Error Analysis in Writing among Non-English Majors at Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract: *The study focuses on the impact of error analysis in the writing courses at tertiary level among non-English majors. In Bangladesh, the students of the non-English majors learn to write English through various writing courses. However, their proficiency in writing English is far from being satisfactory. Even after the completion of different language courses similar to English Fundamentals, Composition or other academic writing courses, they end up making numerous errors. In this research, the researcher endeavored to analyze the errors made by different non-department majors to discover the roots of errors and also to understand the difficulties students face while avoiding errors. The research was conducted through sample studies and interview questions. For the study 100writing samples were collected from tertiary level students from the renowned private universities in the country. The interview parts in this research reveal the real perspective of students regarding this issue. This research will help the teachers in figuring out why and how the errors occurred and in what ways they can be resolved. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. The result of the findings has been analyzed and some suggestions have been given on the basis of the research.*

Keywords: *Error, error analysis, academic writing, non-English majors, contrastive analysis hypothesis*

Introduction

Error Analysis has been defined by many researchers in several different ways. A few researchers focused on the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) to identify error in every second language learners. They discovered that the differences between L1 and L2 are the major factors for making errors. The theories of CAH concluded that more structural and functional differences between L1 and L2 play a great role in language acquisition and are responsible for learners' errors.Bloomfield (1933) suggested "The differences (among languages) are great enough to prevent our setting up of any system of classification that would fit all languages. Wardhough(1970) proposed a distinction between a strong version and weak version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis. The strong version involved predicting in errors in second language learning based upon a priori contrastive analysis of the L1 and L2, namely error analysis. According to Corder (1967), errors are invaluable to the study of the language learning process. By classifying the errors that learners made, Corder submitted that researchers could learn a great deal about the SLA process by interfering the strategies that SL learners were adopting. Corder also differentiated between mistakes and errors.

Error Analysis (EA) is one of the best tools of linguistics studies that concentrate on the learner's errors. In recent years, there has been an emphasis on analyzing errors of the language learners. In Bangladesh in the private universities, the non-departmental majors need to learn English in various language courses. Even after the completion of several language (writing) courses their proficiency level is far from being satisfactory. Here in this research, the researcher has hypothesized that error analysis can be a great help to identify the roots of students' error.

Research questions:

- What are the common errors that tertiary level students in Bangladesh frequently make while writing a paragraph?

- In what ways can error analysis help both students and teachers to identify the roots of errors?

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Literature Review

In 1960, Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues first introduced Error Analysis in SLA. It was an alternative to Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. In this process linguists used the contrast between learners first and second language as a tool to foretell errors. These researchers focused on the drawbacks of the Contrastive Analysis theory and advocated that CA was unable to identify great majority of errors.Corder (1967) was the first to advocate the importance of studying errors in students' writing. He felt that an analysis of errors is significant because of various reasons. He stated that "learners' errors are a major element in the feedback system of the process which is called language teaching and learning. Therefore, the study of errors is also a fundamental part of applied linguistics"(p-193), that considers error as a way of investigating learning process. Corder (1967) also states that "errors are evidences about the nature of the process and or the rules and categories used by the learner at a certain stage in the course".

On the other hand, Ellis (1994) defines error as deviation from the norms of the target language.It is to be remembered that a learner cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors. Therefore, making errors is an inevitable part of learning. Therefore, Error analysis (EA) examines errors made by L2 learners. Richards and Schmidt (2002) define it as "The study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners." According to Corder (1967) errors are indispensable, since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. Gass and Selinker (2001) define errors as "red flags", that means they are warning signals that provide evidence of the learner's knowledge of the L2.

For decades, Error Analysis (EA) has received a great deal of interest from a number of scholars in the field of second language acquisition. The following are the definitions of Error Analysis (EA) given by some of the scholars. Dulay,Burt and Krashen (1982) state that the analysis of errors is the method to analyze errors made by EFL and ESL learners when they learn a language. Not only can it help reveal the strategies used by learners to learn a language, but it also assists teachers as well as other concerning people to know what difficulties learners encounter in order to improve their learning.

James (1998) proposes that Error Analysis (EA) is the analysis of learners' errors by comparing what the learners have learned with what they lack. It also deals with giving the explanation of the errors in order to accurately reduce them. Another definition of Error Analysis (EA) given by Crystal (1999) is the study of language learners' language forms which deviate from those of the target language. Norrish (1983) proposes that errors are not only an inevitable part of the learners' output but they are also quite possibly a necessary part because they provide useful information for teachers and help them to plot the learning activity as it takes place. Ellis (1994) states that "errors occurred as a result of the negative transfer of mother tongue patterns into the learner's L2".

Recent Studies on Error Analysis

To analyze learners' errors systematically, Error Analysis has gained immense interest among researchers and scholars. Recently, in a study titled "An Error Analysis of Free Compositions in Written English by Thai School Students",JittraBanlomchona Thai researcher thoroughly identified the errors in the writings of Thai Students. He identified that the major source of problem for Thai students in writing English clearly is from grammatical and lexical errors.These errors make the student's writing obscure and confusing structures. The most troublesome problem in the area of grammatical errors was determiners. Thai has no definite and indefinite articles while English has a number of articles. Students often omit articles or make the wrong choice. The second highest numbers of errors were the errors in the use of verbs. Wrong choice of verbs and omission of verbs were the main errors in this regard. The third most frequent errors were the use of agreements. Subject-verb agreements were the major errors in that research. In the area of

lexical errors, most students used the wrong choice of words when they wrote compositions because they had inadequate vocabulary to explain things in English Language.

In 2010, SaaraSirkkaMungungu, a South African researcher presented a paper namely "Error Analysis: Investigating the Writing of ESL NAMIBIAN Learners". In this study, there were three groups: Oshiwambo students, Silozi students, and Afrikaans students. This study investigated common English language errors made by Oshiwambo, Afrikaans and Silozi First Language speakers. The four most common errors committed by the participants were tenses, prepositions, articles and spelling. Oshiwambo students recorded the highest number of errors (656) followed by Silozi students that recorded (630) errors and Afrikaans recorded the lowest number (588) errors. The remarkable part of this study is that the Afrikaans, who wrote the highest number of words, produced the least number of errors. This shows that the length of the essay does not necessarily determine the number of errors. This research also focused on finding out the frequency of occurrence of the identified errors in the L2 learner's written work. In this study, Afrikaans and Oshiwambo compositions recorded almost the same rate of occurrence of errors that is 292 and 278 respectively. In contrast, Silozi students recorded the lowest rate of frequency of error types occurrence that is 193. However, the results of the study reveal that there was no big difference in the type of errors recorded from each group. The total numbers of errors recorded were almost the same (Oshiwambo 656, Silozi 630 and Afrikaans 588 errors). The only difference that occurred was in the rate of frequency of occurrence.

Another study entitled "An Analysis of the Common Grammatical Errors in the English Writing made by 3rd Secondary Male Students in the Eastern Coast of the UAE" by Taiseer Mohammed Y. Hourani. He explored that the common types of grammatical errors made by Emirati secondary male students were in their English essay writing. This study showed the most common and salient grammatical errors which were found in the students' essays that includedpassivization, verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, plurality and auxiliaries. After analyzing the errors, it has been found that the students make grammatical errors due to two main reasons: Inter-lingual and intra-lingual reasons. This research clearly showed that the lack of the basic English grammar was the main reason of their errors. The findings of this study support the claim that Arabic-speaking students commit many grammatical errors. It is clear that the errors in grammar require more attention because grammatical proficiency is the foundation of better writing ability.

Research on Error Analysis in Bangladesh

If we consider Bangladesh perspective we can say that Bangladeshi learner's face many difficulties because English is not their second language. An analysis of student's "mistakes and errors in English writing", Akther and Khan (2011) talkedabout the condition of English writing ability of Bangladesh tertiary level students. Although they got twelve years education and learn English as a compulsory subject still they could not produce confident, competent and error-free writings. They also observed that teachers hardly provide any constructive comments for accurate writing.

According to Akhter and Khan (2010), in Bangladesh education system there are 3 stages which are primary, secondary and higher education that is undergraduate and graduate program. English is introduced as a mandatory subject from class 1 to higher secondary level, but they cannot write properly and their standard of English is not satisfactory. However, Heydari and Begheri (2012) found that a great number of errors in writing are made by adult while learning the L2.For instance, they said that learners have difficulties in writing English if they do not get enough facilities for free handwriting practice in class.

Md. Didar Hossain & Md. Tareque Uddin (2015), for instance, analyzed the errors committed by First Year undergraduates in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University. They showed that the students committed errors frequently inusing prepositions, articles, auxiliary verbs and pronunciation. These errors are due to the less involvement in writing and speaking activities.

Sources of Errors

It is noted that the native language plays a crucial role in learning second language fluently. A number of scholars proposed about the sources of errors made by language learners as follows: Richards (1974), for instance, states that two major sources of errors are inter-lingual errors and intra-lingual errors. The first one refers to errors caused when learners wrongly use the rules of their first language when they produce sentences of the target language. For example, in the English Language the basic sentence structure does not match with that in Bangla.

I eat rice. (Subject + Verb+ Object) [English]

আমিভাতখাই। (Subject + Object+ Verb)[Bangla].

Therefore, the students sometimes make errors because of the difference of structures. Other than differences of structures, there are differences in articles, genders etc. For example, in English, 'He'refers to male and'She'to Female whereas in Bangla, '**সে**' refers to both the genders. Again in English there are rules regarding 3rd person singular numbers. For example, "He eats", "They eat".Whereas in Bangla'**সেখায়।তারাখায়।**' No change in Verbs.

Other than structures, there are loads of contrasts observed in morphemes and phonemes between these two languages. Another researcher Penny (2001) concludes that there are two major sources of errors: inter-lingual transfer and intra-lingual transfer. Likewise, Heydari and Bagheri (2012) also state that inter-lingual interference and intra-lingual interference are the two sources of errors committed by EFL and ESL learners.

Procedures of Error Analysis (EA)

Error analysis is a complicated process consisting of several procedures. For error analysis research Corder suggested the following steps:

    1. Collection of a sample learner language

    2. Identification of errors

    3. Description of errors

    4. Explanation of errors

    5. Evaluation of errors

In the first step of error analysis it is needed to decide what samples of learner's language will be used for analysis and how to collect those samples. Once a corpus of learner's language has been collected, the errors in the corpus have to be identified. It is also necessary to establish a procedure to recognize errors. The description of errors requires attention to the surface properties of the learners' written expressions and utterance based on linguistic categories. After identifying and describing the errors, the next step is to explain them which are concerned with the sources of the error that is accounting for why they are made. It involves an attempt to establish the process responsible for fossilizing L2 acquisition. The final step, error evaluation involves a consideration of the effect that errors have on the person(s) addressed either in terms of the addressee's comprehension of the learners' meaning or in terms of the addressee's affective response to the errors. In this way, the evaluation of learner's error poses a number of problems. Thus, error

evaluation can be influenced by the context in which the error occurs. The evaluations also vary from person to person depending on who made it, and where, when, how it was made. Finally, on the basis of the analysis the evaluator gives some recommendation from his/her point of view so that the errors could be avoided.

Procedure and timeline

The participants of this study were the non-English majors' students at tertiary level. The study includes 100 students writing samples to identify the categories of mistakes and errors that the students made. The study was mainly conducted in Stamford University Bangladesh, University of Liberal Arts and Daffodil International University, Bangladesh where the medium of instruction is English. For this study, the researcher investigated 100 student's paragraph samples from similar writing courses. The researcher collected samples from the concerned course teachers after their final exam.

Analysis and findings of quantitative data

Population and Sampling:

In this study the researcher selected 100 students from 3 private universities of Bangladesh. All the students are non-department majors. They basically learn English language through different language courses. The researcher specifically selected those students who had undertaken writing courses. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 25 years. These students are 1st year non-Department majors, as has been said. All these students also learnt English through their compulsory courses in secondary and higher secondary levels. The number of students according to the departments is given below:

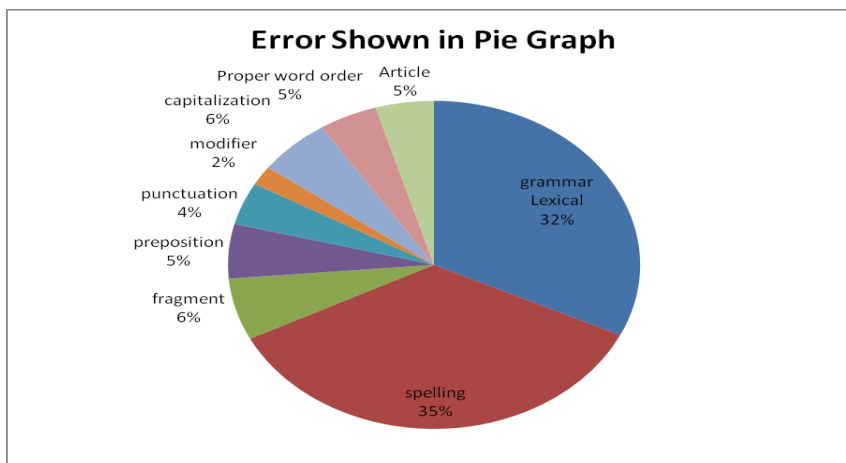| Sl. No.	Name of University	Name of the Departments	No. of students
1	Stamford University Bangladesh	Journalism	20
2	Stamford University Bangladesh	Architecture	20
3	Stamford University Bangladesh	Economics	20
4	University of Liberal Arts	Business Administration	20
5	Daffodil International University	Computer Science	20
Total			100

Brief Description and the Error Chart:

Here, at first different types of errors have been identified and categorized from the samples, according to their types. To investigate the error analysis, the researcher collected samples of student's scripts and then identified the errors. Then the samples were classified into different categories like grammatical errors, spelling errors, fragment errors, preposition errors, punctuation errors, modifier errors, capitalization errors, proper word order errors and article errors.

The following error chart shows the number of errors the students have committed.

Departments	No. of samples	Grammar (Lexical)	Spelling	Fragment	Preposition	Punctuation	Modifier	Capitalization	Proper Word Order	Article
Architecture	20	88	72	20	8	8	4	4	8	8
Journalism	20	60	124	20	16	8	4	8	12	12
Business Administration	20	60	44	12	12	16	4	16	8	8
Economics	20	46	76	8	8	4	4	16	12	12
Computer Science	20	44	56	4	12	8	4	16	8	8
Total	100	336	372	64	56	44	20	60	48	48

Participants Errors shown in pie graph

Error Shown in Pie Graph

The pie graph above shows the percentage of errors non-dept majors have done while writing paragraphs on different topics. The paragraph samples have been collected from the five different departments from 3 different private universities. Here the researcher has discovered that students made 35% errors in spelling, 32% in grammar and Lexical Errors which included the general errors like 3rd person singular number, gender errors, incomplete sentence etc. The other grammar errors are categorized separately where they made 6% errors in fragment, 6% in capitalization, 5% in preposition, 5% in article, 5% in proper word order, 4% in punctuation and 2% errors in modifier.

Grammatical (Lexical) errors:

Grammatical errors are the second most frequent errors that students made in their paragraphs.

The pie graph above shows that the students made 32% errors in grammarwhich included the general errors like 3rd person singular number, gender errors, incomplete sentence etc.

There are different kinds of grammatical errors made by tertiary level students. Most of the students made tense errors and sub-verb agreement error.

Errors in 3rd person Singular Number (Examples from Samples)

The students did not add's/es' to the verb when the subject is 3rd person singular number. On the other hand, the students added's/es' when the subject is 1st person.

a students want*, he think* , he spoil* , he go* , he never face* any problem, I spends* , I packs* , I visits* , I thinks* , I wants* , I eats*.

Auxiliary missing(Example from Samples)

Somestudents did not use auxiliary verb in their writing when it was required. Some students also misused the verb. Some students did not add verb 'to be' in the sentences. Few students mixed up the present tense with past tenses. They got confused to write in the proper tense. The examples are given below:

he watching*, we learning*, I sharing, situated*, there*, Bandarban situated. Misuse/wrong use: (he does not pass instead of 'did not', 'to be' before the exam instead of 'to do', Bandarban is my. . . instead of 'was', 'are' overwhelming instead of 'were', everyone have instead of 'has').

Missing verb 'to be':

(we have to prepared instead of 'to be prepared', we have to started instead of 'to be started', we have to participated instead of 'to be participated').

In addition, it is noticeable that most of the students wrote wrong sentences. Students had a trend to fill up the pages to write more. They wrote pages after pages by using wrong structure.

For example, "my exam of the coming soon, the topics is reviews, if we want acquiring a haire* education and degree, since I am a high school, English is international language communication to another people, so complited of higher education for any students must have to know English, he everyday planning, when exam coming." **(Collected from Sample)**

Spelling errors:

After the grammatical errors, spelling errors are the most frequent ones that students committed. Spelling error occurred as the students did not receive enough help from the teachers to learn spelling in the proper way. They also were unaware of the phonetic structure of words. The error chart below shows that the students made 35% errors in spelling. It shows their unawareness of the spelling sector. Most of the spelling errors occurred as they did not know the exact spelling of the word. Sometimes this kind of spelling errors occurred because of L1interference or it indicates that the students might get confused with a word with another word that sounds alike.

Spelling errors from Samples	Correct spelling
Blieve, surrandings, writting	Believe, surroundings, writing
Madical, comming	Medical, coming
cource	course
Batter, conclud	Better, conclude
charse	church

Punctuation error:

In English writing, punctuation is a very important part of language. Many students make numerous errors while using punctuation. This indicates their performance incomposition very poor. In many scripts it was found that the students did not use comma, semi colon while they wrote long sentences. Without proper punctuation they became meaningless sentence. The students also used incorrect punctuation in their exam and some students did not use any punctuation sign where it was required.

Fragment error:

Fragment is also an essential part of language. In the scripts, the students made fragmental error, where they wrote incomplete sentences and used 'full stop'. These kinds of errors are very common in their scripts. They have lack of knowledge in using comma or they misused the comma. It shows that students are unaware of the proper use of comma in sentences.
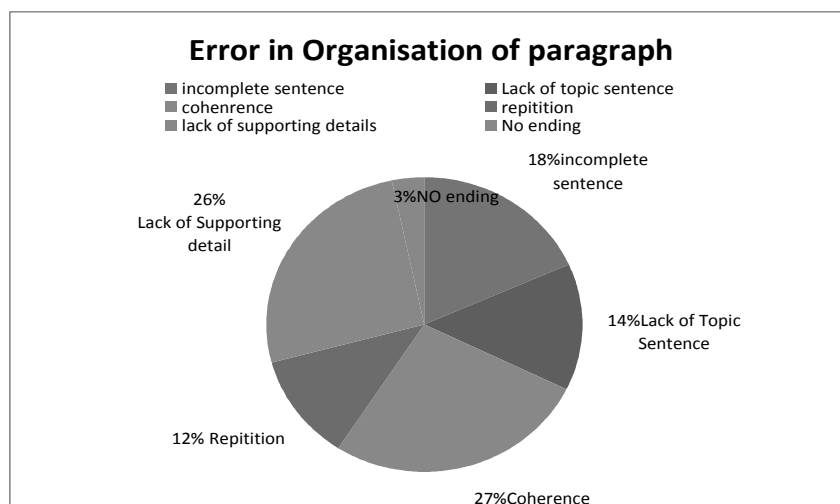
Error Chart regarding organization of paragraph

Students made a number of errors in the structure of paragraph writing. They could not write proper topic sentences, did not use suitable transitional words, did not complete the sentences, and could not write proper closing sentences. There is also lack of coherence and repetitions.

Departments	No. of Samples	Incomplete Sentences	Lack of topic sentence	Lack of coherence	Repetition	Not proper supporting details	No ending
ARC	20	20	16	16	8	24	4
JRN	20	20	12	28	4	20	4
BBA	20	12	4	20	12	20	0
ECO	20	8	12	16	8	12	0
CSE	20	8	8	20	12	20	4
Total	**100**	**68**	**52**	**100**	**44**	**96**	**12**

Error Chart regarding organization of paragraph

At tertiary level, the organization of the paragraph or composition is very important. In paragraph writing, there should be a general specific sequence to write a paragraph. There should be standard rules and regulations to write a paragraph and also proper unity among sentences that relate to the topic. Supporting details should be developed in a way that supports the topic sentence. The following pie chart shows the error that students committed in organization of paragraph.

Error in Organisation of paragraph

- incomplete sentence
- Lack of topic sentence
- cohenrence
- repitition
- lack of supporting details
- No ending

18%incomplete sentence
26% Lack of Supporting detail
3%NO ending
14%Lack of Topic Sentence
12% Repitition
27%Coherence

1. Lack of Topic sentence:

Topic sentence introduces the main idea of the paragraph or composition. Topic sentence should be the first sentence in a paragraph. It is a kind of statement that introduces the paragraph and is followed by specific details and explains or illustrates the topic sentence. The pie chart above shows that most of the paragraphs do not have proper topic sentence. The students have lack of knowledge to use proper topic sentence. The chart shows that students made 14% errors in writing the proper topic sentence. It shows their lacking regarding the topic sentence.

2. Lack of Supporting Details:

Supporting details is a very essential part of a paragraph. Here, the students should develop the ideas in detail with enough examples. The pie graph above shows that the majority of the students failed to develop the supporting details properly. The pie graph shows that students made 26% errors in writing the supporting details properly. It means that they did not even know the general structure of a paragraph or composition. From among 100 scripts, the researcher found that a few students tried to develop the composition with evidence that supported the topic sentence. Some students tried to develop the supporting details within 3 or 4 paragraphs.

3. Incomplete Sentences:

The pie graph above shows that the students made 18% errors regarding the in competency in writing English sentence. It shows their lack of knowledge to write in English as they fail to express their thoughts properly. Very few students succeeded in completing the sentences properly.

4. Lack of Coherence:

In paragraph writing coherence is very important because students get confused after writing some sentences because of their mother-tongue interference. It means the quality of being logical and consistent in the writing. The pie graph shows that the students made 27% errors in coherence.

5. Repetition error:

The pie graph shows that the students made 12% errors in repetition error. In paragraph writing repetition is totally undesirable. Especially at tertiary level it is not acceptable. But, there is a tendency that students try to write the paragraph broadly by using repeated words. It shows their in competency in expressing their thoughts in English.

6. No Ending:

In paragraph, the ending part is regarded as the conclusion part. In this part, the students should summarize the main points of the paragraph. The pie graph above shows that the students made 3% errors in'no ending' area.

Analysis and Findings of Qualitative Data:

Q.1:Do you think error free writing is very important for your career? If yes explain why?

All of the students positively answered that obviously error free writing is very important in their career. They said that English is an international language therefore wherever they go, it will definitely help them. They added that after completion of their graduation they will apply to different companies or banks or any institution. Every institution will give more priority to the students who know English well. They however expressed that proficiency in written English enables them to get good scores because it helps them to do well in the exam paper, assignments or research works.

Q.2: What type of errors do you mostly do while writing? Give some examples?

Most of the students answered that they made mostly grammatical errors followed by spelling errors. The students also said that they lacked the vocabulary to express their feelings in English. Among grammatical errors the students said that they made errors mostly in tense and wrong sentence making since English is not their mother tongue.

Q.3.Doyou think that most numbers of students are aware of their errors in writing?

All of the students negatively answered that they are not aware of their errors in writing and that is why they make errors in their writing. But, the students believe that they should be more concerned about the errors. They also believe that individual student counseling is most effective way for the students to understand their errors.

Q.4.Do you think teachers can help students to do less error in their writing? If yes then how?

All of the students positively answered that 'Yes!' teachers can help students to do less error in their writing. The students said that they help them by checking their copy in front of them, to mark their mistake and to make them understand about their topic. The students also said that the teachers help them to encourage their students to try to write 5 or 6 sentences in English in the class and therefore the teachers find out their errors which help to decrease errors.

Q.5. Do you like to use error free writing in Social networking sites?

Most of the students answered, 'Yes! Absolutely' while answering this question. They said using error freeEnglish writing in social networking sites like 'facebook', Twitter, Skype Chat make them smart, intelligent and funny. It also shows they are more educated. They added that knowing English language enables them to make friends with people abroad through social networking sites.

Do you think the writing courses are helping you in avoiding errors in English writing?

Each and every student positively answered that 'Yes!' the writing courses are helping them in avoiding errors in English writing. They feel good that they have these kinds of writing course.

They said they are taught less about English writing because they are non-English majors and they keep busy with their related field works and assignments.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study was aimed at investigating the impact of error analysis as well as the most frequent errors that the tertiary level students made in writing a paragraph. In the research, a number of different grammatical errors, spelling errors, fragment errors, preposition errors, punctuation errors, modifier errors, capitalization errors, proper word order errors and article errors were found in students' paragraphs. In the construction of paragraph also students made numerous errors regarding the organization of paragraph. To reduce the errors, more English writing course should be added in universities as well as in the school level. Furthermore, our teaching method should be changed according to the student's needs. The students require proper training while learning spelling as well.

The researcher would recommend the following suggestions to overcome the difficulties students face for avoiding errors in academic writing:

➢ Teachers must thoroughly analyze students' errors to understand the roots of errors.

➢ Interactive tasks should be practiced in the class to enhance the use of L2.

➢ More research should be done to discover differences between Bangla and English Language to understand students' errors

➢ Special training should be given to the students to learn/improve spellings. In conducting the survey it was also revealed that the concerned teachers identified the common errors students frequently make but they did not analyze the errors to find out the reasons or the roots of errors. Most of the teachers said that they think these errors occurred because their students lacked basic knowledge and at this level it is not possible to improve them through short time courses. However, some teachers recommended that error analysis can help teachers identify the roots of errors. Proper steps should be taken to reduce the errors.

Further researches may be undertaken for finding out how to overcome/ to reduce the errors in writing a paragraph in English properly. The students must take it seriously; otherwise they will suffer a lot. Bangladesh is a monolingual country but there is no denying the fact that English has occupied a significant position as a means of communication in some sectors. In Private Universities of Bangladesh, English is extensively/widely used for all the activities.

Error free English is also required to communicate with the world abroad. The students need good English writing skills wherever they go, especially when they go for higher education in different countries. So, the remedial action must be taken. The researcher hopes that this research will help the students (especially non-English majors), teachers, curriculum designers to develop the teaching method, teaching aid and material as per the student's need. Error analysis is very useful for the non-English majors because this will help the students to find the problem areas. It will be beneficial for the teachers to design remedial exercise for the students paying more attention on the trouble spots.

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Appendix

Interview questions

1. Do you think error free writing is very important for your career? If yes explain why?

2. What type of errors do you mostly do while writing? Give some examples?

3. Do you think that most numbers of students are aware of their errors in writing?

4. Do you think teachers can help students to do less error in their writing? If yes, then how?

5. Do you like to use error free writing in Social networking sites?

6. Do you think the writing courses are helping you in avoiding errors in English writing?