

## Exploring Writing Errors in the Department of English at the University of Tripoli: A Comprehensive Study to Enhance Teaching Strategies

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### Abstract

This research aims to explore the writing errors among undergraduate students in the Department of English at Faculty of Education, University of Tripoli. The study's purpose is to identify and analyse common written errors made by 20 English majors to develop strategies that can enhance writing proficiency for both students and educators. The objective of the study is to analyse these errors, determine their frequency, and propose effective teaching strategies to minimise them. This research provides insights into the challenges that Libyan EFL undergraduate students face, allowing educators to amend their pedagogical methodologies. The study follows a qualitative design, focusing on in-depth error analysis. Data were collected from 20 academic assignments written by 20 female undergraduate students and native speakers of Arabic, studying in the Department of English at University of Tripoli. The identified errors were categorized into mechanical, grammatical, lexical, semantic, and syntactic categories based on the theoretical framework of the study. The analysis found 78 errors in total: mechanical errors were the most frequent (56%), followed by grammatical (15%), syntactic (10%), semantic (10%), and lexical errors (9%). The high incidence of mechanical errors highlights the need for reinforcing foundational writing skills. The findings underscore the necessity of amendments to writing instruction, addressing all error types. Implementing targeted strategies can improve students' writing proficiency, leading to better academic and professional outcomes.

**Keywords:** Error analysis, Errors, Grammar, Teaching, Writing.

اكتشاف أخطاء الكتابة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة طرابلس: دراسة شاملة لتحسين طرق التدريس

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### المخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الأخطاء الكتابية بين طلاب المرحلة الجامعية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية في جامعة طرابلس. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد وتحليل الأخطاء الكتابية الشائعة التي يرتكبها 20 طالبًا من تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية بهدف تطوير استراتيجيات تعزيز الكفاءة الكتابية لكل من الطلاب والمعلمين. الهدف الرئيسي للبحث هو تحليل هذه الأخطاء وتحديد تكرارها واقتراح استراتيجيات تعليمية فعالة للتقليل منها. توفر هذه الدراسة إيضاحًا للتحديات التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مما يسمح للمعلمين بتعديل مناهجهم لتقليلها. تتبع الدراسة تصميمًا نوعيًا يركز على التحليل المتعمق للأخطاء. تم جمع البيانات من خلال الواجبات الكتابية لعدد 20 طالبة ليبية، ناطقة باللغة العربية الأم، ويدرسن في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة طرابلس. تم تصنيف الأخطاء إلى فئات ميكانيكية ونحوية ومعجمية ودلالية وتركيبية. نتيجة التحليل الكمي كانت إجمالي 78 خطأ: كانت الأخطاء الميكانيكية هي الأكثر شيوعًا (56%)، تليها الأخطاء النحوية (15%)، الأخطاء المعجمية (10%)، الأخطاء الدلالية (10%)، والأخطاء التركيبية (9%). يبرز الارتفاع في نسبة الأخطاء الميكانيكية الحاجة إلى تعزيز المهارات الكتابية الأساسية. تؤكد النتائج على ضرورة اتباع نهج متعدد الجوانب في تعليم الكتابة، يتناول جميع أنواع الأخطاء. يمكن أن يؤدي تنفيذ استراتيجيات مستهدفة إلى تحسين الكفاءة الكتابية للطلاب، مما يؤدي إلى نتائج أكاديمية ومهنية أفضل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الأخطاء، الأخطاء، النحو، التعليم، الكتابة.

## Introduction

Writing is a fundamental aspect of communication, enabling individuals to effectively convey their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. It functions as a crucial tool for disseminating information, exchanging knowledge, and establishing connections with others. However, throughout the writing process, various errors can occur, potentially compromising the clarity, coherence, and overall impact of the written work. These errors may include grammatical, lexical, or semantic errors, as well as unclear language usage.

According to J. Richard et al. (2002), an error is defined as the use of a word, speech act, or grammatical item in a manner that appears imperfect and indicative of incomplete learning. The error analysis approach identifies two primary causes of errors: intralingual errors, which result from the rules of the target language, and interlingual errors, which stem from interference from the learner's native language.

This study examines the writing errors made by undergraduate students in the Department of English at the Faculty of Education, University of Tripoli, and to analyse the frequency of these errors. The research assists students in identifying their weaknesses in writing and to support teachers in developing targeted instructional approaches based on the study's findings.

## Statement of the Problem

Undergraduate EFL students in the Department of English frequently struggle with writing errors, despite the necessity of excelling in academic writing for their future roles as educators and professionals. These errors impede academic progress and professional competence.

## Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the types and frequency of writing errors that undergraduate students make in foreign language writing?
2. How can we minimise the errors that undergraduate students make?

## Purpose of the study

This study aims to analyse the writing errors made by Libyan undergraduate students in the Department of English at the Faculty of Education Tripoli, University of Tripoli. The research will identify the common writing errors made by the students and analyse them highlighting their frequency for the propose of suggesting effective teaching strategies to minimise these errors.

## Significance of the study

This research enables students to become aware of their recurrent errors through offering recommendations to enhance their writing performance. The study seeks to provide significant insights into common challenges faced by students, allowing educators to adapt their teaching methodologies accordingly. Additionally, this research offers invaluable data for researchers, providing comprehensive data on the writing errors of Libyan EFL students.

## Literature Review

Numerous research studies, both locally and internationally, have investigated writing errors among EFL learners. This section will define terms and concepts related to the research and to explore the writing errors made by EFL students, as evidenced by previous studies on the topic and the pertaining challenges in writing.

## Writing

Writing is the process of using symbols, typically letters of the alphabet, to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form. It involves the physical act of putting words on paper or a digital medium and the cognitive process of constructing coherent and meaningful sentences, paragraphs, and texts. Writing is a fundamental means of human communication, allowing for the documentation and dissemination of information, stories, and ideas across time and space. It encompasses various forms, including creative writing, academic writing, technical writing, and professional writing, each serving different purposes and audiences. Effective writing requires a combination of skills, including grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, organisation, and style. Britannica (2024)

## Error Analysis

Error analysis is a systematic process used to identify, categorise, and understand mistakes made in a particular context, often within the fields of language learning, linguistics, and education. Error analysis can be defined as the process to observe, analyse, and classify the deviations from the second language rules and then to reveal the systems operated by the learner (Ahmed, 2014). Language learning learners' errors can be noticed in various areas, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax. The main objectives of error analysis is to uncover patterns of errors, determine their causes, and develop strategies to correct and prevent them. This approach helps educators and researchers gain insights into learners' language acquisition processes, providing a basis for improving teaching methods, materials, and learner support systems. Error analysis can be applied beyond language learning to various domains where understanding the nature and source of errors can lead to enhanced performance and outcomes. Several studies were conducted using EA to improve language proficiency.

## Sources of Errors

Interlingual errors are mistakes made by language learners that result from the influence of their native language (L1) on the target language (L2). Touchie (1986) posits that these errors are primarily caused by mother tongue interference. Al-Khreshah (2010) further categorises interlingual errors into Transfer Errors, which are direct results of L1 interference, and Mother Tongue Interference, where errors occur as learners attempt to understand the structure of the target language using their L1 framework. These errors manifest when learners incorrectly apply L1 rules or patterns to L2. For instance, a Spanish speaker might say "She have" instead of "She has," reflecting the differing verb conjugation rules in Spanish.

Intralingual errors, on the other hand, arise from within the target language itself and are not influenced by the learner's native language. These errors are often due to overgeneralization, simplification, or misapplication of the target language's rules. Brown (1980) observed that the early stages of language learning are dominated by interlingual transfer, but as learners acquire more of the new system, intralingual errors become more prevalent. Richard (1974) classifies intralingual errors into four categories: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesised.

## Role of Errors in Learning

Errors play a crucial role in the learning process, serving as indicators of a learner's progress and understanding. Rather than merely being viewed as failures, errors are essential for cognitive development and skill acquisition. In language learning, for example, errors reveal the hypotheses learners are testing about the target language's rules and structures. Educators can use errors as tools to identify areas where learners

struggle and instruct them accordingly. By analysing and addressing these errors, both teachers and students can focus on specific difficulties, leading to more effective learning strategies and improved performance. Embracing errors as natural and informative aspects of learning encourages a growth mindset, where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth and improvement rather than setbacks.

### **Types of common errors**

Writing errors can be broadly categorised into four major types: 1) grammatical, 2) semantic, 3) lexical, and 4) mechanical.

#### **Grammatical errors**

They are a prevalent issue in student writing, encompassing mistakes in sentence structure, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and other syntax-related aspects. These errors can significantly impede the clarity and coherence of written communication.

#### **Semantic errors**

This type of errors involves the misuse or misinterpretation of meanings, leading to sentences that are logically inconsistent or semantically incorrect. These errors often result from a lack of understanding of the nuanced meanings of words and phrases in context.

#### **Syntactic errors**

Syntactic errors refer to mistakes that occur when the rules governing the structure of sentences are violated. These errors can lead to sentences that are grammatically incorrect and often difficult to understand.

#### **Lexical errors**

Lexical Errors pertain to the incorrect use of vocabulary, which can manifest as inappropriate word choice, incorrect word forms, or the use of non-standard expressions. Such errors can obscure the intended message and reflect poorly on the writer's language competence.

#### **Mechanical errors**

Mechanical errors comprise issues such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, may seem minor but can detract from the overall readability and professionalism of a text.

### **Previous studies**

Many studies tackle the errors that EFL students make. This section reviews existing literature on writing errors in English language education, examining past studies that investigate common errors:

Alseid, Ibrahim and Pathan in a study titled Errors Analysis of Libyan EFL Learners' Written Essays at Sebha University, the paper purpose is to examine and analyse the main errors committed by Libyan EFL learners in their writing at the Department of English of Sebha University. The sample of this study comprised 70 Libyan EFL undergraduate learners who were from the first and second years. The data collection method involved a descriptive essay written by the participants in the class. A quantitative approach was mainly used in this study. The results of the study revealed that Libyan EFL learners committed different types of errors in their writing which included grammatical errors, mechanics errors, discourse errors, lexical errors, and spelling errors. It was also found that the most frequent errors were fragments, s-v agreement, misuse of an article, punctuation, coherence, cohesion, run-on sentences, poor paragraph development, selection of the lexical items, and omission.

In a study by Elraggas (2012), the goal was to explore the writing challenges faced by Libyan graduate students at universities in the United States and to address issues in grammar, coherence, style, diction, and language interference. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving 100 Libyan graduate students studying in the U.S (ESL). The paper found that there was a noted lack of emphasis on teaching other aspects of writing, such as techniques and style, effective communication of ideas and information, and vocabulary and diction. Consequently, the teaching methods commonly used by Libyan instructors were found to be inadequate in preparing students for academic writing, as they did not foster creativity or comprehensive writing skills. Furthermore, the study indicated that 84.5% of participants did not engage in collaborative activities like peer editing and proofreading in their writing classes in Libya.

In a study by Shalandi (2020) aiming to identify the impact of mother tongue interference on the writing of Libyan EFL university students. English writing samples were gathered from 20 EFL university students to be examined, and errors were categorized into morphological, syntactic, lexical, and orthographic types. These errors were analysed using both error analysis and contrastive analysis approaches. The findings revealed that the most common errors were syntactic, followed by orthographic, morphological, and lexical errors. Based on the findings, some pedagogical implications and recommendations are provided.

Despite the extensive body of research on writing errors in English as a foreign language, there remains a gap in literature regarding the specific context of undergraduate students in the Department of English at Faculty of Education Tripoli, University of Tripoli, Libya. Previous studies have focused on general error patterns in diverse linguistic settings or have concentrated on types of errors without a comprehensive analysis in other cities. This study addresses this gap by providing a detailed examination of grammatical, semantic, lexical, and mechanical errors in the writing of department of English undergraduates at University of Tripoli. This research seeks to bridge this gap by not only identifying the prevalent writing errors but also proposing specific, evidence-based teaching strategies to address these errors. The comprehensive nature of this study, coupled with its focus on actionable outcomes, represents a novel contribution to the field of second language writing instruction.

### **Methodology**

This study will employ a qualitative method of data collection, focusing on in-depth analysis of writing errors. Data will be gathered from 20 undergraduate students enrolled in the Writing 2 course at University of Tripoli through a structured writing task designed to point common error types. The instructor of the course assigned this task, allowing students to select whether to write about their parents or friends.

### **Research Design**

Research design refers to the overall strategy utilised to answer research questions. This research will follow a qualitative research method in gathering and analysing the data of the study.

### **Participants and instrument**

The data was collected from 20 female undergraduate students studying in the Department of English at the Faculty of Education at the University of Tripoli. All participants were Libyan and native speakers of Arabic with different Libyan dialects. To collect the data, the participants were asked to write about various topics as a part of the Writing 2 course assignments. Despite being enrolled in the Writing 2 course, the participants had different levels of English proficiency. The essay writing was included as a component of the course evaluation. The papers were collected from the course lecturer after obtaining consent from the students and the lecturer.

### Data analysis

The researcher examined the papers to point out the errors using the Error Analysis theory. Through the paper's content analysis, several writing errors were identified, categorized, and tabulated to determine the common writing errors among EFL undergraduate students at the University of Tripoli.

### Error Types

After an analysis of the students' papers seventy-eight (78) errors were found in (20) essays. The errors vary from grammatical, lexical, semantical, syntactic and mechanical errors. The found errors are ranked according to frequency as the following

**Table 1** Types of errors found in the essays

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Mechanical	48	56%
Grammatical	10	15%
Syntactic	7	10%
Semantic	7	10%
Lexical	6	9%
Total	78	100%

**Note** the total of the errors found in the essays after the analysis

**Table 2** The categories and subcategories of errors

Category	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Grammatical	Subject-Verb Agreement	4	1%
	Number Agreement	3	4%
	Article Use	2	3%
	Preposition Use	1	1%
Semantic	Contextual Inconsistency	7	9%
Syntactic	Structure	7	9%
Lexical	Incorrect Word Use	6	8%
Mechanical	Misspelling	34	44%
	Punctuation	4	5%
	Capitalization	10	14%
Total		78	100%

**Note** the table above shows the subcategories of errors found in the essays.

**Table 3** examples of mechanical errors.

Category	Error	Correct Form
Mechanical	She has short, curly, light brown hire	She has a short, light and brown hair
	When ever you strggel truboules	Whenever you struggle traboules
	She is wonderful person due to her fixibility	She is a wonderful person due to her flexibility
	She has wears glasses in ayes	She has to wear glasses.
	Because she is really akind person	Because she is really a kind person

**Note** Mechanical errors primarily involved capitalization issues and spelling errors.

**Table 4** examples of grammatical errors.

Error Category	Error	Correct Form
Grammatical	She is very kind how to act with us	She is very kind in how she acts with us
	she have a pure heart	She has a pure heart
	she cares on every moment of our life with we asking. they do it naturally	She cares for every moment of our life without us asking. She does it naturally
	my mother is the most beufeful women l've seen before	my mother is the most beautiful woman l've ever seen
	she had muscular	she is muscular

**Note** Grammatical errors included instances such as singular and plural mismatches.

**Table 5** examples of Syntactic errors

Error Category	Errors	Correct Form
Syntactic	My best friend your name is Malak	My best friend, whose name is Malak
	She is very kind how to act with us	She is very kind in how she acts with us
	My aunt energy and calm nature always leave a strong impression on those around her	My aunt's energy and calm nature always leaves a strong impression on those around her

**Note** syntactic errors included incorrect possessive structures.

**Table 6** examples of semantic errors

Error Category	Errors	Correct Form
Semantic	He always tries to make what is around him happy	He always tries to make those around him happy
	The body is thin	Her body type is thin
	she has medium and old age	She's middle-aged

**Note** semantic errors are contextual inconsistency which impacted the message coherence.

**Table 7** examples of lexical errors

Error Category	Errors	Correct Form
Lexical	She has medium and old age	She's middle aged
	My bestfriend your name is Malak	My best friend's name is Malak
	She is very kind to act with us	She's very kind with us

**Note** Lexical errors impact the clarity and precision writing.

## Results and Findings

The analysis of writing errors among undergraduate students in the Department of English at University of Tripoli reveals significant insights into the challenges faced by Libyan EFL learners. This section discusses the types, frequency, and implications of the identified errors, and proposes recommendations for improving teaching strategies to enhance students' writing proficiency. The study identified 78 errors in total, categorized into mechanical, grammatical, lexical, semantic, and syntactic errors. The breakdown of these errors is as follows

### Mechanical Errors

These were the most frequent errors, primarily involving misspellings, punctuation mistakes, and capitalization errors. For example, words like "hire" instead of "hair" and "strggel" instead of "struggle" highlight common spelling issues. Punctuation and capitalization errors also detract from the readability and professionalism of the text.

### Grammatical Errors

These errors include subject-verb agreement issues, incorrect use of articles, and preposition misuse. Errors such as "she have" instead of "she has" and "a tall" instead of "at all" were prevalent. These mistakes significantly impact sentence clarity and coherence.

### Lexical Errors

Incorrect word choices and non-standard expressions were common, as seen in phrases like "brown skin blonds" instead of "has brown skin and blonde hair". These errors often obscure the intended message and reflect a lack of vocabulary mastery.

### Semantic Errors

These involve the misuse or misinterpretation of meanings, leading to logically inconsistent or incorrect sentences. Examples include "means to a handful" and "comfortable and happy", which are contextually incorrect.

### Syntactic Errors

Violations of sentence structure rules were noted, such as missing verbs or incorrect possessive structures. Sentences like "the most beautiful women" without a verb and "My bestfriend your name is Malak" lacking proper possessive structure are indicative of syntactic issues.

The high frequency of mechanical errors indicates a need for increased focus on basic writing skills, such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, which are foundational to clear and effective communication. Grammatical errors, particularly those involving subject-verb agreement and article usage, suggest that students may benefit from targeted grammar instruction and practice and need better instruction at the foundational stages of education. Lexical errors point to a gap in vocabulary knowledge, which could be addressed through enhanced vocabulary-building activities and exposure to diverse reading materials. Semantic errors highlight the need for better contextual understanding and the appropriate use of language in different scenarios. Syntactic errors, including sentence structure violations, indicate that students require more practice in constructing well-formed sentences.

### Discussion

Alsied, Ibrahim, and Pathan (2018), have similarly identified substantial difficulties in academic writing among Libyan EFL learners, particularly in grammar and sentence structure. They also found that grammatical errors, mechanical errors, and issues with coherence and cohesion were prevalent among Libyan EFL students at Sebha University. These studies support the findings of this research, which also highlights grammatical and mechanical errors as primary challenges.

Elraggas (2012) focused on Libyan graduate students in the United States, identifying grammar and stylistic issues as significant obstacles. This study's results, particularly the frequent grammatical errors, echo Elraggas' findings, reinforcing the idea that Libyan students face similar challenges both domestically and abroad. The emphasis on grammatical errors, such as the overuse of the definite article "the," is consistent across these studies, suggesting a common area for instructional improvement. . This study also gives a priority to improve teaching methods to enhance students' performance which aligns with the current study.

Moreover, Shalandi (2020) explored the impact of mother tongue interference on Libyan EFL students. Also, identifying syntactic and lexical errors as one of the most common issues. This study's findings corroborate Shalandi's results. Both studies underscore the need for targeted teaching strategies to address these specific error types

The findings of this study suggest several pedagogical implications for improving the writing proficiency of Libyan EFL students. Firstly, there is a clear need for targeted grammar instruction, particularly in areas such

as article usage and subject-verb agreement. Additionally, incorporating regular spelling and punctuation drills into the curriculum can help address the high frequency of mechanical errors. Furthermore, enhancing vocabulary development through activities that expose students to new words in context can mitigate lexical errors. Engaging students in exercises that improve their contextual and semantic understanding is also crucial for reducing semantic errors. Finally, providing students with ample opportunities for syntactic practice, including sentence construction exercises and peer reviews, can help them develop more accurate and coherent writing skills. Regular feedback and revision sessions are essential for helping students learn from their errors and improve their writing proficiency.

### Conclusion

This study explored the writing errors among EFL students at the University of Tripoli. The study results revealed that mechanical errors are the most frequent errors made by the participants, representing (56%) of the total errors detected in the study; those mechanical errors involved misspelling were due to lack of careful proofreading. The following errors were grammatical with (15%) of the errors often result from incomplete understanding of language rules. Then, syntactic errors with (10%) arising from improper sentence structures and reflecting difficulties that the participants face with complex grammar. With an equal frequency as syntactic errors, semantic errors (10%) happened with students use words incorrectly affecting the intended meaning. Moreover, the least frequent errors were lexical errors with (9%) and they might have occurred due to limited vocabulary or confusion between similar words.

### Implications

Study on Tripoli University undergraduate students highlights teaching needs for writing improvement involving:

- Targeted teaching boosts students' writing skills for academic and career advancement.
- Emphasize tailored instruction to enhance student writing in mechanics, grammar, and vocabulary, fostering proficiency and confidence.
- Further research needed to assess strategies for Libyan EFL learners

### Recommendations for Teaching

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve writing instruction and reduce errors

1. Incorporate regular spelling and punctuation drills into the curriculum.
2. Develop modules specifically addressing common grammatical errors and use exercises that provide immediate feedback to reinforce correct grammar usage.
3. Implement vocabulary-building activities with the encouragement of the use of dictionaries to expand their word choices.
4. Engage students in activities that enhance their understanding of context and appropriate language use.
5. Focus on sentence construction exercises, including combining sentences, using conjunctions, and proper punctuation.
6. Provide timely and constructive feedback on students' writing assignments. Encourage multiple drafts and revisions to help students refine their writing and learn from their errors.

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