5. Organization	Hi, I will talk about my favorite season. I like winter	I like winter season for some reasons
6. Capitalization	my favorite season is spring	My favorite season is spring
7. Prepositions	There are many seasons at the year	There are many seasons in the year
8. Wrong use of verbs	I better this season	I prefer this season
9. Articles	The winter is my favorite season	Winter is the favorite season for me

The study aimed to discover the errors in students writing. The results of the study revealed that the students had produced several errors while writing a paragraph.

Table 1 shows that grammatical errors were the most frequent errors committed by the students among students at ZU (250) errors, followed by prepositions (200), wrong use of verbs (110), spelling (105), articles (90), punctuation (85), organization (70), capitalization (60), and pronouns was the least common errors committed by the students (30 errors).

Grammatical errors

Based on data collection and analysis, grammar was the most committed errors. The errors can be divided into the wrong use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, and plural, singular nouns.

Example 1: Last summer we go to the beach. --- Last summer, we went to the beach.

Example 2: He join us every day. He joins us every day.

Example 3: There are many place that are beautiful. There are many places that are beautiful.

The above three examples showed that students made some grammatical mistakes.

Preposition errors

Likewise, the participants of this study did not use prepositions correctly.

Example 1: There are many seasons at the year. --- As the writer should use in instead of at because /at/ is used with places or limited things.

Example 2: I usually meet my friend on the house. As the writer needs to use /in/ instead of /on/.

Example 3: My neighbor is always helpful when we are into the park, while the writer supposed to say /at/ instead of /into/.

Wrong use of verbs

The wrong use of verbs also was frequently existed on students writing.

Example 1: When the summer arrives I feel so happy. The writer should use the verb come instead of arrive.

Example 2: One of my neighbors pronounces that the garden is nice. The writer supposed to use another verb instead of pronounces such as say, state, or claim.

Spelling errors

Spelling was discovered on the students' writing many times.

Example 1: One of the students wrote beutiful instead beautiful.

Example 2: comer instead of come.

Example 3: neibor instead of neighbor.

Articles

The participants of this study committed some errors in using articles a/an/the/ or zero articles. Students omitted them from their writing, or some of them add an unnecessary article.

Example 1: My neighbor is friendly person.

Example 2: Our house have big living room.

The writer omitted to use the indefinite article (a) before the adjective in the previous examples.

Example 3: My mom is always cook a dinner.

Example 4: I usually go to the bed early.

The participants add the definite article for the following two examples, while they supposed to delete the definite article.

Punctuation

Also, the participants had made errors in using punctuations. The researcher categorized such errors into two categories as omission and addition punctuation marks. The most problematic punctuation were comma (,) and period (.).

Example 1: I like winter because... The writer used a colon after the word because while the right punctuation on this statement is a comma.

Example 2: My favorite season in autumn, The writer used a comma after "autumn" instead of using a full stop.

Organization

Students did not establish the right organization in their writing. They provide an example in table 2; the student begins his paragraph by saying: Hi, I will talk about my favorite season. I like winter. It is not important that the writer presents the reader to what he will talk about, because the reader already knows that from the title. He may say for example, I like winter season for some reasons. Another organization error, one of the students wrote his paragraph into points he said: 1- I like winter season. 2- The winter season is the most beautiful season and he completed his paragraph like so. The correct paragraph has a topic sentence to present the topic that the writer will talk about. Then, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence that reminds the reader about the topic.

Pronouns

In addition, most of the students did not rightly use pronouns. Example 1: One of the students said: My favorite season is winter because when he comes. The pronoun he should not be come with winter, because it's a personal pronoun. He should say: my favorite season is winter, because when it comes. Example 2: another student said: I like it because his atmosphere. He used a wrong possessive pronoun "his", he should said: I like it because its atmosphere.

Capitalization

The students also do not write a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence. Like the students wrote, "my" at the beginning of their topic sentence instead of writing "My". Some of them also did not write a capital letter after the full stop; for example, one of them wrote: autumn is my favorite season. the atmosphere on it is amazing. He didn't write "the" on a capital letter, because it's occurred after a full stop.

The Causes behind these errors

To suggest some strategies in order to improve students' writing, the researcher interviewed ten students and asked them about the reasons that students committed such errors.

Table3. The causes behind students' errors

	Causes	Occurrences
1-	Students do not use grammar in a correct way	8
2-	The mother tongue interference	8
3-	Lack of practice	7
4-	Insufficient knowledge of a foreign language structure	6
5-	Educational background	5

The second question most of the answers were like we actually don't know how to use grammar in our writing, and other student said: we don't focus on the right form and structure. Another student said: sometimes I don't distinguish between Arabic rules and English rules, because I used to write in English not in Arabic. Most of the students' answers concerning about practicing and how they don't practice, One of the students said: I don't practice, I just make a memorize about what I know without practicing. Another reason behind these mistakes is translation, one of the students said I used sometimes to think in Arabic then I use what I have arranged in Arabic into English.

The results of this study were like students at ZU committed some errors similar to those committed by other participants in different ESL/EFL papers. In this study, grammar was the most type of error committed by the participant, while the least type used pronouns in writing. This study in some way is similar to (Al-Ghabra & Najim, 2019; Al Tameemy & Daradkeh, 2019; Alsied, et al. 2018; Nuruzzaman, et al., 2018; Hamza, et al. 2017; Latifah & Hani 2017 and Al-Khasawneh, 2014). In addition, the researcher can conclude that most ESL/EFL learners committed the same types of errors such as grammar, preposition, wrong use of verbs, spelling, articles, punctuation, organization, capitalization, and pronoun errors. Moreover, the researcher recommended that other researchers to look out for the ways, methods, and criteria to overcome such errors, as ESL/EFL students are still committed the same problem without improving their writing.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the types and frequency of writing errors committed by students at ZU when writing English paragraphs. The researcher was also focused on the importance of error analysis. EA is necessary to investigate such type of research. 60 paragraphs were collected from the students and then analyzed. The results were as follows students committed several writing errors like grammar, preposition, wrong use of verbs, spelling, articles, punctuation, organization, capitalization, pronoun errors. Then the researcher interviewed 10 students to discover the reasons behind committed

such errors. Students declared that using grammar, lack of practice, mother tongue interference, and background knowledge were the most causes. While the researcher suggested two ways in which students can get benefits from them to improve their writing. This study will help teachers to predicate the types of errors that students might have in their writing so that teachers can focus on overcoming them.

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