

# Types and Sources of Jordanian EFL Students' Errors in Writing: A Study of Error Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper examined the types and sources of Jordanian EFL students' errors in writing in 15 written texts by EFL students at Al Mazar Directorate of Education in Southern Jordan. The conceptual framework that underpins the study comprises theoretical and empirical studies on students' writing errors in lower education and approaches to teaching writing to EFL learners. The mixed-mode study used two research instruments; written tasks and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the written essays were analyzed using Corder's (1976) framework of error analysis. The qualitative data achieved from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed by looking at emergent themes. The findings indicated that four types of errors occurred in their essays. The most frequently occurring type of error is omission, which showed 150 times (42.97%), selection 105 times, addition 63 times (18.05%), and ordering 31 times (8.88%). Together these errors affected the quality of the written essays and contributed to the overall unity of students' writing. This research recommends that future research be conducted on this concern.

**Keywords:** Types, Sources, Jordanian, EFL students, Errors, Writing, Analysis

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## 1. Introduction

English is one of the main languages in the world used for communication, teaching, and learning purposes (Khanh, 2023). Despite the importance of the English language, many English foreign learners (EFL) make errors while speaking, reading, or writing English (Mehrabi, 2014). Writing is an essential language skill that EFL students should master. Ernawati et al., (2022) described writing as a process of communication that uses signs and letters to represent language's sounds, syllables, or words along with a selection of mechanisms such as; capitalization, spelling, word form, punctuation, and grammatical functions. Writing is a skill that converts oral expression into structured form. In other words, a written form of language is a means of providing messages and exchanging ideas, opinions, and feelings among people through well-structured sentences. Writing is simply the graphic representation of spoken language. This entails that spoken language can be delivered in written form.

Writing includes many language components such as grammar, vocabulary, and phonology. In addition, the written forms are produced because of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures (Brown, 2001:p35, 36). Writing skill is the most challenging one in comparison with other language skills due to the request for a high level of language control, generating thoughts, and assessing the final form of production. Thus, writing skill is still considered a very difficult task for most native and foreign language learners (Al-Ghabra & Najim, 2019).

In the Jordanian context, English is a required subject for all school and university students in Jordan and is taught as a foreign language in both elementary and high schools. Despite learning English for many years, Al-Khasawneh also added that Jordanian students achieve low English proficiency, particularly in writing skills (Al-Khasawneh, 2013). EFL Jordanian students face a serious problem in their writing skills. Such problems include mainly; spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors (Huwari, 2020). On the other hand, Jordanian EFL learners suffer from two main difficulties regarding writing skills. First, they fail to create the ideas necessary for writing. Second, they use the mechanics of writing skills incorrectly (Ibnian, 2017). To contribute to supporting the tireless efforts of the Ministry of Education, which seeks to raise the level of performance in all its components, and to focus on the most important problems facing high school students in writing skills in the

Southern Al-Mazar Education Directorate, the researcher noted the necessity of making special efforts. It relates to the student's attitudes toward learning English writing skills. These attitudes are evident in the awareness of the importance of English language writing skills and its benefits in continuing education and work, the continuous effort to absorb and master it, and the desire to benefit from it. This will not be achieved unless we can know and overcome the difficulties that high school students face by studying writing errors in terms of their types and sources.

From the foregoing, the great importance of English writing has made this study concerned with the types and sources of errors committed by Jordanian high school students while learning English writing skills. To shed light on the most important of these problems in preparation for the development of proposed solutions may help teachers practice the teaching process with high efficiency, achieve its objectives, and try by themselves to mitigate those mistakes that may prevent them from succeeding in their educational mission.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Much research has been conducted to study the development of writing in EFL context. Hussain and Abdullah (2019) conducted a study to determine the types and causes of errors made in English writing by undergraduate students. The sample of this quantitative study consisted of 130 Saudi female EFL students at King Khalid University. This study used Corder's (1967) error analysis framework. The study's results showed that common errors were made in four areas: grammar, lexis, semantics, and mechanics (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation). The results also showed that the teachers received the most negative feedback.

Further, Mohammad and Hussein (2020) explored English writing difficulties encountered by Iraqi EFL learners at the university level. The participants of this mixed-mode study involved 80 third-year English major students from the University of Anbar. The findings exposed that Iraqi EFL learners' incorrect use of writing mechanics (spelling and punctuation marks) was a main difficulty for them.

Also, Rosalina, et.al. (2023) analyzed EFL learners' job application letters. This qualitative study used numerous job application letters. The study involved 4 vocational high school students two boys and two girls in grade 12. The results indicated that two students met the needs for writing a job application letter, while the other two students did not. Shinta et. al. (2023) explored the errors made by students when completing writing assignments. 21 students randomly selected and enrolled in a Business English class at the University of Semarang participated in this study. The analysis of this descriptive qualitative study showed that students still do not understand how to use Basic English grammar structures or how English sentence structure varies depending on the first language (L1).

To conclude, the researcher agrees with the aforementioned research that errors play a significant role in the organization of the written text. Further, any analysis should always begin with the sources and types of errors that affect the basic meaning of writing (Khan and Khan, 2016). The researcher also observes that many research studies (Ibnian, 2017; Hussain and Abdullah, 2019; and Alsariera and Yunus, 2023) adopt Corder's Model (1967) of Error Analysis in their investigations of the types and sources of EFL students' errors in writing. Although much research has examined errors in different contexts, no studies have so far investigated the types and sources of Jordanian EFL students' errors in writing at AlMazar Secondary School for Girls in Southern Al Mazar Directorate in Jordan. In this regard, the present study adopts Corder's Model (1967) of Error Analysis to analyze the types and sources of Jordanian EFL students' errors in general writing. Since understanding the sources, causes, and types of errors plays an essential role in producing meaningful written text, the researcher desires to carry out a detailed analysis of the types and sources of errors.

## **3. Study Problem**

Writing clearly and correctly is one of the main difficulties that EFL Jordanian school students face (Ibnian, 2017). They usually produce disconnected sentences that lead to meaningless written texts. Writing skills are significant to attain the educational necessities and success (Al-Khasawneh, 2013). Based on the researcher's observation and preliminary interviews, it has been observed that Jordanian high school students face many difficulties in producing coherent writing. The objective of this study is to classify the types of errors that Jordanian high school EFL students create at the level of writing, identify the sources of these errors, and offer descriptions for their occurrence. In this regard, the researcher aims to adopt Corder's (1967) framework of error analysis to investigate the types and resources of errors that Jordanian high school students make in writing.

#### 4. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is:

1. To analyze the types of writing errors made by Jordanian high school students.
2. To investigate the sources of writing errors that Jordanian high school students make, and provide explanations for why such errors occur.
3. To examine the frequency of writing errors encountered by Jordanian high school students.
4. To analyze the teachers' perceptions about the effect of errors on the unity of Jordanian high school students' general writing.

#### 5. Study Questions

Based on the above objectives, this study attempts to answer the questions below:

- i. What are the different types of English writing errors frequently occurring in Jordanian high school students' English-written essays?
- ii. What are the main sources of errors that Jordanian high school students make in English-written essays?
- iii. What is the frequency of writing errors encountered by Jordanian high school students?
- iv. What are the teachers' perceptions about the effect of errors on the unity of Jordanian high school students' general writing?

#### 6. Research Methods

This mixed methods study included one study sample (participants). It consisted of 15 female Jordanian secondary school students. The participants' ages ranged from 14 to 16 years old. All participants speak Arabic as their first language. They have studied English for 10 years at Jordanian schools. A random sampling method was employed (Creswell & Clark, 2011) to ensure equal opportunity for all population members. To elicit data from the participants, the researcher used two instruments are; written essays and semi-structured interviews. The participants had to write a 120-word general writing essay entitled "*Playing Sports is One of the Activities that People Do to Relax*" in 45 minutes which is normal writing class timing. Whilst, each interview ran for 25 minutes. The written essays were analyzed textually and the interviews were examined by looking at emergent themes.

#### 7. Discussion

This study examined 15 essays generated by female secondary school students from Al Mazar Directorate of Education in Southern Jordan. The selection of the written general essays titled "What they and their family do to relax?" based on their school curriculum "Action Pack 11". The students were requested to generate a general essay in no less than 120 words, which is the normal word count essay that they commonly practice in regular classes. The data was analyzed based on Corder's Model (1967) of Error Analysis. The essays were coded as T1 until T15 as discussed in the following section. Each essay was converted into frequencies and percentages that provide proper descriptions for classifying the different types of errors that result in showing the unity of each essay. This helps in providing both qualitative and quantitative descriptions of the errors found in the content of the written essays. The findings of the analysis of errors have been tabulated in terms of the types, sources, and frequencies.

Having analyzed the data elicited from participants, the findings revealed four types of errors that occurred in students' general writings/ essays, specifically: ordering, addition, selection, and omission. The findings showed that 31 (8.88%) of the participants committed misordering errors that varied between adverbs and verbs. 63 (18.05%) errors represented addition errors and redundant items in students' general writing, in which most of the errors included verbs, nouns, connectors, pronouns, and articles. This may be related to mother tongue interferences in the foreign language writing rules. 30.08% of errors depict selection errors that include the replacement of wrong items in the position of the right items. Wrong selection errors happened when the students chose the wrong letter and morpheme in a sentence. 15 students (females) were involved in 105 errors in wrong selection. Table 1 and Fig.1 indicate the number of occurrences of each type of error in the 15 general writing essays produced by the students.

Table 1. Occurrence of the Types of Errors

Type of Error	Occurrence of Each Error in Students' Essays
Ordering	31
Addition	63
Selection	105
Omission	150

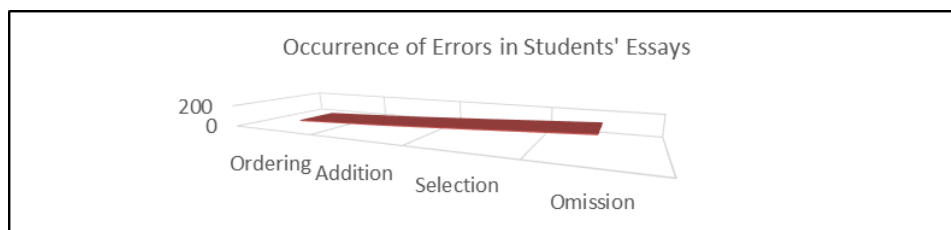


Fig 1. Occurrence of Errors in Students' Essays

As depicted in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1, it is shown that ordering errors occurred 31 times, addition errors 63 times, selection errors 105 times, and omission appeared 150 times in students' writings throughout the collected 15 texts. Based on the analysis of this study, most errors created by the students in this study were related to first language (L1) either transference or interlingual errors, their generalization about the challenging second language rules (L2) intralingual errors. More significantly, the 349 errors generated by the students tended to be affected by interlingual features rather than intralingual features as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Percentages of Errors in Students' Essays

Type of Error	Total	Number of Errors in Students' Essays	Percentages
Ordering	$31/349 \times 100 = \%$	31	8.88%
Addition	$63/349 \times 100 = \%$	63	18.05%
Selection	$105/349 \times 100 = \%$	105	30.08%
Omission	$150/349 \times 100 = \%$	150	42.97%

However, the number of errors recorded in each text were as follows; T1 is (16), T2 is (21) T3 is (26), T4 is (24) T5 is (12), T6 is (30), T7 is (22), T8 is (24), T9 is (24), T10 is (24), T11 is (24), T12 is (36), T13 is (19), T14 is (15), and T15 is (31). Therefore, the findings of the analysis show that T5 recorded the least number of errors, namely; addition (1 error), omission (4 errors), selection (5 errors), and ordering (2 errors) making a total of 12 errors in the whole essay. Whilst, T12 showed the existence of the highest number of errors amongst the entire 15 essays, namely; addition (10 errors), omission (11 errors), selection (11 errors), and ordering (4 errors) making 36 errors in the whole essay.

To conclude, EFL learners committed omission errors such as deletion of the subject, auxiliary verb, complements, and determiners mostly when attempting to organize their ideas in the text due to overgeneralization of rules and transferences that happened between their first language and English. Whilst, the majority of the students committed other types of errors such as selection, addition, and ordering due to students' lack of knowledge and understanding concerning the use of the four types of errors discussed earlier. Similar findings have been indicated in previous research. The results of the current study agree with the past research findings. For instance, Shinta et. al. (2023) explored the errors made by students when completing writing assignments. The analysis of their study showed that students still do not understand how to use Basic English grammar structures or how English sentence structure varies depending on the first language (L1). Hence, the lack of vocabulary and limited knowledge of grammar make students commit many errors in writing. This is reported by Al-Husban (2018) who found that Jordanian undergraduate students' writing errors (omission, addition, ordering, and selection) could be associated with writing and teaching materials as they act as the only supplementary sources at the secondary school level and intralingual difficulties.

It is necessary to mention that the data were elicited mainly through collecting general writing essays of the

Jordanian students. Taking into consideration this reality, out of 4 types of errors only 1 type (ordering) was not much used in the elicited data, though general writing was implemented to create the analysis. It is very difficult to explain this occurrence, but it may be related to the type of writing emerging in the data analysis because some of the errors are general writing specific and this may be the reason why other types of errors have not shown at all. For instance, some errors such as omission, selection, and deletion are applied in speaking compared to writing. Another cause might be the small size of the data. That is, if they were large enough, there was a probability for the enduring writing errors to happen.

However, the findings of the interviews showed that students have changes and resemblances in answers regarding methods of teaching general writing. They are worried about the development of their students' writing. Teachers stressed that their students faced many difficulties in generating unified and expressive pieces of writing. They related these errors to many issues such as insufficient vocabulary, interlingual, use of limited vocabs, and conventional teaching writing resources that encourage outdated teaching methods for classroom teaching. Additionally, they showed that the necessity for understanding the development of original teaching models in general writing should be connected to their students' incompetence in creating unified written essays. To sum up, the results of qualitative data with four EFL teachers display that there is a necessity for emerging students' writing quality.

Furthermore, the results of interviews presented that most selected writing samples involved diverse types of errors such as omission, deletion, ordering, and selection. Some of these errors can be considered as omission of determiners, omission of complement, deletion of verbs and nouns, addition of articles, and other related types of errors. Results emphasized that writing teachers, students, and syllabus designers should be aware of original writing approaches. They approve that secondary school students should be prepared on how to use new methods of teaching general writing. These can be integrated into EFL teaching materials at the school level. In addition, the teachers were requested to provide some recommendations to help students write unified texts. Teachers assert that students should do more writing until they master the skill and avoid omission, deletion, ordering, and selection errors. One teacher recommends students read more on writing strategies to develop their writing. All of them appear to have a poor understanding of the writing strategies. None of them recommends teachers or curriculum designers to provide more attention to writing skills.

## **Conclusion**

This summary proposes to discuss the study queries due to the investigation exposed several results in this research. They were addition errors, omission errors, insertion errors, and ordering errors. This means that words and sentences do not reflect the situations that occur in the text. As reflected in the findings, the analysis showed that some errors were considered as ordering such as time adverbs and errors of using tenses. Omission error is a deviation occurrence in arranging the expressions in the structure. This form of deviation is shown by the inadequacy of a characteristic that should appear in a sentence. The deviation occurrence happens when the learner removes a phrase or structural morpheme when structuring a sentence, so the construct of the clauses is not well structured. Concerning this, the investigator discussed omission error in the omission of complement, subject, determiners, and auxiliary verb, subject.

Insertion error is the performance of neglect where the writer inserts words or expressions that are not essential in a phrase so that the words or expressions in the sentence become incorrect. Therefore, the analysis showed three types of insertion in students' writings including auxiliary verbs, subject pronouns, and spelling. Further, the analysis showed other types of errors in the use of adverbs, nouns, conjunctions, adjectives, verbs, articles, and prepositions that the writer selects in organizing the grammatical structure (sentence or clause). These errors may be referred to as errors in the use of part of speech. In addition, mechanical errors were found clear in the students' writing including punctuation, capitalization, and writing items' arrangement, therefore, the writing product will be chaotic and incoherent to read.

Then, many reasons led to students' writing errors such as incorrect construction of sentences, elimination of items, spelling mistakes, redundancy and use of unnecessary information, lack of awareness concerning the goals of writing, source and target language transferences (intralingual & interlingual transfer), and writing strategies and techniques. Most of these errors happened due to students' lack of understanding of the native and foreign language structures. The low vocabulary deposit made it complicated for students to build correct sentences when making English compositions. Students depended mainly on the translation process from the source language into the target language without understanding the written composition tone or context. Similarly, students applied incorrect translation using word-for-word or literal translation, which resulted in low-quality

writing.

### About the Author

Fadwa Al-Nawayseh is an English language instructor at the secondary education level at the Ministry of Education in Jordan, where she teaches a range of courses on language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) and literary-based research.

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