



## *Error Analysis of Writing Skills at College Level: A Case Study of Government College for Women, Wah Cantt*

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### Article Details:

Received on 06 April 2025

Accepted on 30 April 2025

Published on 02 May 2025

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### Abstract

Error analysis is the branch of applied linguistics and an important area of research in countries like Pakistan. The aim of this study is to discover the common errors committed by the students of college level of Government College for Women, Wah Cantt in their English writing. The most frequently happened errors which were found in the writings of the students included; capitalization, punctuation, spellings, words from first language, prepositions, incomplete structures, word order, possessives, pronoun, gerunds, infinitives, subject verb agreement, and articles. Based on the findings, recommendations and some implications which are of significance to educators and policy makers as well as to EFL teachers are provided. At least, it is hoped that the results of this study could be of much benefit for developing the English writing skills among intermediate students in Pakistan.

**Key words:** Error Analysis, Target Language, First Language, Errors and Mistakes.



## Introduction

Language is a system of specific symbols through which we express our feelings and emotions. It is a medium of communication. All human contact is dependent upon the language. Through language human are socially connected. They use language to inform others, to argue, to ask things from others, and sometimes it is used to perform certain acts. In short language is the very basic and most important aspect of humans.

Every language has four basic skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing. They are divided into two categories; receptive skills and productive skills. Listening and reading are receptive skills because in these two skills the learner receives the language. Writing and speaking are productive skills as they need the learners to produce certain volume of language. Listening means to comprehend what we hear. It has two types, interactive and non-interactive. In interactive listening we have a chance to contribute and speak in response to what the speaker says while in non-interactive listening we are unable to interact with the speaker i.e. when we are listening to TV shows etc. speaking is a productive skill and it also has three types. Firstly, interactive in which we interact with the listener. Secondly, partially interactive in which there is a partial interaction on the part of the listeners, for example, lectures. Thirdly, non-interactive in which the listener just listens to the speaker, for example certain speeches and sermons. Reading is a receptive skill through which we comprehend writing.

Writing is one of the basic skills of a language. It is the most important field of human communication and the most complicated skill to acquire. We must write properly if we want to convey our message clearly because in speaking we can use our body language, our stress and intonation and even the gesture of our hands to convey our message but, writing consists only the graphic representation of the spoken language. It means to convey your message through explicit written symbols. Writing has different genres and each of them has their own structure and format. As the hardest skill of all the skills, it requires the learners go to certain institutions or schools for the acquisition of it. Learning in the first language is a bit easier than that in the second language.

Learners are expected to commit errors in writing the second language. Although many scholars say that mistakes are the part of earning process. The learners learn from their mistakes. Mistakes are necessary to give attention to. They help us to know about the current level of the learners. If we analyze the errors of the students and investigate the sources of the errors, we can easily put certain remedial measures to them. This research is concerned with the errors in writing skills committed by college students.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to know the difference between errors and mistakes. Commonly both are considered the same but, they are quite different. Mistakes are errors of performance. They are caused by lack of attention, fatigue or haste while errors are deviation from rules of language because of faulty learning on the part of the learners. Errors are important. We should eliminate errors.

Error analysis is the branch of applied linguistics which investigates and analyzes the errors of the students. It was introduced by Corder in 1960. It distinguishes between errors and mistakes. According to the theories of error analysis, errors are systematic and can be classified into different categories while mistakes are not systematic. Errors can be phonological, syntactic and lexical. The very first aim of error analysis is to identify the errors, its categories and forms. Secondly, it detects the most common difficulties in learning the second language. It contributes to the study of second language acquisition. It



also investigates the sources of the errors and gives proper remedial measures to minimize those errors.

Error analysis divides the errors into two basic types; inter-lingual and intra-lingual. Inter-lingual errors are because of the first language's influence over the second language acquisition. Intra-lingual errors are because of the faulty learning of the second language. Error analysis is an area of study which investigates learner's language to that of target language. Corder is known as the father of error analysis. Before him it was considered that errors are something which is to be eliminated but Corder presented a bit different view that errors are to be studied deeply because learners use it as devices to learn.

Slinker in 1994 said that errors are like red flags on the road of second language learning and it gives us information about the strategies and techniques which the learners use to learn the target language. Sampson is a linguist who studied error analysis deeply, concludes that errors are the means by which teachers get to know about the learner's present level of understanding through the learner's errors. Corder classifies the error analysis into two areas. Firstly, theoretical: which deals with the learners as how they learn the second language. Secondly, error analysis helps the student to learn easily.

The study of error analysis is a diagnostic study because it tells us about the current level of understanding of the students. It is also prognostic because it tells the syllabus designers how to organize syllabus for certain students.

This research is concerned with the errors committed by college level students in English writing at Government College for women Wah Cantt.

### Research Hypotheses

1. Mother language of the students does not cause errors in writing the second language.
2. The students do not make errors in writing because of the over generalization of rules or of faulty learning.

### Research Methodology

The researcher has used quantitative method to recognize, categorize and analyze the data, it includes numerical, graph etc. Quantitative data analysis is to bend raw numbers into significant data using rational thinking. In quantitative data analysis we calculate the frequencies and difference of different variables. Quantitative data analysis is done to confirm or reject hypotheses you have framed at the earlier phases of your research. The same numeral within data set can be understood differently; so, it is necessary to use fair and sensible judgment. Certain software can also be used to make quantitative data analysis, like SPSS. The researcher has used Ellious'(1994) method for the analysis of data which has the following three steps.

1. Written sample collection of the students.
2. Error identification.
3. Errors evaluation.

### Research Design

Quantitative descriptive design is used. The research investigates the common errors committed by college level students of Government College for Women, Wah Cantt.

### Population

The target population for the proposed study consisted of all the students of college level at Government College for Women Wah Cantt.



### Sample and Sampling Technique

F.Sc level students of Government College for Women Wah Cantt were the participants of this research. The researcher took 30 students through convenient sampling. Students were from the same class and the same section.

### Theoretical Framework

Darus' (2007) method is followed for the identification of errors. According to which there are 18 types of errors which the students make in writing the target language; use of first language's vocabulary, word choice, word form, mechanics, preposition, incomplete structures, negative construction, possessive, subject verb agreement, pronouns, infinitives, gerunds, other agreements, and articles.

### Data Collection

Data collection is a procedure of gathering data from all the relevant grounds to find solution to the research problem, assess the hypothesis and estimate the results. Data collection procedures can be divided into two groups: primary methods of data collection and secondary methods of data collection. Primary data collection is to collect new data through interviews or questionnaires. Secondary data collection is to collect data from already published data. Quantitative data collection is based on mathematical calculations and is often collected through questionnaires. This research has used quantitative data collection method. And the data is collected through questionnaires. In which the students are asked to write on certain topics. And their errors are analyzed and quantified through SPSS software.

### Research Instruments

Questionnaire is used for the collection of data in order to know the common errors committed by the students.

### Data Analysis

The data is analyzed through SPSS software. First of all, the data is inserted into excel file. Then the researcher has given the desired commands to the software and the data is analyzed. After the data is analyzed, it is presented through pie chart.

### Data Analysis

This part of research has a detail of the errors committed by students at college level at Government Degree College for Women Wah Cantt. The data is presented through pie chart which shows the number and percentage of the errors. The researcher also categorized the errors of the students into different groups and then tried to show the possible causes and solutions of the errors. One of the major reasons of errors committed by the students is the effect of the mother language. The researcher not only investigated the causes of the errors committed by the students but also has given some solutions and remedial measures for minimizing the errors. In order to know about the most common errors of the students, they are given with a few topics and are asked to write short essays on them. Those topics include my best teacher, my college and my favorite book. Thirty students of F.Sc are taken as a sample for the research.

Most of the students committed 13 types of errors which are presented and analyzed in this research. Those errors include errors in the use of subject verb agreement, articles, tenses, prepositions, capitalization, gerund, capitalization and spellings. The students are not aware of the syntax or sentence structure of the target language. They are even not aware of the proper and common nouns. Many of the students use proper nouns where they should use a common noun. Sometimes they use common nouns where proper nouns



are needed. Some of the students don't capitalize the proper nouns and begin common nouns with capital letters.

Sr No	Gerunds	G	S/V Agreement	Article	Capitalization	Spellings	Incomplete Sentences	Possessive	Infinitive	Preposition	Punctuation	Pronoun	L1 words
1	-		1	2	4	17	1	-	1	5	1	10	1
2	-		3	2	3	18	2	-	-	1	14	7	1
3	1		-	2	5	14	1	1	1	2	12	9	-
4	2		-	1	7	15	4	3	2	3	1	13	1
5	2		6	1	4	22	-	-	1	-	1	9	-
6	1		2	1	9	19	1	1	1	5	9	9	1
7	2		1	2	12	16	2	1	2	7	10	8	-
8	-		1	1	3	19	2	1	2	2	5	7	-
9	2		2	3	5	13	-	-	6	5	4	3	1
10	3		3	2	12	11	4	-	2	5	2	17	2
11	1		2	3	7	23	-	-	3	3	6	13	-
12	1		4	1	7	10	1	1	1	2	1	7	-
13	2		5	7	14	11	1	4	3	5	5	13	-
14	1		1	1	2	20	2	1	1	4	13	8	-
15	1		1	1	11	12	1	-	2	3	8	10	-
16	2		6	1	12	16	-	-	3	4	11	16	1



17	1	2	1	8	18	1	1	1	-	13	11	-
18	2	4	1	8	19	1	2	1	3	11	10	-
19	-	3	1	6	18	1	1	1	5	2	12	-
20	1	1	3	6	9	4	1	3	5	8	13	1
21	-	3	5	7	8	1	-	-	4	10	16	-
22	-	1	2	7	16	1	1	2	2	9	10	-
23	1	3	1	2	13	1	3	1	1	6	9	1
24	-	3	2	10	9	-	-	4	2	9	12	-
25	1	4	1	13	5	1	2	3	3	6	2	2
26	1	4	1	12	6	-	-	1	2	3	12	-
27	-	2	8	10	10	3	3	2	1	10	15	-
28	1	6	1	14	6	-	-	3	2	13	4	-
29	1	1	3	15	12	1	-	1	3	13	5	4
30	1	6	1	12	9	2	1	-	2	12	4	-
Total Errors											1548	

Majority of the students don't know how to write an essay. Their essays are just one paragraph. The students don't know about the proper structure of an essay. There is no introductory paragraph, a proper body of the essay and a conclusion in the essays of the students.

Majority of the students are not careful about their spellings. They don't know the correct spellings of the words. 24% of the total errors are the errors of spellings. The students don't know the importance of the correct spellings. They don't know that often misspelled words affect the meaning of the sentences.

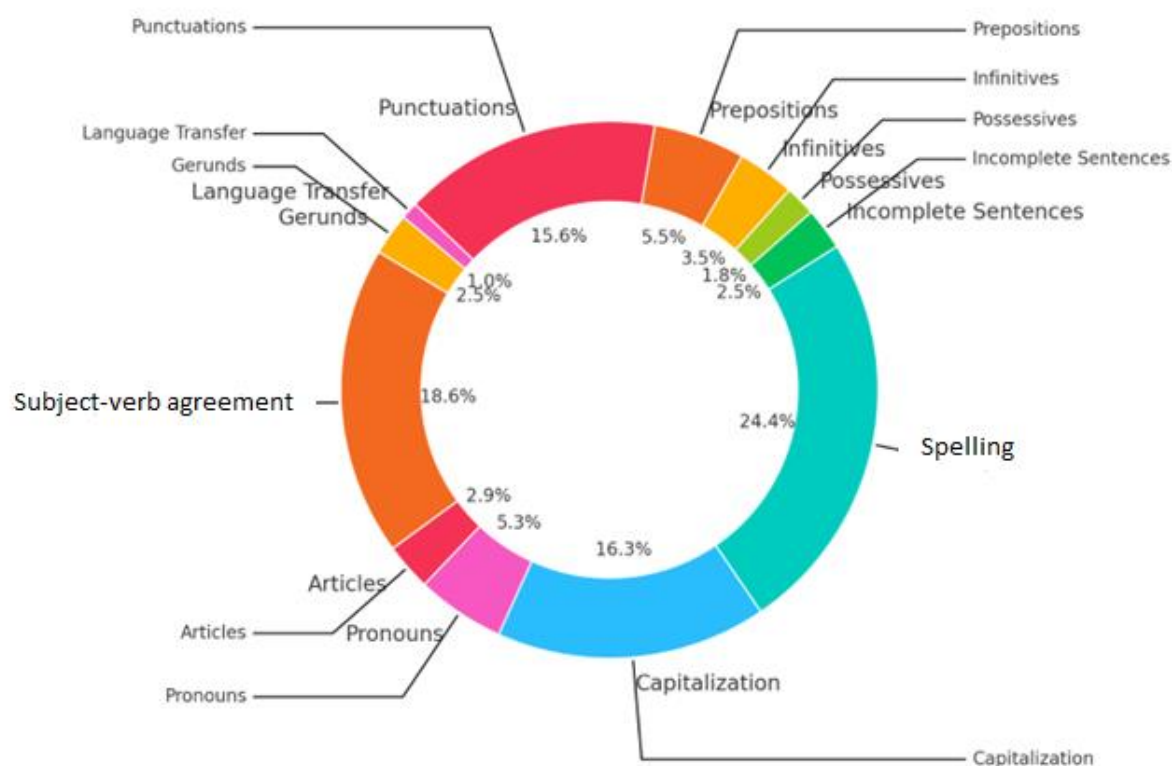
The second highest rate of the errors, are errors in the usage of subject verb agreement. 18% of the total errors are errors in the use of subject verb agreement. Thirdly most of the students are not aware of the capitalization rules. They begin sentences with small letters. 16% of the total errors are errors in capitalization. The fourth highest rate among the errors committed by the students, are errors in the use of punctuation. 15.3% of





the total errors are errors in punctuation. The following chart shows the percentage of the errors committed by the students.

**Percentage Pie-Graph**



### Percentage of Every Category

Mistakes in gerunds are 2.5% of the total errors, in subject verb agreement errors are 18.3% of the total errors, in articles 2.84%, in pronoun 5.23%, in capitalization 16 percent, in spellings 24 percent, in incomplete sentences 2.5 percent, 1.8 percent errors occurred in the possessives, 3.4 percent errors occurred in infinitives. In the use of preposition 5.4 percent errors occurred. In punctuation 15.3 percent of the total errors occurred. And the last but not the least 1% of the total errors occurred because of usage of first language words in the target language.

### Sample of the Errors and Interpretations

Some errors of the students are taken by the researcher as samples and are discussed thoroughly. The researcher indicated the wrong sentences with \* and correct sentences are written in the brackets.

#### Article

She is good teacher\* [she is a good teacher]

She works as guide\* [she works as a guide]

Ma'am Sonia is best\* [ma'am Sonia is the best]

Ma'am Sonia is great teacher\* [ma'am Sonia is a great teacher]

She is a coming to the college daily\* [she comes to the college daily]

The total number of errors committed in the use of articles is 60 which is 3.87 percent of the total errors. They don't know where to use a definite and indefinite articles. Even some



of the students don't use articles where they are needed. Some of the students don't know whether the articles are used with nouns or with verbs as many of them have used articles with verbs. All of this shows that the students still have not learnt the use of articles here at college level.

### Subject Verb Agreement

She go to college\* [she goes to college]

She do not like to study\* [she does not like to study]

There are a garden in our college\* [there is a garden in our college]

The area of our college are 460 square meter\* [the area of our college is 460 square meter]

She were absent\* [she was absent]

Errors in subject verb agreement are one of the most occurring errors. There are 284 errors in the use of subject verb agreement, which makes the 18% of the total errors. Most of the students don't add s, es and ies with the verbs so that they may agree with the subject of the sentences. Some of the students have used are before numbers which indicates that they don't have knowledge that how to use the different forms of verbs with different subjects.

### Gerunds

She asserted on me resigning the post\* [she asserted on my resigning the post]

I am thinking to write my notebook\* [I am thinking of writing my notebook]

The students don't have any knowledge of the gerunds and they don't know how to use it. 32 errors are committed in the use of gerunds which makes the 2.5% of the total errors.

### Infinitives

It's the first time to ate the food\* [It was the first time to eat the food]

It take a lot of time to prepared for the paper\* [It takes a lot of time to prepare for the paper]

The principal ordered to opened the door\* [The principal ordered to open the door]

54 mistakes are made by the students in the use of infinitives which make 3.4% of the total errors. It is pathetic that the students even at college level still don't know the infinitives. Some of the students use to with the second and third form of the verbs which is completely invalid.

### Pronoun

Ma'am Sonia got its degree from University of the Punjab\* [Ma'am Sonia got her degree from the University of the Punjab.]

I like our ma'am very much\* [We like ur ma'am very much or I like my ma'am very much.]

We have very talented teachers in our college. She teach us very well\* [We have very talented teachers in our college. They teach us very well.]

There are 81 mistakes in the writing of the students in the use of pronoun, which makes 5.32 percent of the total errors. The students don't know the appropriate use of the pronouns. Some of them have used it with animate noun which is usually used with inanimate objects. Another problem in using plural pronouns for singulars is because of the mother language's (Urdu) interference which use plural pronouns for elders' respect. But in English we don't have such rules.

### Word Order

She college comes\* [She comes to college]

She teaches to us ma'am Sonia\* [Ma'am Sonia teaches us English]





The students have not acquired the structures of the target language properly. They do not follow the rules of SVO. Some of them start their sentences with verbs and some start their sentence with objects. Some of them even put the objects before verbs. There are 22 mistakes in word order which makes almost 1% of the total errors.

### Possessive Pronouns

Aslam is has friend\* [Aslam is his friend]

I'am intended to write about our college\* [I am intended to write about my college]

Our college is a big ground\* [Our college has a big ground]

All of the students likes there teachers\* [All of the students like their teachers]

The students committed 28 errors in the use of possessive. They are not aware of the use of possessive pronouns. They don't know the difference between auxiliary verbs and possessive pronouns and many of them has used possessive pronouns instead of auxiliary verbs or vice versa. Errors in the use of possessive pronouns make 1.8% of the total errors.

### Incomplete Sentences

Ma'am Sonia the best teacher in the college\* [Ma'am Sonia is the best teacher in the college]

She daily eats\* [She daily eats fruit]

A very few students have committed these types of errors. Still we can say that many of the students cannot differentiate between transitive and intransitive verbs. They sometimes use objects with even intransitive and at sometimes they do not use objects with transitive verbs. The percentage of these types of errors is 2.5%.

### Errors in Prepositions

Ma'am Sonia composed poem\* [Ma'am Sonia composed a poem]

She is studying in Government Degree College\* [She is studying at GDC]

If a girl of the college gets ill\* [If a girl in the college gets ill]

Prepositional errors are very common in the students. The students don't know how to use prepositions appropriately. 91 prepositional errors are found in the essays which make 5.3% of the total errors. Prepositions need some special attention from both the teachers and the students. Sometimes even the first language of the students creates difficulties for the students in the use of prepositions.

### Errors in Punctuations

We were there but she did not come\* [We were there but, she did not come]

I like my college I am proud of our college\* [I like my college, I am proud of my college]

There are grounds trees gardens and flowers in our college\* [There are grounds, trees, gardens, and flowers in our college]

The students are ignorant towards the usage of punctuations. They are simply not aware of the importance of punctuations. There are some essays which are written in a single sentence. The students even don't know where to use a comma. There are 238 mistakes in punctuation which make 15.3% of the total errors.

### Punjabi Words

It is quite interesting to say that the students sometimes directly borrow words from their mother language when they don't have enough vocabulary in the target language. This shows us how the mother language affects the target language. If the students use words of their native language in the target language then we can think how much the mother language sentences will affect the target language.

### Shortcut Words



Mobiles can be seen in the hands of everyone in the society. Everyone uses message applications such as Whatsapp, SMS, and messenger. All of them use shortcut words instead of writing the full spellings. The use of shortcut words in text messages has affected the spellings of the students. Many of them use shortcut words even in formal writings such as essays and applications. The following shortcut words are found in the writings of the students.

Coz for because

Ni8 for night

Mrng for morning and so on

### Spellings Mistakes

It is natural for a non-phonetic language's learners to commit errors in the spellings of the target language. The spellings of English sometimes don't represent the pronunciation of it, which causes a lot of the difficulties for the learners. Sometimes the students over generalize the rules of the target language which cause errors in spellings. Many of the students over generalized the rule that we form the second and third form of a verb by adding ed to the end of the verbs. The students and the teachers need to focus on the spellings. The highest rate of mistakes is that of spelling mistakes. There are total 373 mistakes in spellings, which makes 24% of the total errors.

### Capitalization Errors

her name is naila\* [Her name is Naila]

she is from attock\* [She is from Attock]

Capitalization errors are one of the most common errors committed by the students. There are 82 errors of capitalizations, which make 5.32% of the total errors. The students don't know the rules of capitalization. They begin proper nouns with small letters which is not valid. Some of them even begin each sentence with small letters. The teachers also need to focus on the capitalization errors.

### Conclusion

The topic of the research is Error Analysis of Writing Skills at College Level; A Case Study of Government College for Women, Wah Cantt. It has a great significance for both the teachers, students and syllabus designers. To the students, it exposes their weak areas and shows them where to work hard. For the teachers this investigation helps to diagnose the students' weaknesses, to know the current level of the students and to adjust his teaching methodologies with the current level of the students. For the syllabus designers it is helpful to design the syllabus according to the competency of the learners.

The objectives of this research were to investigate the common errors committed by the college level students and to investigate the sources of those errors.

Questionnaire is used as a tool or instrument for collecting the data. 30 students of F.Sc are selected through convenience sampling for this research. The students are given certain topics to write short essays on. And then the data is analyzed through SPSS software.

The researcher has analyzed 10114 words in which 1548 mistakes. The total percentage of the errors is 15.5%.

In this research the researcher has tested two hypotheses which are;

1. Mother language of the students does not cause errors in writing the second language.
2. The students do not make errors in writing because of the over generalization of rules or of faulty learning.



Both are proved wrong according to the findings of the research because students committed many errors in writing the second language. And those errors are because of overgeneralization and faulty learning.

The teachers should do certain things to minimize these errors. First, the teacher should tell the students the importance of the English language. Secondly, the teacher should teach the grammar carefully, he should teach his students not to over generalize every rule.

The last but not the least, the errors are part of the learning process. The teachers should not be over reactive to the students' errors. The correction should be made carefully because the students learn through their errors.

### Recommendations

Recommendations for the future researchers are that they can do research on each of the hurdles in learning the second language. They may do research on the effects of L1 on learning L2. They can also do research on the role of learning the grammar of the second language in learning L2.

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