

## ERROR ANALYSIS AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE WRITING SKILL: A JOURNEY FROM PRETEST TO POSTTEST

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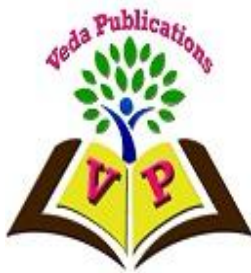
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### ABSTRACT



This study aims to make the English language learners writing skill more effective at the undergraduate level of Bangladesh. For this purpose the evaluation of the writing component of a four months' Communicative English language course was conducted at a public university of Bangladesh. Firstly, a pre-test based on essay writing was given to the learners at the beginning of the semester as a first evaluation, the results were saved. The errors that are noted down from the first evaluation are: Subject Verb Agreement, Collocation, Discontinuous Constituent, Mechanics, Complementary Clause, Gerund, Mix of American and British English Words, Mix of formal and Informal/semiformal form of words, Copula "be", Modal Verb, Modal Verb, Run-Ons, Word Order, Quantifier, Pronoun, Redundancy, Capitalization, Conditionals, Determiner, Punctuation Marks and Double Negatives. Based on the outcomes of this study, these errors were the main focus in the remedial English Teaching that followed during the whole semester. It saved valuable teaching time, and made the English classes for the students more effective. Secondly, overt grammar practice was given to them during the following four months focusing on the specific errors which were collected from the pretest. Thirdly, a final assignment was given to see if their writing skills had improved after four month program. The comparison of the pre-test and post-test produced valuable data that exposed that the learners improved their writing skill significantly at the end of the four month semester.

**Keywords:** *Error Analysis, Essays, Pretest, Posttest.*



## INTRODUCTION

In a foreign or second language setting errors or mistakes work as course of action in the way of learner's language learning process. Consequently, systematic analysis of the errors is very precious and can give a useful insight into the processes of the foreign or second language learning. There might be a subtle difference between errors and mistakes as error results from incomplete knowledge and mistake is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, or carelessness (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Error analysis as a branch of Applied Linguistics is one of the best mechanisms for the study and analysis of the errors made by second and foreign language learners. Errors play an important role in the learning process of a second or foreign language. Language learning is not a matter of subconscious process rather a process of consciously knowing the underlying norms of the target language presented to him by the teacher. It is a journey and to finish this journey the learners have to go through several processes and error making is one of them.

There is a debate whether English is taught in Bangladesh as a second or foreign language. We may say that English is a foreign language in our country as English is taught formally only in the classroom. And English is used outside classroom to some extent. Writing English plays a vital role in the way of communication whether English is second or foreign language does not matter.

Writing is associated with several issues such as pronunciation, morphology, syntax, semantics etc. In Bangladeshi public universities the medium of instruction is in English. The students have to use English to complete their assignment, research, article, and magazine. To communicate nationally and internationally through letter or email the students use English language. Moreover, it is the world of globalization. In Bangladesh the Bangla language is being Englishized day by day. Educational, academic or personal life is greatly dependent on English language. So the importance of writing skill of the learners is indescribable.

The university students of Bangladesh need to spread out their own ideas in writing an essay as well as arguing, problem solving, analyzing, and explaining in written form. Academic writing is about

clarifying, translating, decoding, exemplifying, illustrating, paraphrasing, investigating, editing, recasting, proofreading, reporting task etc. The writing activity for academic writing can be paragraphs, essays, textbooks' assessment, research scheme, action research, thesis, article, project report, dissertation etc. That is why; it is considered that writing essay is the students' writing material and also the teachers' assessment in university level. Data is collected from the essay writing in this research.

Now-a-days, writing seems to be a great burden for the fresh students at university level in Bangladesh. In the public universities of Bangladesh the students consciously or unconsciously ignore the mechanisms of writing. Lots of errors or mistakes are found in the scripts of the learners. The researcher endeavors to know in this research what kind of writing errors that are mostly made by the students in writing their own essay. The researcher also tries to give a best solution as a way of improving writing skill writing through the analysis of pretest and posttest performances.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Corder (1967) opines that error analysis is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the teachers get the idea regarding the progress of the learners. Secondly, error analysis indicates that how a language is acquired. Thirdly, the researchers can utilize errors properly for the betterment of the learners' language skill. Richards opined (1974) that the teacher can assess learning and teaching through error analysis at the level of pragmatic classroom experience. That is how; the teacher can fix up future efforts to be done for the improvement of the learners.

Rod Ellis (2008) opines that error analysis is the best way of learning target language. Errors in writing can be minimized only if they are identified, categorized and analyzed by the teachers for the students in a befitting manner. Through error analysis research the teacher can find out why the learners fail to achieve appropriate competence in the target language and then plan appropriate remedial lessons. Roos, (1990) made a study on syntactic error analysis of the written work of the



learners. He postulated that the use of remedial activities focusing on the most serious or frequent errors can be followed in the classroom for error free writing.

Khansir et al (2013) investigated different types of errors of paragraph writing of 90 first year medical Iranian learners of English at under-graduate level in Bushehr University of Medical Sciences and Health Services. The outcome of the study indicated a significant difference between pre-test and post-test in paragraph writing of Iranian EFL learners. The results of the study indicated that the total number of errors regarding verb, tense, article, mechanics, informal words committed by the Iranian students was 3045 and that of their Indian peers' was 3274. He added that faulty learning strategies are the main cause of errors in their universities.

Ahmadian et al (2013) examined the effects of peer-feedback and teacher-feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing ability. They collected data from 52 homogenous undergraduate university students. The outcome of this research indicated that teacher feedback is a great procedure in the way of improving writing ability of the students.

Salehzade (2017) examined the consequence of peer recast on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing ability through pretest-posttest activities. The subjects of the study were divided into two groups: experimental and control. The control group received writing instruction through recast strategy. Peer-recast strategy was exposed to the experimental group. The results showed that peer-recast had a large effect on the writing skills of the learners.

Pimsarn, 2009, conducted pretest- posttest, control - experimental group research design, containing 30 members in each using quantitative plus qualitative methods. His statistical analysis reveals that brainstorming strategies play a vital role in developing the interest and motivation level of the students.

Malmir et. Al (2010) made a comparative study regarding reading comprehension on the effect of task based language teaching(TBLT) and content based language teaching(CBLT). Two groups, one experimental and one controlled group were chosen by the researcher. TBLT was exposed to group A and

CBLT was exposed to group B. The researcher administered reading comprehension post test. The result of pretest and posttest was exposed through SPSS and T test exposed that TBLT group performed better than CBLT group.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to compare the errors made by the Bangladeshi EFL learners in their essay writing in their pre-test and post-test. Following errors made by the learners in the pretest, teaching grammar of target language was exposed to the learners during the whole four month long session. This study is about the assessment of the pretest and posttest performance. This study is to give thought on error analysis that can be used in class to motivate learners to improvise their learning goals and linguistic skill.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

The medium of instruction is English in the undergrad level at the universities of Bangladesh. But most of the learners are from Bangla medium school and colleges. It is a matter of great sorrow that almost all of the students have poor competence in English. That is why, the learners face adverse situation in the universities. Making error is a common phenomenon in the writing of the students. The poor performances of the local Bangladeshi undergrad learners compel the researchers to conduct this study. So the most prominent and frequent errors made by the ESL students in their writing were identified, categorized and analyzed. Moreover, it was suggested by the researcher that following error analysis remedial strategy may be implemented fruitfully to eradicate errors in writing. This will help ELT practitioners to build up a curriculum design that can help facilitators to focus mainly on the common language errors.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a difference in types of errors between pre-test & post-test in essay writing of Bangladeshi undergraduate students?



2. What is the role of errors in remedial measures? To what extent do remedial strategy following grammar practice influence learners to improve accuracy in writing?

### RELIABILITY

Reliability refers to the consistency of the test scores that means test will give up similar results if administered at different occasions. For the purpose of reliability of the test, twenty learners from the target group were selected randomly and they were asked to write one of the essays again just after one week of the pretest. The learners' made almost same errors in the both writing test. These learners were excluded in the pre test.

### VALIDITY

Hughes (1989) opines that a test is said to be valid if it measures actually what it is intended to measure. To ensure content validity of the test, the topics of essay writing were sent to a panel of judges consisting of two academicians in ELT. The topics were then adjusted to their suggestion.

### METHODOLOGY

#### PARTICIPANTS

Data were collected from one hundred undergrad learners (70 males, 30 females). All of the learners belong to a public university in Bangladesh. Bangla is the native language of the learners but they had studied English as one of their compulsory courses at primary, secondary and higher secondary level for twelve years. In undergrad program they study Fundamental English Course as a compulsory course. But the medium of instruction in other courses is in English.

#### PROCEDURE

- i. Administration of the pretest (argumentative essay writing on several topics was given to the students as a pretest).
- ii. Analysis of the errors
- iii. Development of the writing following errors made by the learners
- iv. Administration of the posttest

This research focused on the writing component in the four months' English Writing Skills training of a class of Hundred Honors students at a public university of Bangladesh. The methodology comprised of three processes. Firstly, a pre-test based on essay writing on several topics was given to the students at the beginning of the semester as a first evaluation. The participants were asked to write an essay on one of the topics: Cultural Adaptation, Lookism, Favorite Cricketer, Question Leakage in Public Examination of Bangladesh, or Terrorism. They were asked to write approximately 400 words in two hours. The errors at the level of morphology and syntax made by the learners in their first pretest were saved. Secondly, explicit grammar practice was given to them during the following four months focusing on the specific errors which were collected from the pretest. The teacher takes remedial measures following the types of errors committed by the learners in the pretest. The materials were collected from several books keeping in view the errors made by the learners in their first pretest. Four sessions of one hour in a week were conducted as remedial work during the four month long semester. Regular test was conducted after ten sessions to prepare the learners for a diagnostic final test. The researcher checked worksheets on the spot and gave a thought on the errors or mistakes in the end of each session. Thirdly, a final assignment on essay writing was given to see if their writing skills had improved after the four month schooling program. The topics of essay writing were totally different from those of pretest. The comparison of the pre-test and post-test produced valuable data to expose if writing activities can be improved through the exposure of error analysis. The target of error free writing was attained by instructing, exercising and repeating remedial materials throughout the whole semester.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION****Table-1: Descriptive statistics of test items with errors.**

Test Item		Pretest		Posttest	
		Errors	Percent (%)	Errors	Percent (%)
Mechanics	Spelling	401	17.1	11	12.8
	contracted form of words				
	numerals				
	punctuation				
	Capitalization				
Subject Verb Agreement		302	12.9	07	8.1
Collocation		84	3.6	04	4.7
Discontinuous Constituent		102	4.4	08	9.3
Complementary Clause		104	4.4	11	12.8
Gerund		123	5.3	03	3.5
Mix of American and British English Words		47	2.0	00	0.0
Mix of formal and Informal/semiformal form of words		87	3.7	05	5.8
Copula "be"		184	7.9	07	8.1
Modal Verb		204	8.7	00	0.0
Run-Ons		67	2.9	04	4.7
Word Order		108	4.6	11	12.8
quantifier		67	2.9	03	3.5
Pronoun		45	1.9	02	2.3
redundancy		76	3.2	00	0.0
Conditionals		76	3.2	03	3.5
Determiner		187	8.0	07	8.1
Double Negatives		75	3.2	00	0.0
Total		2525	100	86	100

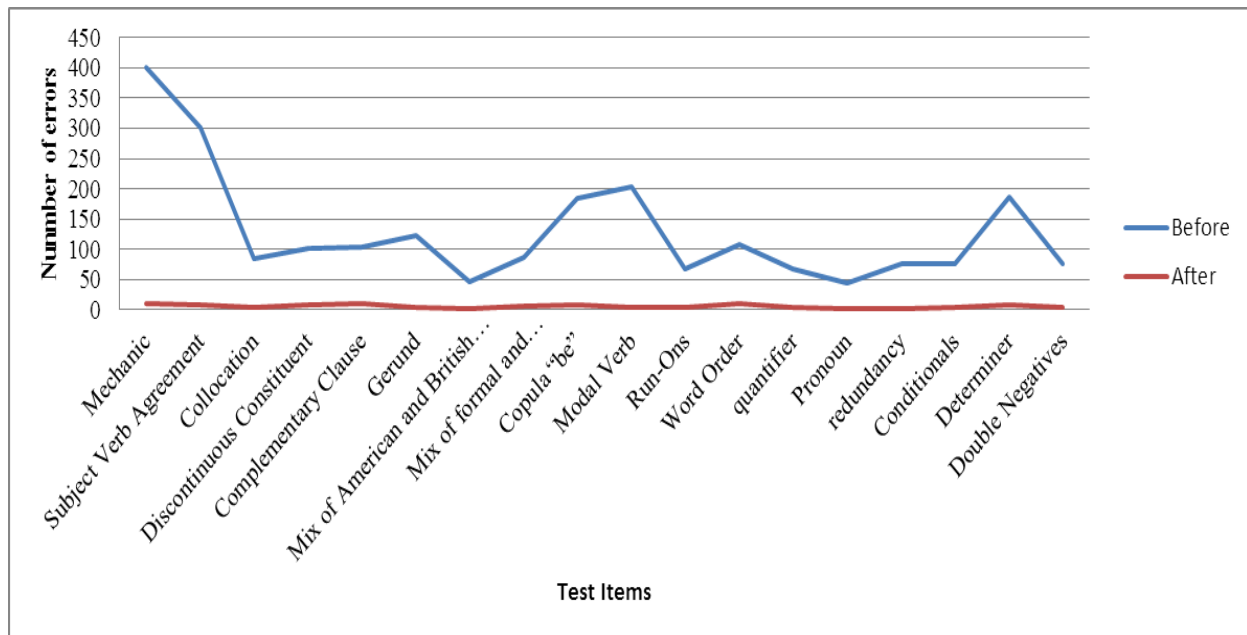


Figure-1: descriptive statistics of test items and number of errors.

Different teaching aids and methods play vital roles in the way of teaching learning process. The many benefits of implementing different methods as per the needs of the learners include helping learners develop reading comprehension skills, strengthening a skill, distinguishing instruction and alleviating nervousness by presenting information in a charismatic way. There are no restrictions in what materials can be used while conducting a class. The study was conducted to know the comparison between the pretest errors and posttest errors of different grammatical and syntactical items on the basis of before and after the lectures. The above figure shows that the numbers of posttest errors are less than the number of pretest errors. This result

illustrates that the students are benefited and their knowledge increases due to the proper teaching learning processes.

#### TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

The test of hypothesis was conducted to know if there remains significant difference between the numbers of errors of pretest and posttest of different English test items.

$H_0$ : The difference between pretest and posttest is insignificant.

$H_1$ : The difference between pretest and posttest is significant.

Table-2: Paired Samples Test.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Before - After	-125.16667	92.59034	21.82375	-171.21076	-79.12258	-5.735	17	.000



The above result shows that the p-value is 0.00 (<0.05) which implies that the difference between pretest and posttest is significant at 5% level of significance. Therefore, the analysis of writing errors and the use of proper teaching learning process facilitate the teachers in differentiating instruction from a different vantage which gives each learner the opportunity to interact with the content in a comprehensive way.

### CONCLUSION

Richards and Renandya (2002) opined that writing is the trickiest skill for second or foreign language learners to master as writing associates with several ideas such as generating and organizing ideas, spelling, punctuation, word choice, and so on. The difficulty becomes even more acute if the language proficiency of the learners is feeble. Ferris (2003) opined that error analysis is considered fundamental to upwarding learners' writing skill. In this study the researcher pays an attention to the efficacy of error analysis on Bangladeshi EFL learners' writing skill. It is proved by the researcher that teaching grammar following error analysis throughout whole semester help the learners eradicate errors they made in their pretest to a great extent. Through this study we have come to know about the improvement of the learners in writing skill from the very beginning of the semester to the last of the semester. Error analysis saves valuable teaching time as the teacher can teach the students focusing only on the errors the students make in their writing. Thus Error analysis works as a helping tool for the teachers in improving writing performances of the students. Finally, it can be said that the learners showed noticeable improvement in their writing skill after they were given four month schooling program following error analysis. This study may play a vital role to encourage the learners to eradicate their ungrammatical usage of language.

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