

**Research Report No. 1**

**Students' Mistakes and Errors in English Writing:  
Implications for Pedagogy**

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East West University



**CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND TRAINING  
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## **Abstract**

English writing in our academic setting has always been recognized as a certifying skill as students have to sit for examination and prove their competence by writing properly. However, the common tension affects each learner and teacher that the standard of English writing is declining as far as independent writing of students is concerned. English has been a compulsory subject from grade 1-12 with further emphasis on various skills at the undergraduate level that does not even guarantee any reasonable achievement in writing for majority of the students. The current study aimed at looking at a general standard of paragraph writing focusing on a very simple topic which is commonly practiced in the junior secondary level. For the study, 300 sample writings were collected from tertiary level students of 10 different institutions of the country. The findings reveal rather a bleak picture of student writing showing serious weaknesses in several areas from spelling mistakes as the highest number (*n*-573) to pronoun (*n*-19). In addition, sentence level mistakes also indicate a poor command of syntactic accuracy. Therefore, from this study, word and sentence level mistakes appear to be quite alarming underpinning innovative means of teaching to improve current state of student writing in English at their primary and secondary level. This issue equally deserves to be incorporated in various ELT training and pedagogic discourse so that teacher and learner awareness can be raised for effective classroom teaching and learning.

## **Acknowledgement**

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# **Student Mistakes and Errors in English Writing: Implications for Pedagogy**

## **Introduction**

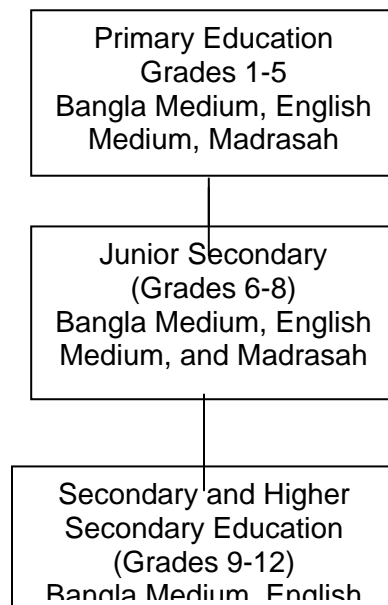
Writing in English is an inseparable part for our students throughout their academic life. But it often appears to be a difficult task for them. In our mainstream educational setting, students' full potential is not exploited through creative process of thinking and writing. Instead, they are left with rote learning of some selected items for answer. To assess semi-broad, broad, paragraph or essay type answers, teachers mark students' writings on the basis of holistic impression in which there is hardly any scope for learners to see their specific drawbacks. Teachers give feedback merely underlining the mistakes and errors but hardly provide any constructive comments for correct writing. Writing is not often treated as a skill to be developed through process. Learners, in general, memorize answers collecting from popular notebooks. But in real life situations, many of them are unable to write correct sentences of their own. Despite getting expected grades/scores, they cannot write confidently and correctly. At the secondary and higher secondary levels, word or sentence level accuracy is usually given more consideration in allotting marks for paragraphs, essays, letters, broad and semi broad answers. Due to significant number of mistakes in basic grammar, good ideas, if any, are not often appreciated. Furthermore, our teachers are also traditionally preoccupied mostly with dominant sense of grammatical accuracy rather than development of ideas. In this context, it is crucial to see what level of mistakes students make at their undergraduate level after many years of formal study in English language and more importantly, what implications it may have for teacher development to guide our learners to overcome their problems in writing.

## **Education System of Bangladesh: An Overview**

Education in Bangladesh has three main stages such as, primary, secondary and higher educations. Primary education is a 5-year program while secondary education is a 7-year with three sub-stages: 3 years of junior secondary, 2 years of secondary and 2 years of higher secondary. Higher secondary is followed by undergraduate level education in general, technical, engineering, agriculture, business studies, and medical

streams requiring 5-6 years to obtain a Masters degree. In the general education stream, higher secondary is followed by college/university level education through the Pass/Honors Graduate Courses (4 years). Higher education has 3 streams: general (inclusive of pure and applied science, arts, business and social science), madrasah and technology education. Technology education in its turn includes agriculture, engineering, medical, textile, leather technology and ICT. Madrasahs (Islamic education), functional parallel to the three major stages, have similar core courses as in the general stream (primary, secondary and post-secondary) but have additional emphasis on religious studies. (Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 2010).

At tertiary level, Bangladesh has four different types of institutions that offer undergraduate and graduate programs. They are colleges under National University, autonomous public universities, private universities, and madrasahs. At present, English is introduced as a compulsory subject from class 1 and continues to be so till class 13 or 14. Thus, the first-year university students whose English writing is the focus of our present research learn English or at least are supposed to do so as a compulsory subject irrespective of the types of institutions they are enrolled in.



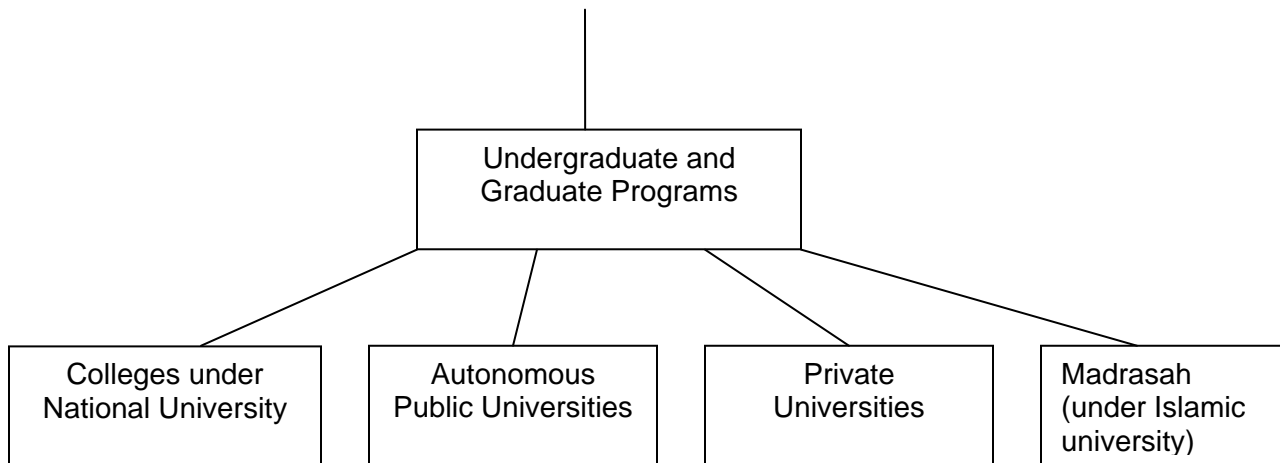


Figure 1: Schematic Representation of Bangladesh’s Education System

### Statement of the Problem

Bangladesh has a long period of academic attachment to English language teaching and learning. Against such a background, it is generally agreed that the standard of English of our learners is not satisfactory in comparison to the time they spend in learning the language. In this regard, Hoque (1986: 93) notes, “Despite the considerable amount of time devoted to English instruction, the general proficiency and achievement of the majority of the students graduating from high schools is unsatisfactory and disproportionately low.”

Similarly, one of the major findings of the English Language Teaching Task Force of 1976 set up by the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh (quoted in Rahman (1999:15) stated “The English proficiency of students in class 9 was two years and in class 12 four years behind the level assumed in their textbooks.”

Referring to the present level of proficiency of our learners in English, Kay (1998: 23) also notes the inadequate proficiency of our learners in English: “There has been massive loss of English competence in recent years amongst school leavers and graduates, leaving the government in no doubt that it must invest to reinstate English as the second language.”

Besides researchers, educationists and language teachers who lament the dismal condition of our learners’ English in general, there are many ELT practitioners who point



at the poor quality of our learners' English in specific areas. One such area that frequently receives attention is the writing skills. Referring to an English examination taken by first-year university students (from Bangladesh) where they rewrote a small passage to supply appropriate articles, Ahmed (1999: 168) notes,

The best student in the class [made] as many as ten errors of article use (wrong article and no article where one is required). You can guess the number of errors made by her class mates who are a long way behind her. These students had read English for about 12 years before they came to university ---.

While this is the general case and condition of English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh, it is very important to identify the factors that are mainly responsible for such a state. Among several significant factors such as lack of trained teachers, appropriate examination system etc. the issues concerning appropriate classroom language teaching methodology are often cited. Hoque (1999: 95) points out,

. . . both teachers and students of English are mainly concerned about teaching and learning textbook contents, grammar rules, etc. through this traditional grammar-translation method-they are hardly involved in practical and participatory activities for teaching and learning language skills

Shahidullah (1999: 46), likewise expresses his dissatisfaction over the efficacy of an old language teaching method. He notes, “. . . the practical problems of ELT in Bangladesh where the age old traditional methods do not seem to produce the desired results, . . .”

Based on all these observations, reflections and findings, it may be concluded that to improve English language teaching-learning situations in Bangladesh in general and at secondary level in particular much work is needed to be done, among others, methodology issue is the main concern of this study.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the questions that we will address in our study:

1. How do our students fare in writing?
2. What kinds of mistakes and errors do they most commonly make in terms of
  - a) grammar
  - b) spelling and
  - c) discourse?
3. What implications do these mistakes have for classroom teaching?

## **Theoretical Framework**

In language teaching, a major shift has taken place in recent years. It is that teachers are no more viewed as controllers of language learning rather learners, through their experimentations with language, have become determiners of their own learning needs. This has resulted in the shift of attention toward the monitoring and analysis of the learner's language. Such a viewpoint taken from the perspective of practical teaching, has made language teaching practitioners more aware of the long term value of the mistake and error analysis of the learners. Language teachers can use this analysis not only to assess the learner's language learning but also to determine the degree of match between their teaching syllabus and the learner's learning process. Mistake and error analysis has thus significant pedagogical justifications as these allow the teachers to give appropriate feedback and to design remedial curricula. They also serve as valuable input to theoretical understanding of such concepts as 'interlanguage' 'fossilization of errors', 'approximate system', etc.

The analysis of the learner's errors and mistakes, however, can serve many other purposes as the learner's learning processes reveal a host of interrelated symptoms. Richards and Samson (1974) notes that the learner's learning processes are indicative of seven different kinds of phenomena, such as, language transfer, intralingual interference, the effects of the sociolinguistic situation, the modality of exposure to the target language and the modality of production, the age of the learner, the instability of the learner's linguistic system, and the effects of the inherent difficulty of the particular item being learned. Notwithstanding the fact that the learner's errors and mistakes are manifestations of such a complex set of symptoms, in this research, we do not attempt to discover what symptom(s) each particular error or mistake refers to. Thus, we will not indicate if a particular mistake or error has resulted from, say, language transfer or the learner's approximative systems or it has occurred because of the learner's intralingual interference.

Explaining the dichotomy between errors and mistakes here with regard to the learner's errors, as Corder (1974) observes, there have been two schools of thought. First, the school which suggests that if we were to attain a perfect teaching method the errors would never be made in the first place. So the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques. On the other hand, the belief of the

second school is that we live in an 'imperfect' world and as a result, errors will always occur in spite of our best efforts. We should pay our attention to techniques for dealing with errors after they have taken place. In the present research project, we subscribe to the second approach to errors and mistakes meaning we believe that teachers can effectively deal with the learner's errors and mistakes after they have occurred and can bring about positive changes in the learner's proficiency in this connection.

What we attempt in this study is to identify the errors and mistakes that the learners most frequently or most commonly make in an EFL situation. We have not tried to investigate the reasons for which the learners made the errors and mistakes. At the moment, a research project of such psycholinguistic rigor was beyond our scope. Neither did we attempt to detect if a particular linguistic deviation of the learner was an instance of error or mistake. The exclusion of these phenomena from our research goal was motivated by three factors. First, from a pedagogical point of view, teachers tend to deal with every single linguistic deviation of their learners no matter whether it is a mistake or an error. Second, such a goal would require us incorporate interviews which would affect the feasibility of our work as we drew on a relatively good number of samples from all over the country.

### **Review of Literature**

In our teaching-learning context, writing skill is usually considered as a clear proof of whether learners learnt English well or not. Learners sit for different examinations and get grades/scores on the basis of writing ability. Although other three skills are more or less practiced in the class, only writing ability is assessed for grades or scores in the examination. This is apparently a vast area of language production that our students and teachers are concerned with. However, only a few studies on student writing have been carried out so far. Khan (1999) addressed the issue of assessment in writing English based on empirical data that were collected from composition writing of learners at their higher secondary level. On the other hand, Khan, H R (2008) shows frequency of word and sentence level mistakes in writing paragraph by undergraduate level students through a small scale investigation. Another study by Hamid (2007) identifies different levels of student mistakes arguing that teachers' feedback is not always plausible with the learners' intended meaning. He suggests that there should be more effective ways of correcting student writing with plausible feedback. Practicing writing in the classroom and its problems can be a practical area for assessment and for writing development. In this regard, we do not have many investigative reports revealing

detailed picture of problems in student writing that could have provided professional insights for teacher development. However, various studies have been carried out focusing on error analysis of ESL learners in different language and culture contexts. Nada (2002) made an empirical study on error analysis of ESL learners of Arabic L1 background that encompasses a broad based scenario of Arabic learners' tendency, categories and frequency of error making in ESL learning. In another study Izzo (2002) revealed an elaborate study on common English writing errors of Japanese university students that showed a more investigative report based on huge number of data (391 writings containing 88,000 words). Findings of this current study have some similar characteristics with Izzo's despite the former being a small-scale research.

It is essential to make a distinction between mistakes and errors. Corder (1981) reveals a criterion that helps us to do so. It is the self-correctibility criterion. A mistake can be self corrected but an error cannot. Errors are systematic; i.e. likely to occur repeatedly and not recognized by the learners which means they have not learnt it. Hence the teachers and researchers could locate them; the learners could not. Some Language professionals want to consider these mistakes and errors. "...deviations from the standard use of English as judged by sophisticated users such as professional writers, editors, teachers, and executives and personnel officers" (Brian 2003).

In analyzing learner errors, Brooks (1964) mentions four reasons (1) learner does not know the structural pattern and so makes a random response (2) the correct model has been insufficiently practiced. (3) distinction may be induced by the first language (4) the student may follow a general rule which is not applicable in a particular instance. However, these four causes of errors may not account for all errors. Dulay and Burt (1974) pointed out four kinds of errors with their psychological origins.

1. Interference like errors, i.e. those errors that reflect native language structures and are not found in first language acquisition data.
2. First language developmental errors, i.e. those do not reflect native language structure but are found in the first language acquisition data.
3. Ambiguous errors, i.e. those that cannot be categorized as either interference-like or developmental.
4. Unique errors, i.e. those do not reflect first language structure and also are not found in first language acquisition data.

Error analysis is closely linked with contrastive analysis having its two aspects – psychological and linguistic. Psychological aspect is based on behaviorist learning theory and linguistics aspect is, in the first place at least, on structuralist linguistics (Ellis 1994). However, this psychological rationale takes the form of the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis*, which exists in strong and weak form (Wardhaugh 1970). The strong form claims that all L2 errors can be predicted by identifying the difference between the target language and the learner’s first language. Here Lee’s (1968:180) remark is also considerable; “the prime cause, or even the sole cause, of difficulty and error in foreign language learning is interference coming from the learner’s native language.” Therefore, contrastive analysis appears to be important tool for at least, identifying the errors which are the result of interference. On the other hand, linguistic aspect of Contrastive Analysis, in most cases, has been based on surface structure characteristics, such as those described by the structuralists. The procedure followed was (1) description (2) selection (3) comparison and (4) prediction. And among these, comparison between L1 and L2, perhaps, plays a predominant role in error analysis.

Writing is perhaps the most researched area among the four basic language skills (e.g. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) that are generally taught around the world. Perhaps, this has been warranted by writing’s increasing importance in the student’s academic and professional life. Secondly, compared to other skills, writing is more demanding in terms of such factors as grammatical accuracy, mechanics, diction, coherence, etc. Moreover, writing is usually considered to be more researchable than other skills as it provides concrete and permanent data to the researcher to turn to and as well as to show as evidence. These are possibly the reasons that the role of grammar instruction and error correction in the L2 classroom has been an issue of continuous debate in second language acquisition (SLA) research and theory. In general, this debate can be categorized in terms of meaning-focused instruction versus form-focused instruction. From the view point of this divide, our research falls more on the form-focused instruction. Where meaning focused instruction emphasizes the availability of comprehensible input and a low affective filter in the learner (e.g. Krashen 1981, Newmark & Reibel 1968, Schwartz 1993), form-focused instruction suggests that even after many years of exposure to the target language, L2 learners’ production still grammatically inaccurate (Swain 1985, Skutnabb-Kangas 1976). This non-target-like levels of accuracy is usually attributed to the absence of opportunity for learners to observe and practice linguistic forms, indicating that some types of form-focused instructions are beneficial for successful L2 learning. Where form-focused instruction is

concerned, EFL has been seen as consisting of two broad types: focus on forms and focus on form (Long 1991). Focus on forms is marked by “division of the language according to lexis, structures, notions or functions, which are selected and sequenced for students to learn in a uniform and incremental way” (Klapper & Rees 2003). On the other hand, focus on form constitutes attention to linguistic structures within the context of meaning-focused, communicative activities (Ellis 2001, Long 1991).

Regarding the form focused instruction, few studies have specifically examined L2 learners' beliefs about grammar instruction. For example, Schulz (1996) studied the beliefs of US postsecondary foreign language students and teachers for a number of languages classes regarding the role of grammar instruction and error correction in language learning. Of the students, 90% thought it imperative to be corrected while speaking in class, whereas, only 34% of the teachers thought this to be so, showing some discrepancies between student and teacher beliefs about oral error correction. However, in spite of the disagreement between teachers and students regarding oral correction, around 90% of teachers and students agreed that errors should be explicitly corrected in written work. In 2001, Schulz replicated the 1996 study with English as a foreign language students and teachers in Colombia. Results indicated that Colombian students also had a strong belief in the positive role of grammar study and corrective feedback in foreign language learning. Besides, both teachers and students agreed that grammar study was not sufficient, and they felt that real-life communication was also important.

Bangladesh has also seen some focus on research on students' writing particularly with a focus on their errors and mistakes. Ahmed (1999), for example, in his study of students' grammatical proficiency, found out that Bangladeshi students are seriously prone to making mistakes in English articles. He ascribes such mistakes to the differences of Bangla and English in terms of the use of articles and emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction on grammar.

### **Research methodology**

The present study focuses on the common mistakes and errors that learners make in their writing in English. It gives specific focus on sentence level problems alongside vocabulary and mechanics. A descriptive analysis focusing on what kinds of problems occur in student writing is presented. The study includes 300 students' writing samples to identify the categories of mistakes and errors that the students made. In obtaining the data, consideration was given on ensuring acceptable representation from male-female,

private university, public university, tertiary level colleges and urban-semi urban groups of students.

In order to obtain data based on common mistakes and errors in English writing, we prepared a semi-guided writing topic (see Appendix A) for students to write on. The motivation for providing the guideline was that it would ensure at least thematic uniformity. As the topic did not warrant technical or special knowledge on an issue, we expected that this would best measure students' strengths and weaknesses of writing. Furthermore, we wanted to make sure that the topic covers variety of linguistic skills such as, the three basic tenses (present, past and future), common vocabulary items, word order, ideas of collocation, orthographic competence, use of connective devices, perception of function and content words, coherence and cohesion, the factors that are considered fundamental of a paragraph. We collected 300 pieces of student writing from across the country. These 300 students were selected from 10 different tertiary level institutions from seven major locations of the country (See Map A). The names of these institutions were kept anonymous in consideration of research ethics. We collected about 50% of samples from two big cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong. All these students were either in their 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> year of 4 year Bachelor program in various subjects. Their entry level eligibility criteria demand that they have to have at least second division or 3.5 CGPA which can be regarded as middle range of academic merit. These students have at least passed their English subject separately. The researchers' personal network was instrumental for collecting data from those institutions, as requests were made to contact faculty members of those institutions who requested their students to respond to our instructions. On our behalf, a student research-assistant went to selected institutions in person and collected these writings from those selected institutions. Respondents were supplied pen and paper along with the guideline slips (see Appendix A) for clear understanding of their tasks. The writers of these writings were in their undergraduate programs of different disciplines like; Bangla, Botany, Business, English, History, Mathematics, Medicine, Physics, and Business Administration. However, it is important to note that all these students already had 12 years of learning experience of English as a compulsory subject from their primary, secondary and higher secondary levels of schooling.

## Map A: Regional Representation



After collecting all these writings, we requested some of our experienced colleagues ( $n=10$ ) in the English Department to assess the copies. We gave them a guideline about how to grade the copies. They basically underlined each and every mistake that the writers have made and gave their brief and precise feedback. Examiners have also separately identified two copies (from a bundle of 30 copies) as best or worst based on students' writing ability in general. Later two research assistants made data entry in the computer after picking up each mistake manually from student writings. Two separate scrutinizers randomly checked 20% of the student copies to maximize the reliability issue in the process. These mistakes were separately kept on spreadsheets that became a source of comparative study, more specifically for frequency of mistakes made by students of different subjects as well as different institutions. Later, all these word data were classified based on their types of mistake in order to prepare a table of common mistakes and their frequency of occurrences. We also separated at least 20 copies that were identified as best and worst. These copies provide a good number of authentic examples of writing that generally indicate their level of proficiency in writing.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

We collected data i.e. the mistakes and errors that students made, from ten tertiary educational institutions of Bangladesh. Of all the mistakes and errors, we mainly present and analyze those that we found most frequently to have occurred. We divided such



mistakes and errors into the following categories: use of words, tense, number, preposition, missing words, redundancy, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, article, syntax, punctuation, incomplete sentences, number, pronoun, spelling, and coherence. We will present and analyze the data keeping the language teacher's potential needs in mind. First, we provided an overview of the mistakes and errors by separating them into specific grammatical categories and show them against individual institutions. Besides, we highlighted the mistakes and errors (see Appendix B) that are most regular and habitual in the corpora of our students' written work.

### **Mistakes and Errors of Individual Institutions**

**Table 2: The Distribution of Errors and Mistakes Based on Individual Institutions**

	Spelling	Wrong Use of Words	Capitalization	Preposition	Sub-Verb Agreement	Tense	Article	Redundancy	Number	Pronoun
*EI 1	23	45	16	19	06	24	6	00	19	01
EI 2	29	17	5	5	06	6	2	06	03	07
EI 3	11	6	1	9	02	2	6	00	10	01
EI 4	62		7	19	12	15	16	19	19	00
EI 5	123	49	62	15	12	7	18	09	30	02
EI 6	39		44	56	18	32	55	29	40	01
EI 7	53		3	41	16	31	26	00	39	01
EI 8	63	59	46	18	17	31	5	00	64	00
EI 9	112	37	12	41	02	28	12	24	26	00
EI 10	58	36	51	13	06	11		00	21	06
<b>Total</b>	573	249	247	236	97	187	146	111	261	19

\*EI stands for Educational Institution and number shows a particular institution followed by the number of mistakes

#### **I) Spelling Mistakes**

The number of spelling mistakes made by the students record the highest (*n* 573) showing an alarming situation of writing standard. The wrong spelling of words (see appendix B) mostly belongs to the high frequency list of word of any corpus dictionary even then many students are not good at that. Presumably most students had to sacrifice marks for their silly mistakes in spelling despite various kinds of reminder. It can

also be the reason that with the increasing use of computer and mobile phone technology student might feel reluctant about spelling correction.

### **ii) Number**

When mistakes in number were concerned, the number of mistakes made by the students of each institution was as follows-EI 1- 19, EI 5-30, EI 3-10, EI 2-3, EI 6-40, EI 8-64, EI 10-21, EI 9-26, EI 7-39, and EI 4-19. The number of total mistakes made with regard to the use of words stood at 261.

### **iii) Wrong Use of Words:**

By 'wrong use of words' we meant the use of such words were not appropriate in their contexts; which can be illustrated by the use of 'do' with 'favor' or 'draw' with 'conclusion'. When use of words was concerned, we found that a large number of students made mistakes in this regard. The distribution of such mistakes based on institutions stood as follows: \*EI 1-45, EI 5-49, EI 3-6, EI 2-17, EI 6-0, EI 8-59, EI 10-36, EI 9-37, EI 7-75, and EI 4-16. The number of total mistakes made with regard to the use of words stood at 249

### **iv) Capitalization**

The number of mistakes related to capitalization, i.e. writing a letter as an upper case and others as lower case based on specific rules, occurred in individual institutions in the following manner: EI 1- 16, EI 5- 62, EI 3- 01, EI 2- 05, EI 6- 44, EI 8- 46, EI 10- 51, EI 9- 12, EI 7- 03, and EI 04- 07. The total number of mistakes in connection to this was 247.

### **v) Preposition**

Where mistakes in the use of appropriate preposition were concerned, the institutional distribution stood as follows-EI 1- 19, EI 5-15, EI 3-9, EI 2-5, EI 6-56, EI 8-18, EI 10-13, EI 9-41, EI 7-41, and EI 4-19. The number of total mistakes made with regard to the use of words stood at 236.

### **vi) Tense**

As for mistakes in tense, the number of mistakes made by the students of each institution was as follows- EI 1- 24, , EI 5-7, EI 3-2, EI 2-6, EI 6-32, EI 8-31, EI 10-11, EI 9-28, EI 7-31, and EI 4-5. The number of total mistakes made with regard to tense was 187.

### **vii) Article**

Where mistakes in the use of articles were concerned, the institutional distribution stood as follows-EI 1- 06, EI 5-18, EI 3-06, EI 2-02, EI 6-55, EI 8-05, EI 10-00, EI 9-12, EI 7-26, and EI 4-16. The number of total mistakes made with regard to the use of words stood at 146.

### **viii) Redundancy**

Mistakes were also found in terms of incomplete sentences that resulted from the use of words giving information that are already given by existing words. Mistakes of this type are distributed as follows-EI 1- 0, EI 5-9, EI 3-0, EI 2-6, EI 6-29, EI 8-0, EI 10-0, EI 9-24, EI 7-0, and EI 4-17. The number of total mistakes made with regard to the use of words stood at 111.

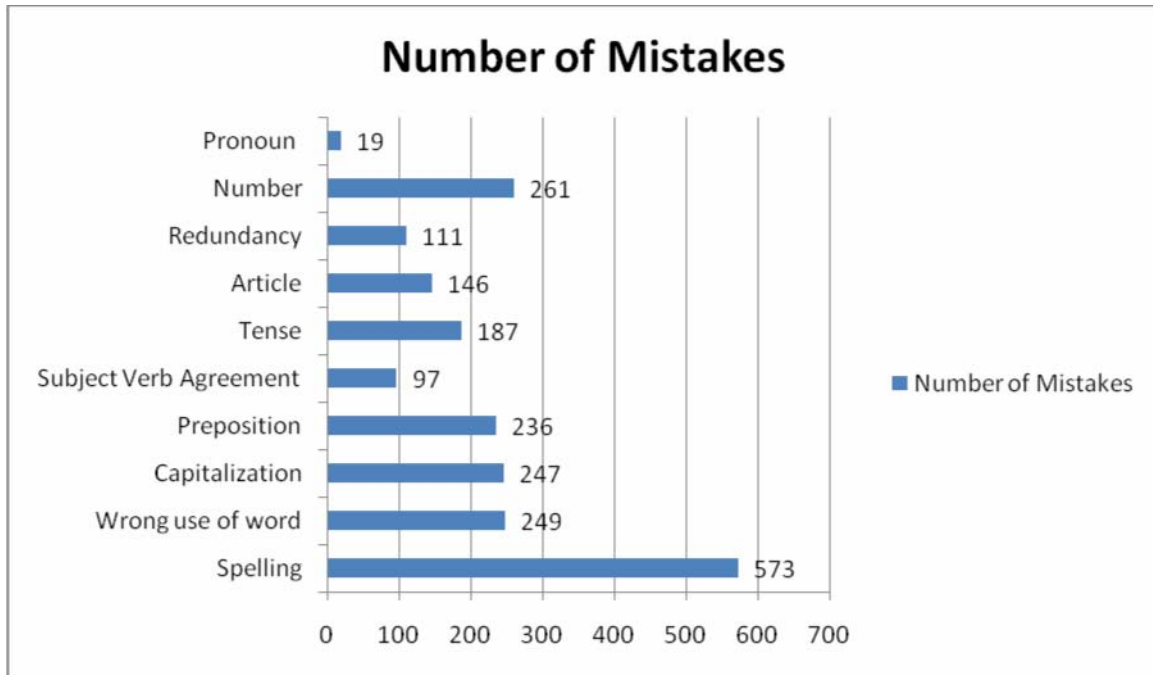
### **ix) Subject-Verb Agreement**

The number of mistakes related to subject-verb agreement, i.e. both subject and verb should have the same number (either plural or singular), that was distributed across the institutions were as follows: EI 1- 06, EI 5- 12, EI 3- 02, EI 2- 06, EI 6- 18, EI 8- 17, EI 10- 06, EI 9- 02, EI 7- 16, and EI 04- 12. The total number of mistakes that occurred in relation to subject-verb agreement was 97.

### **x) Pronoun**

The number of mistakes related to the right use of pronouns across the institutions was as follows: EI 1- 01, EI 5- 02, EI 3- 01, EI 2- 07, EI 6- 01, EI 8- 00, EI 10- 06, EI 9- 00, EI 7- 01, and EI 04- 00. The total number of mistakes that occurred in relation to subject-verb agreement was 19.

**Table 2: Distribution of Mistakes & Errors Based on Grammatical Categories**



### **Implications for pedagogy**

Given the overall reality of teaching learning scenario of Bangladeshi context, hence ELT, there has been plethora of reasons that teaching is still teacher dominated and students are dependent on rote learning. Examinations from grade one to upwards mostly demands recall competence of textual content rather than promoting students' analytic views, and opinions on open ended questions. In many cases creativity is discouraged just to avoid mistakes and that is why students usually tend to fear making mistakes in writing and gradually become more dependent on memorization. It is important to note that most children, at their primary level classes had to memorize a paragraph titled 'The Cow' which is perhaps the first stage of damaging their creativity. Since then their English learning has appeared to be heavily influenced by teachers, textbooks, guidebooks, notebooks rather than students' own thinking and language. When some students try to write something independently is hardly appreciated or encouraged. In precise, teaching writing is here as it more or less common in other developing countries, viewed as product not a process. Teachers are not trained for teaching writing as a process which appears to be the most challenging task for them.

Above findings and analysis, show a state of writing at tertiary level students that definitely leaves a serious concern to each English language teacher and trainer as well

as curriculum designers, policy makers of the same context that the basic objectives of learning writing was not largely achieved. This concern should take us back to the fundamental questions that are why to teach writing, how to teach writing, what to teach writing and who to teach writing, and genuine search for the responses may inspire us gradually in engaging students in writing job. From pedagogy to practice, from theory to instruction, from instruction to assessment everywhere learning objectives have to be carefully reviewed if major points are being missed out by our students. Gaining the liberty and courage of making mistakes could be one of ways of reducing mistakes for a student and alongside teachers should change their traditional attitudes towards student mistakes into an investigatory spirit that why students make mistakes and what methodology or technique could help them reduce their mistakes at a reasonable standard. One of most common allegations from teachers is that they do not have much time for checking their copies with relevant feedback could be minimized by substituting peer checking, group checking and whole class checking. This trend may enable students to increase their own responsibilities as well as better cognitive ability.

Teacher training manuals need to be truly supplemented by authentic materials emerging from the classroom teaching so that trainees can stick to the ground reality of the context and learner's level. Microteaching, reading case study, narrative inquiry of teaching, reflective teaching procedures etc. could be practiced and shared for continuous professional development. Peer observation of classes and providing constructive feedback often makes one's understanding more pragmatic and professionally supportive. Students can maintain portfolio writing, writing wall magazines, poetry competition, vocabulary contest, annual writing symposium, email writing could be some of the useful measures to be organized by the teachers who are teaching writing. More importantly, it is to be noted that writing is truly a process for everyone to be engaged into it. Therefore, it seems to be important that teachers write various articles in English and share these with students occasionally. Curriculum of writing components often lacks authenticity of topics and materials that discourage students' thinking for writing creatively. Students' imagination could contribute immensely should they have the opportunity in doing so. For writing effectively students should have a good background of their own reading preferably from their extensive reading habits that can enrich ingredients of writing considerably.

The results and discussion of this study put forward a major concern that the overall strengths of writing of our students in the undergraduate level is not up to the mark.

Paragraph writing is done (if not necessarily taught) from the late primary to twelve grade through repeated practice. Throughout this study, the issue of objective setting and its validity regarding writing skill can be revised from professional point of view. Here it is also important to note that all along the line of twelve years of English learning, our students have to prove their foreign language proficiency through their writing where paragraph-writing skill is one of the major components and therefore, it cannot be ignored. The following concerns immersing from this study should be addressed in professional forums for better understanding.

1. The students were not taught writing properly based on process writing
2. Teachers perhaps did not try to teach students as they were supposed to.
3. The textbook materials as well as the traditional teaching method often encourage students to memorize paragraph rather than to develop writing ability of their own.
4. Classroom research is merely emphasized in our context. English teachers do not carry out action research which might encourage effective teaching and learning.
5. Teacher training programs usually do not include useful findings from research studies to prioritize the components to be covered in training sessions.

## **Conclusion**

Writing is basically a process of cognitive development through which a learner has to learn gradually. As writing is considered to be the most important skill in primary and secondary level terminal assessments, some fundamental changes in the existing system of teaching writing appear to be crucial now. It is also the learning process in which effective learner training is necessary for writing improvement. Therefore, the existing methodology of teaching writing in our learning contexts has serious setback that evidently prevents students from writing independently. The number and frequency of errors and mistakes identified in the 300 sample writings of the study perhaps indicate that ineffectiveness of current practice of teaching and learning English writing. Most of the student writings in this study show a sharp decline in the quality of the writings skills the learners were generally exposed to. There may be other reasons such as lack of or absence of nurturing learning styles, heavy dependence on memorization, large classes, individual & peer correction training, consciousness raising, interlanguage problems, ineffective feedback mechanism by teachers etc. The almost inherent ethos

of teachers 'writing as a product,' has been held one of major causes of poor quality writing albeit most teachers are not either trained or accustomed to the system of teaching process writing that fosters student writing development over a period of time through planning, drafting and rewriting etc. This is being entirely a pedagogic issue that primarily needs a policy change in English language education and curriculum that can possibly yield a satisfactory outcome in the student performance in writing over a period of time. In the training curriculum, aims and objectives should be appropriately designed and utilized to make sure it is effectively linking the praxis of writing which is inevitably essential in today's English teaching and learning context.

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## Appendix A

### **A request letter**

Hello. On behalf of the Center for Research and Training, EWU, we are carrying out a research project called “Student Mistakes and Errors in English Writing: Implications for Pedagogy” which requires student writing as sample. We would like to request you to write a paragraph **About Yourself** within 120-150 words. *You may wish to write on points such as, your name and current occupation, your previous school and college education, family information, free time activities and future plan of career.*

We want to assure you that your writing will only be used for this research purpose and kept confidential.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Harunur Rashid Khan  
Assistant Professor

Zahid Akter  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
East West University

## Appendix B

### **List of Most Common Spelling Mistakes**

In addition to finding the most common syntactic errors & mistakes in the students' written samples, we found a good number of spelling mistakes that occurred in the writing of most of the students irrespective of their institutional backgrounds. Below, we provide a list of them while showing the correct spelling alongside:

Inoscent (Innocent)  
Studding (Studying)  
Gole (Goal)  
Collage (College)  
Listing (Listening)  
Complited (Completed)  
Honers (Honors)  
Songing (Singing)  
Spical (Special)  
Pinic (Picnic)  
Coxbazer (Cox's Bazar)  
Membars (Members)  
Riter (Writer)  
Birthdat (Birthday)  
Hobbie (Hobby)  
Butiful (Beautiful)  
Plane (Plan)  
Philosopy / Philasaphi (Philosophy)  
Faverite (Favorite)  
Promeasing (Promising)  
Govement (Government)  
Sea (See)  
Farmar (Farmer)  
Hosewives (Housewives)  
Bussiness (Business)  
Pearson (Person)  
Friens (Friends)

Garls (Girls)  
Reaing (Reading)  
Remembar (Remember)  
Shell (Shall)  
Comercial (Commercial)  
Realy (Really)  
Pleasant (Pleasant)  
Familly (Family)  
Hobbiese (Hobbies)  
There (Their)  
Belive (Believe)  
Pareaants (Parents)  
Telivation (Television)  
Mather (Mother)  
Halp (Help)  
Gredening (Gardening)  
Beily (Belly)

## **Appendix C**

### **List of Most Common Syntactic Mistakes**

In the samples of the students' written production, we were able to identify a number of syntactic mistakes and errors that were common and most frequently made in all the institutions. We provide below a list of them while showing the correct forms alongside:

1. I born in 1986 – I was born in 1986
2. I was birth in 1987 – I was born in 1987
3. I studying in Political Science – I am studying in Political Science
4. I complete three semesters – I have completed three semesters
5. I am the elder son/daughter of my family – I am the eldest son/daughter of my family
6. My favorite hobby gardening – My favorite hobby is gardening
7. I like reading nobels – I like reading novels
8. Cricket/Football my favorite game – Cricket/Football is my favorite game
9. I have lots of friend- I have lots of friends
10. We are two sister but no brother – We are two sisters but no brothers
11. The date of birth of mine is January 18, 1986- my date of birth is January 18, 1986
12. By the bless of almighty Allah- by the blessing of Almighty Allah.
13. I am having my bachelor's of business administration degree- I am doing my bachelor's of business administration degree.
14. My father is service holder- my father is a service holder.
15. Another youngest sister I have, who reads in class three in Ideal School and College.
16. I hear songs- I listen to music.
17. It is easy to me walking by the river- It is easy for me walking by the river.
18. I have been born in Dhaka- I was born in Dhaka
19. In my past time, I'm listening music- In my free time, I listen to music.
20. When I go home I stay with my computer- When I go home I work on my computer
21. My interest is to be a good guitar player- My aim is to be a good guitar player
22. My father live in abroad- My father lives in abroad.

23. The situation of my village is on the south side-my village is situated in the south.
24. My hobbies read nobel, Islamic books and gardening- My hobbies are reading Novel, Islamic books and gardening.
25. My have a three friends and are good men- I have three friends and they are good.
26. Our family members a four man- I have four family members.
27. My leisure time passed my friends- I spend my free time with my friends.
28. I fell well to gossiping with them- I like gossiping with them
29. My family are three sisters and two brothers- I have three sisters and two brothers in my family.
30. My favorite hobbies is teaching- I like teaching.
31. I can't never forget it- I can never forget it.
32. I am a lucky girl birthing in this family- I am lucky having born in this family.
33. I listen song- I listen to song.
34. I got completed my S.S.C from Ideal school- I have completed my S.S.C from Ideal School.
35. School.
36. I get very few free time- I have very little free time.
37. They are helpful not only on my happiness but also on my sorrowness- They are helpful not only in my good times but also in my bad time.

## **About this report...**

This research report is circulated to encourage discussions and comments. Comments may kindly be sent to: EWU Center for Research and Training (EWUCRT), East West University, 45-46 Mohakhali C/A Dhaka-1212, E-mail:ewucrt@ewubd.edu



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