



Common Errors in Writing of EFL Sophomores in a Context of the Mekong Delta

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Abstract

Committing errors and feedback in writing are important in the process of language acquisition (Corder, 1975; Foster et al., 1988; Krashen, 1981; Marina et al., 2005; Salehi et al., 2018; Valizadeh et al., 2020). In Vietnam, however, error-analysis in writing in the contexts of EFL students has not been investigated fully. This research study explores and examines common mistakes of second-year English language students in writing English. The research was conducted with different tools including error assessment of some writing assignments, a survey to measure the ability to recognize errors in English writing, and interviews with some participants from an insider's perspective. The results found that the level for each of the written errors in the results varied widely. Certain types of errors were correctly identified by research participants and their ability to correct the issues was demonstrated properly at some points. However, most of them were unable to recognize errors, suggesting inconsistency in the ability to recognize and correct errors. Specifically, the research found a list of types of errors which occur while writing English from the phrase level to the sentence level, among other groups of errors while writing. This study could foster a trend to develop strategies to help students learn English better from both teachers' and students' point of view in today's English training programs.

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1. Introduction

In the context of Vietnam, several studies have shown that the English competence of the Vietnamese has numerous limitations and constraints despite many years of learning this language. Of four skills in standardized tests, writing is a popular way to evaluate the English proficiency of learners, especially for academic achievement purposes. However, writing is one of the most difficult skills for the Vietnamese, as evident from a wide range of research about improving English writing skills of students. These studies deal with error correction, corrective feedback, teaching and learning activities, and challenges in learning writing or writing to learn (Bandura, 1986; Hoang, 2007; Huy, 2015; Huynh, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2012). Most of the trends in research about writing have been done from researchers' perspectives in higher education. However, no research has been conducted from the perspective of BA English language students, who are still in a university and carry different levels of perceptions. These student-participants and student-researchers would provide different insights into

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the core issues.

Regarding errors and feedback in writing and language teaching, however, there is no dearth of research, focusing on error analysis or types of error and feedback to students' exercises (Corder, 1975; Salehi et al., 2018). Learners have a lot of trouble with the L2 awareness and its acquisition. Their problems lie in understanding the language and what they should do to improve different types of errors, adopting a proper error analysis and understanding the causes of language errors. Research about errors is classified differently: the higher hierarchy of linguistic knowledge, the levels of proficiency, the types of errors, and the causes (Corder, 1975; Foster et al., 1988; Jennings, 2005; Krashen, 1981; Marina et al., 2005). With respect to issues related to writing, there are many variables utilized in different research including motivation for writing, learning, and writing ability of learners, lack of vocabulary or ideas, limitations about grammatical knowledge, and common errors such as lack of confidence in writing, lack of self-belief in writing ability and the influence of culture.

There is no dearth of research on L2 learning in general, and L2 writing skills, in particular, including a large domain of research on error analysis. However, little research has focused on common errors in English writing skills from an insider's perspective. Learners inside an institution usually lack confidence when writing. Committing common errors becomes one of their habits. As a result, many of the insider learners of English writing feel less interested in the very act of writing. They are not willing to change their perspective or take the requisite actions to improve their writing skills. Moreover, the existing teaching methods cannot easily improve learners' writing abilities as they fail to identify barriers or errors that they frequently make in their writing. In some cases, they may identify what the problems are, but they cannot solve the problems by themselves without extra instructions or advice at certain points.

Hence, this study was conducted to discover common errors when writing English of the sophomores majoring in English studies at a university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. The EFL sophomores in the research context were recruited as they had spent one year of study in the university program, and were also familiar with the writing activities in comparison to students of the first year. The students of third or fourth-year would have been too advanced for this research because writing requirements at their levels are more academic and advanced. The sophomores are also in the process of transition, aiming to acquire proficiency in writing, often facing a chaos in their competencies, and learning and attempting to assimilate themselves with the writing process. Moreover, since the convenient sampling method was used to identify the sample, the researchers of this study were in a better position to work with the sophomores at the time of conducting the research.

This study was designed to analyze students' common errors and their relationships with various aspects like word order, use of verbs, nouns and adjectives, use of punctuation, capitalization, etc. It intended to propose methods of improving students' academic English writing ability and preparing them to write good essays and theses in the forthcoming semesters as well as in future. Such data was collected that demonstrated students' writing ability. The study was carried out from the student's perspective of the insider's viewpoint and in the context of Vietnam.

2. Literature review

There are several types of errors in English language ranging from words, phrases, clauses and sentences, right through paragraph structures to writing essays, theses, or dissertations. However, the nature of errors cannot be varied in whatever type of writing it occurs. A learner may commit the error in the choice of words, choice of its correct form, its spelling, appropriate semantics, or may even fail to establish harmony between the subject and the verb, the tense, or any other part of a sentence. For example, with respect to vocabulary, English writers often commit errors such as misplaced words, use of words in wrong position, using incorrect words, spelling mistake, typographical error, and so on. Vocabulary is believed to be playing an indispensable role in the creation of good writing and writers require training of this skill (Lightbown, 2006). At the university level, lack of vocabulary is considered to be one of the most important challenges in writing, in general, and in academic writing, in particular. Alfaki (2015) points out that university students are not able to express themselves clearly and accurately nor can comprehend written texts due to their limited vocabulary.

Error analysis is an area which requires to focus on various aspects such as types of errors, causes of errors from different perspectives, cognitive abilities in language acquisition, methods of teaching and learning, levels of proficiency, and most importantly, the level of awareness of linguistic knowledge

of the learners. In the 1970s, the field of error analysis was well defined and established, when a lot of research was carried out with a focus on analyzing errors mainly from linguistic perspectives. It was also ascertained that a few learners of English, in a foreign language context, might find themselves in a scenario of trials and errors during their learning process and while practicing the language. Xie et al. (2007) believed that errors occurred in the process of transferring words from L1 into L2, or while learners made efforts of producing words in the target language. In the Vietnamese context, errors in writing can be seen as problems but with a different perspective, i.e., seen as a part of the learning process. This is consistent with Krashen (1981) theory of second language acquisition which regarded errors as “natural process” of language learning. This idea of language learning as a process, in the Vietnamese context, was further reconsidered by Khang et al. (2018), who insisted upon revisiting the concepts when a language is acquired.

Further, misspellings have also become a common problem. According to Farooq et al. (2020), the English language itself has many irregularities and styles that make writing difficult, especially for second language learners. Such errors in English spelling take place because there is no proper connection between sounds and symbols. An incorrectly spelt word is not only a derivation from the norm but can adversely affect the intended meaning. For this reason, learners need to remember spellings of words that are frequently used. When a word is not in practice for long, the learner is liable to commit errors in the use of such words.

In addition to vocabulary errors, learners make errors in many areas of the English language as they write. Brown (2000) stated that these areas include content, organization, grammar, and spelling as some of the criteria to measure students' errors in their writing. According to Alfaki (2015), problems with grammatical structures are found the most, preventing effectively writing. A study by Al-Khasawneh et al. (2010) also found that students have difficulty in grammar because of their not understanding grammatical rules. This study also drew attention to the role of teachers in correcting students' writing errors. The study proved that teachers need to take make use of such teaching methods that focused on skill development and influenced students' learning grammar. In another study, Zamel (1985) found that teachers' responses are so ambiguous and abstract that they do not help learners understand their error correction and improve their writing abilities.

Furthermore, in many contexts, errors in writing tend to focus too much on the evaluation of the written product rather than on error correction and learning how to write. The writing instructor usually emphasized grammar and punctuation more than the content and organization of ideas. Specifically, many students claim that they have been exposed to writing rules and grammar without developing their ability to express ideas (Rass, 2015). Notably, the research results of Huy (2015) show that one of the reasons that learners still make many mistakes is the lack of opportunities to receive feedback from teachers. Such issues occur due to the lack of real-time learning and practice in classes, which hinders the development of writing ability.

The aforesaid review of literature has made evident a wide research gap for this study, which is the lack of insiders' perspectives in error analysis. While addressing the mismatch between the EFL learners' beliefs and their capacity in recognizing or fixing the errors, this study attempted to examine what mistakes sophomores made in English studies when writing in this language.

3. Research methodology

This descriptive study utilized a mixed method research design in which the data was both qualitative and quantitative. The underlying question of the research was “*What mistakes do sophomores in English studies often make when writing in this language?*” The research participants were sophomores from two campuses of a university, who were registered in English studies program. The sample was identified based on the convenient sampling method. The data was collected through different research instruments starting from the text analyses of participants' writing specimens, followed by a questionnaire about the errors found in the writing specimens and finally ending with the interview containing questions related to the answers chosen by the participants in the questionnaire. A total of 96 writing specimens were collected from the sophomores studying writing courses; 64 questionnaires were filled up by participants via the Google Forms and the researcher conducted fifteen direct and indirect interviews using open-ended questions.

Prior to using the final version of the questionnaire and the interview questions for data collection, both research tools were piloted properly. The questionnaire was developed from the

analysis of the common errors found in the participants' writing specimens. After framing, the questionnaire, which comprised 50 items of multiple choices, it was tested on 19 high-quality second-year students of the English language to check if participants understood the questions in the same manner as they were designed. The items in the questionnaire focused on different types of errors collected from the writing specimens such as participants' ability to recognize and identify the errors. Since the questionnaire items were designed from errors found in the participants' writing specimens, there was no need to run a validity or reliability test. However, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire items and interview questions were ensured because they were carefully selected and grounded from a prior process of analyzing errors committed by participants themselves prior to the experiment. From EFL learners' perspective, the analysis of linguistic errors should be connected to their praxis or real samples of their work for ease of analysis later (Khang et al., 2018).

After receiving feedback on the questionnaire from 19 participants, ambiguous questions were modified and spelling mistakes were corrected. A similar process for the interview questions was adopted. After the first interview was conducted, its audio recording was sent to experts to check for its approach, flow of data collection, and what modifications should be made in the subsequent interviews. The interview questions mainly dealt with the types of errors and the specific errors that participants had committed while choosing the answers in the questionnaire. No attempt was made to blame them for their errors or ask explanations for their choice of answers. It was more about probing into their ability to recognize errors and correct them in their writing in future. Having completed all the steps of research, the data was quantified to synthesize it into final report. For qualitative results, the researcher's focus was on examining common errors committed by participants and find out possible causes of those errors. Hence, the research conducted in-depth interview while comparing at the same time the data from other data collection tools for the purpose of analysis, synthesis, and writing final reports.

4. Findings

This study focused on finding common errors of grammar, punctuation, content, and vocabulary. The data was collected from 96 writing papers of sophomores, 64 of whom were also respondents of a 50-item questionnaire, and 15 of whom were interviewed. The findings of common errors were classified into 25 error categories, which formed the basis of the analysis and discussion in this study. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

The rest of the data from other research instruments were generalized using the same categories to conduct error analysis of participants' writings and their perceptions.

The following findings present ten most common cases of errors from all data with (1) verbs, (2) word forms, (3) sentence fragment, (4) prepositions, (5) spelling, (6) punctuation, (7) articles, (8) word order, (9) run-on sentence, and (10) capitalization. The case of "writing content" was excluded from the top ten positions because it was not related to the categories of error analysis in this study. The significant examples have been illustrated in figures in some cases.

4.1 Cases of errors with verbs.

In the writing specimens comprising paragraphs and essays, there were 52 cases of errors with verbs, out of which 18 students had made errors of subject-verb agreement like "helping other people make us feel good" or "they [is] students", etc. There were 11 errors about verbs following a modal verb. Many students wrote verbs after a modal verb with "-ing", "-s", "-ed", "to verb", or an "adjective", "noun", or a "do not verb". For example, "we *can* walk or riding the bicycle to the office", etc. Many students used double verbs in incorrect forms as in a sentence "she likes is preparing everything". Error about the active and passive voices included examples like "the chicken prepares by my mother". Four students made the error in using tenses whereas other errors were about use of multiple verbs as in the examples: "he helps you are/can stable" (3 times), "the things what they should do and do not" (1 time), "people tend to more carling about it" (1 time), with the misuse of bare infinitive and to-infinitive (1 time).

During the interview, most of the participants admitted that they made mistakes about the subject-verb agreement (14 cases), used nouns with article "the" in front of them, used the case for a noun which was not clear, or used wrong cases (like "he", "she", "it", and so on). Many participants did not know the singular or plural conjugation; or number of tenses (6 cases).

Table 1: Different types of errors in all research tools

| No | Type of errors | From Interview | From Writing papers |
|----|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Word forms | 14 | 53 |
| 2 | Verb | 32 | 52 |
| 3 | Sentence fragment | 14 | 27 |
| 4 | Preposition | 15 | 24 |
| 5 | Spelling | 10 | 21 |
| 6 | Punctuation | 9 | 18 |
| 7 | Acronyms | 5 | 15 |
| 8 | *Contents | 11 | 12 |
| 9 | Articles | 9 | 12 |
| 10 | Run-on sentence | 8 | 11 |
| 11 | Capitalization | 1 | 10 |
| 12 | Word choice | 16 | 9 |
| 13 | Relative clauses | 2 | 7 |
| 14 | Possessive adjectives | 2 | 7 |
| 15 | Adverbs | 3 | 6 |
| 16 | Word order | 7 | 5 |
| 17 | Double subjects | 3 | 5 |
| 18 | Double negatives | 3 | 3 |
| 19 | Conjunction | 2 | 3 |
| 20 | Dangling | 4 | 2 |
| 21 | Non-parallelism | 4 | 2 |
| 22 | Sentence structures | 3 | 2 |
| 23 | Word with different meanings | 8 | 1 |
| 24 | Objects | 1 | 1 |
| 25 | Others | 5 | 2 |

(Note: *contents – not related to error analysis so it was excluded in the top ten common errors)

They often made mistakes in tenses related to sentence completion and wrong usage of two tenses at the same time. Some participants did not know tenses and therefore used rare tenses, active voice, and irregular verbs that did not follow the grammatical rules (2 cases). For example, "taught" instead of "taught"; in that place, a bare form of a verb or the extra verb "-ing" or "to verb" should be considered; or sometimes they used 2 main verbs in a single sentence (2 cases).

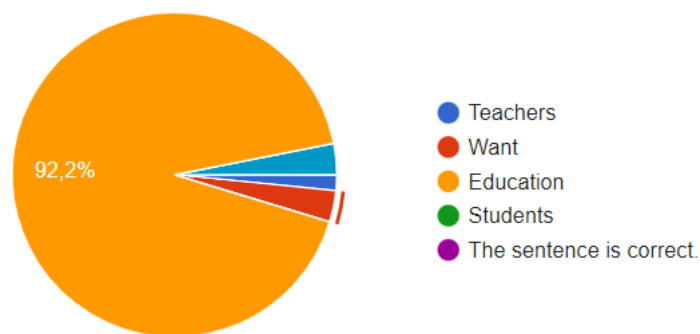


Figure 1: The recognition of errors in the sentence of “Teachers always want to education students.” (n=64)

The results summarized in Figure 1 are quite like the data obtained from the questionnaire. In the sentence "teachers always want to [education] students", about 92.2% of the participants (59 students out of 64) chose "education" as the false answer; eleven students chose "want" as incorrect; two participants chose "teachers" as incorrect, and only 3 students' choice was correct. This finding was a surprise for the second-year students of English when they could not identify the appropriate part of

speech for the phrase “want to [education]”.

In another sentence, “transport is a social problem in big cities, but its solution depends on new technologic”, 20 students chose “technologic” as the false answer; 25 students chose “depend” as the false answer, six students chose “depend, technologic” as false answers; two students chose “its”, one student chose “but”, one chose “its, technologic”, seven students chose “a child”, six students chose “is”, one chose “its solution”, one student chose “do not know”. A similar conclusion was drawn that the ability to recognize “technologic” as the error in the sentence was very limited. In the sentence “a child that comes from a wealthy family has a disadvantage of a family love life. [Commonly], their parents express love by money”, 11 students chose “that, commonly, have” as wrong answers, 1 student chose “of a family love life, commonly, love, have”, 3 students chose “love”, 8 students choosing “of a family love life”, six students choosing “commonly”, 17 students selected “have”, six students chose “that” and so on.

In addition, out of 60 survey respondents, six commented that they used words in the wrong context, and errors caused related to wrong word meaning or a spoken word was used in writing. From the interview data, most of the students admitted that they did not possess a large vocabulary, and often used simple words such as “having.” A few others admitted the use of wrong word usage, or words that were not suitable in the context. One participant admitted getting confused between negative and positive words; another mentioned the use of outdated words; 3 students used words of spoken text in written text. Likewise, 50 respondents thought they made mistakes with verbs and tenses, especially with subject-verb agreement in sentence, not knowing whether structures like “a number of + plural nouns” should have a plural verb or singular verb. Some respondents commented that they were confused about what to use in a particular context for accuracy, and therefore often used the wrong verb for the subject in front or used multiple verbs in a sentence.

4.2 Cases of errors with word forms

The respondents of the questionnaire admitted having put incorrect word forms in a sentence, which could be either a wrong verb form or wrong noun form. For example, in this sentence they were asked to identify errors of the word form: “Transport has been one of the most important problems for the last two items. The problem began with the development and the growing of the cities.” A total of 36 students chose wrong answers such as (transport, problems, has been, the development) while a few said that the sentence was correct, or they did not know the answer. In another sentence, “transport is a social problem in big cities, but its solution depends on new technologic”. A total of 33 out of 60 participants could not identify “technologic” as the error in the sentence. In the sentence, “We can take care of the health of our family or bring happy for them”, only 15 students could identify “happy” as incorrect. In addition, one student commented that he/she made mistakes of singular and plural noun forms (e.g., life/lives, man/men, woman/women).

Figure 2 exemplifies the distribution of responses evident in the sentence “it would be better to think about other different kinds of transports. In Brazil, the government talked about transport on the river,” the largest number was of 39% students who admitted making mistakes in the form of nouns, followed by 37.5% who mistook verb forms.

To answer the question: “Do you often use wrong words when writing English or not?” about three-fourths of students answered yes. In the interview data, 8 students made the mistake of missing “s/es” in plural nouns; one student could not make a difference between “more interested” and “more interesting”, and 5 students admitted misplacing the words out of the context. In the textual analysis of the written specimens, 31 students made a mistake about forms such as “this is money to we can spend”, or “he goes to school without worry about money”, or “she has professional”, etc. A total of 18 students admitted missing “s/es” in plural nouns, two students made errors of “more interesting/interested”, one student wrote “it makes a student a better candidate” and one student confused “an important” with a noun.

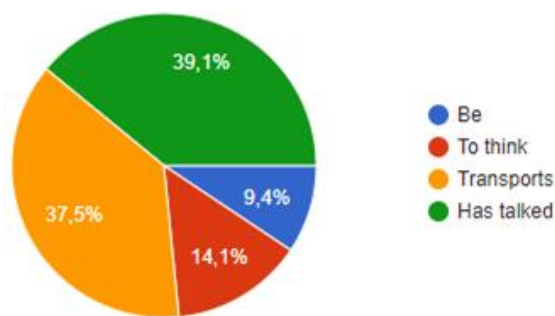


Figure 2: The recognitions of errors in word forms from the sentence “It would be better to think about other different kinds of transports. In Brazil, the government has talked about transport on the river.” (n=64)

It can be seen from this figure that the participants in the study could not analyze or recognize a sentence with a proper use. Although the sentence is not a perfect version with ease of understanding, most learners could recognize problems in a sample. More than two-third of the participants thought that this sentence was incorrect if we use “to think” and “transports”. All of them would classify this sentence with full of grammatical errors in all listed cases. This indicated that the participants could not identify what and when something was correct or not.

4.3 Cases of errors with a sentence fragment

From the questionnaire, 16 out of 60 students thought that sentences like “the individual who owns this backpack” and “Marina, the beautiful mermaid, wanted some tuna salad. But had a small problem since she was allergic to celery” were correct. A total of 19 respondents chose the sentence “using big salary to do a favorite job. Money can help you complete your dream” was not grammatically wrong. A total of 15 students thought the sentence “after listening to his joke, she is laughing out loud” was correct. Out of 60 students who participated in the survey, one of them admitted that they made broken sentences like “she who is beautiful”, or “because it is cheap. I like it”. Likewise, from the interview, five participants admitted the wrong use of words like “because”, “so”, “and”, five students wrote sentences without a verb, and one student wrote a sentence with the subject missing with only verbs and adverbs. From the specimens of writing, nine samples lacked verbs such as “they struggling to get high mark”, “they do not competition...”, etc. Nine cases included “because”, “so”, “but”, “and” with only one clause to make a complex or compound sentence. Five cases were found without the subject of the sentence; one of them wrote two parts “better than” instead of “not same”; three cases wrote a sentence “the first solution, we can prevent polluted environment.”

4.4 Case of error with prepositions

From all three research tools, the errors with prepositions could be easily detected. First, in the questionnaire, 39 students made mistakes of prepositions such as “before the eighth century, people lived in small villages. They did not worry about the time to arrive in somewhere” followed by 9 students (14.1%); who also made mistakes of prepositions when used with verbs (phrasal verbs) such as “we can take *care about* the health of our family or bring happiness *for* them”. 31 students used the wrong preposition e.g., “the impact *to* a child is that they will grow up and think that money is everything”

In the interview, ten people admitted that they used the wrong preposition with the verb. Errors with “at”, “in” existed when talking about the place. These errors were residual, false, or wrong use. A few Of them could not differentiate between “on” and “in”, or between “with”, “on”, and “about”. They said that such errors were caused because they wrote too quickly and therefore sometimes could not differentiate between “to me” and “for me”; or the residual prepositions “at” or “in” for time and places. From the writing specimens, 8 papers lacked preposition in phrasal verbs; two students wrote superfluous prepositions with the verb; one student wrote a wrong preposition with the verb; six students wrote incorrect prepositions in relation to nouns such as “in some reasons, I agree with the salary is much more...” The number of errors of residual prepositions or phrasal verbs with no preposition were counted for 7 times.

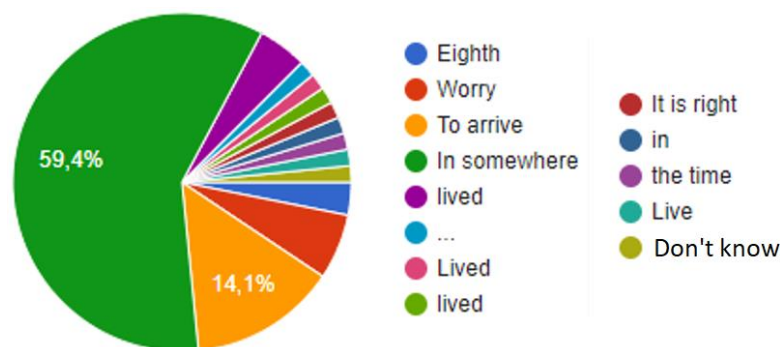


Figure 3: The recognition of the errors related to prepositions in the sentence “Before the eighth century, people lived in small villages. They did not worry about the time to arrive in somewhere” (n=64)

From Figure 3, it is revealed that participants’ selections of problems with prepositions are quite different from other measures. More than half of the respondents could identify the problems with preposition in the case of “in somewhere”. However, the situations would be still questionable when the rest of them made some mistakes in identifying the correct cases into the problematic ones.

4.5 Case of error with spelling

Spelling is one of the mistakes that students most likely commit. Students often spelt words with missing letters, or added unnecessary letters, or spelt incorrectly the long words, as seen in examples like “sucess”, “enviroment”, “comonlly”, etc. In the sentence “a child that comes from a wealthy family have a disadvantage of a family love life. Commonly, their parents express love by money.” Thirty-four students made the mistake and spelt “commonly” as “comonlly”. When being asked during the interview about their self-reflective evaluation of their errors with spelling, 62.5% of students answered “yes”.

4.6 Case of error with punctuation

From the questionnaire, thirty-five students admitted making punctuation mistakes, twenty-six participants out of 60 put residual punctuation marks in a sentence with a relative clause “this is because their eyes are blinded by the power of money, that their parent has” resulting in the semantic ambiguity. Answering the question: “Do you often make mistakes in punctuation when writing English?”, 53.1% of the students answered “yes”. Similar findings were found in the interview data. Two students believed that a colon is required after “such as”, or “like”. One student did not know the difference between a comma and a full stop. One student said that sometimes the comma is not correct if we want to add two sentences together. Many of them did not know whether to use a comma after an adverb e.g., “[however] I want to become better”. One student thought that comma is used with an unfinished sentence; another participant believed commas were not used between two independent propositions, if there is “and” between two propositions.

In the case of writing specimens, 7 students used a comma before words like “so that”, “because” and after “although”. There was no full stop in a sentence like “I do not go to school because it rains today.” There was a case about missing commas before “so” and another case after the adverb. Two of the participants wrote a colon after “such as:”, two students used a comma after and before “because”, a comma after “that,” a colon after: that” as in “many students said that: they need money to spend tuition”; one student used a colon after “about:”; and other thought if there are two clauses joined with “and”, a comma is not used.

4.7 Case of error with articles

A total of 33 students out of 60 made mistakes of articles in sentences like “children from families that do not have a large amount of money will grow up with the sense of respect for money” and only

12.5% of students recognized the error. Many students wrote sentences without the needed article in a sentence, e.g., “Some words in the Bini language are found in Urhobo language”.

Although these cases were seen fewer in number in interviews and writing specimens, but still 9 students made mistakes about articles, of which 7 students used article redundantly or missed it or used in excess. One student made mistakes about using the definite article “the” with a proper noun. Several students used “a” and “the” incorrectly. Similarly, there were 9 errors of missing articles, 3 cases of incorrect use of articles, as in “a good wage”.

4.8 Case of error with word order

Research data shows heterogeneity in the number of errors in all three research tools. Many learners made similar errors while answering the questionnaire compared to the other two tools. From the questionnaire, twenty-five out of 60 students misplaced word order in the embedded question, thirty-four students used the wrong word order. To the question: "Do you often make mistakes with word order?" 62.5% students answered “yes”. Likewise, from the interview, one case incorrectly wrote compound nouns; another did not know the correct position of adverbs, adjectives, and verbs; and there were four cases who were not aware of the position of nouns. In the writing specimens, two errors were detected of using adverbs before defective verbs such as “traffic accident usually may happen...”; three errors were categorized as of wrong word position such as “following the reasons”, and so on.

4.9 Case of error with a run-on sentence

In the questionnaire, thirty-seven students committed the error of run-on sentences such as “I washed my car yesterday, hence it rains today.” Eight students committed the same error, including one more error of putting a comma before the adverb. One error was found about no punctuation between 2 clauses in the interview data. Five errors were found about putting a comma between two independent clauses, four errors were found with no punctuation between two clauses and two errors were about putting a comma before “therefore”, “however” in writing papers. Figure 4 presents the distribution of errors in run-on sentences.

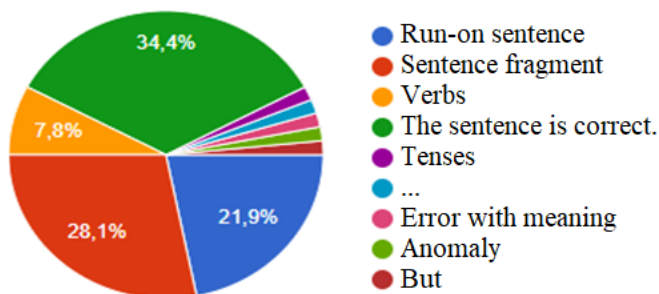


Figure 4: The recognition of errors about run-on sentence (n=64)

Figure 4 confirms the phenomenon that there were only 21.9% (n=64) of learners with the ability to recognize the error of run-on sentences. A serious problem was found in this case was that one-third of the participants were not aware of the problems in the sample testing sentence. About 34.4% of the respondents did not realize the errors. This is evident of the situation about EFL learners’ lack of awareness or missing the essential linguistic knowledge of grammar, which leads to the problems of run-on sentences.

4.10 Case of error with capitalization

For this error, only one student commented that he/she made a mistake with capitalization negligently. Figure 5 shows the redundant case of capitalization, or incorrect capitalization in the middle of a sentence as in “Tourism has its non-monetary Advantages; it brings cultures and people closer” (n=64). The result was similar in interview and in writing specimens, with one case of capitalization of the first letter of a word (not a proper noun), which was not required.

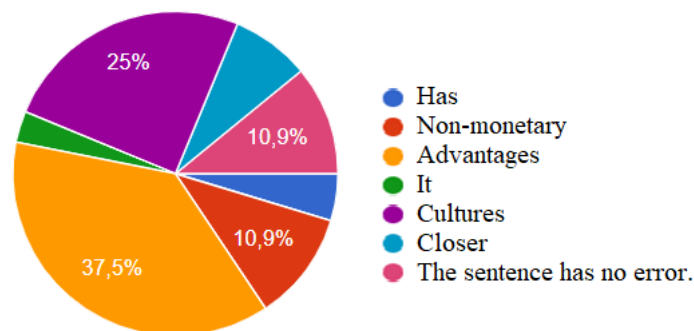


Figure 5: Incorrect capitalization in the middle of a sentence in “Tourism has its non-monetary Advantages; it brings cultures and people closer” (n=64)

This sample sentence aimed to investigate the participants’ ability to recognize problems with capitalization. It was surprise to find that only one-third of the respondents (37.5%) could figure out this error. It was even more serious with 10.9% of them who thought that the sentence had no error. It could be seen that around two-third of students could not identify the testing issue which might mean that their practice and awareness on capitalization were questionable.

5. Discussion

This study focuses on different aspects of common research in writing English in some contexts similar to [Homstad et al. \(1996\)](#) in activities corresponding to the writing ability, or similar to [Nguyen et al. \(2012\)](#) with writing activities; or [Huynh \(2008\)](#); [Nguyen et al. \(2012\)](#); [Dodigovic et al. \(2015\)](#); and [Bandura \(1986\)](#) about skills of students, error correction, feedback, activities for teaching and learning, and challenges in learning writing or writing to learn. From the research findings, it has been evident that, in addition to the errors of polymorphism, adjectives, possessive adjectives, and conjugations, almost all other errors have a very high frequency. This evidence was deducted from examining students’ writing specimens, surveys and interviews. Out of twenty-five types of errors retrieved from the data, it can be generalized that second-year English language students in this research context often made mistakes of verbs, word form, spelling, sentence fragment, punctuation, prepositions, vocabulary choices, articles, capitalization, and run-on sentences.

This research also dealt with a variety of learners’ problems related to different types of errors at word and sentence levels in the context of EFL writing. The findings made feel the importance of revisiting the huge issue of language awareness and revamp the theory and practice of L2 acquisition. It was felt in this research that EFL learners in sophomore years regard getting awareness about errors in writing as their main problem. They want to understand the ways to improve different types of errors with proper analysis, or even by identifying the causes of those errors.

[Jennings \(2005\)](#) studied error-analysis in writing skills to show how people were interested in acquiring writing competence. Globally, error analysis helps in ensuring the access, interaction, and research of writing in an international environment. Moreover, in an academic environment, it helps students to perform exercises, improve efficiency and expand knowledge. Regarding the issues of errors and feedback in writing and language teaching, [Corder \(1975\)](#) initially activated the field of error analysis, and it was later carried forward by several research ([Salehi et al., 2018](#); [Valizadeh et al., 2020](#)).

Errors in writing can be classified into different categories and hierarchies such as linguistic knowledge, learners’ language awareness, levels of proficiency, types of errors, causes, and so on ([Corder, 1975](#); [Foster et al., 1988](#); [Jennings, 2005](#); [Krashen, 1981](#); [Marina et al., 2005](#)). This study is consistent with [Brown \(2000\)](#) in terms of framework of error analysis developed in early 1970s by [Corder \(1975\)](#). One of the research tools of this research was to collect writing specimens of sophomores in order to analyze errors in their writing, classify the differences and similarities among the data sources, and categorize common groups or types of errors from a given context. This analysis was linked with the errors made by common EFL learners in writing in other contexts and that of Vietnam ([Huy, 2015](#); [Khang et al., 2018](#)). A little similarity is found between the findings of this study and that of [Brown \(2000\)](#) related to learners’ competence and errors of learners’ awareness, levels of fluency and accuracy in language practices. The larger difference can be found in cases shown by [Brown \(2000\)](#),

indicating the interference of L1, which this study did not focus on. Regarding the core of errors analysis in comparing language products by EFL learners and then giving the explanation of the cases and types of errors for a thorough understanding of problems in the target language, this research is consistent with Crystal (1987), who defined error categories in a research context.

The research results obtained from this study are quite similar in terms of the type of error that previous studies have found. The difference, however, is that error rates are quite common in data obtained from research tools. However, finding errors in this study is completely different from the study of Khuwaileh et al. (2000) on different types of errors in writing, or errors due to lack of coherence, association, and error of tense. This study is also consistent with the study of Cronnell (1985) who highlighted the errors of verbs, nouns, syntax among others. In addition, errors related to spelling, pronunciation, and verbs were also found in the study of Kreiner et al. (2002).

The problem of error-detection competencies also raised a lot of problems about the English language proficiency development of English language students. Thereby, the tactics to help students learn English better also need more attention. Students' common mistakes in writing in this study were better shared by teachers, who would develop their ability to recognize and correct mistakes. This would also help to increase learning motivation so that learners understand and comprehend the learning principles and practice them to develop their writing abilities.

6. Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

This study has made evident of many problems that EFL learners face in their English writing. Writing skills play an important role in determining learners' English proficiency to meet the demand of today's society. A piece of writing with many errors greatly affects the quality of written assignment comprising essays and reports, letters and paragraphs, and later theses and dissertations. Good writing helps improve students' confidence in working and carrying out tasks in future jobs. This study, therefore, endeavored to identify reasons why students made mistakes in writing or what causes poor writing of the English language, though most of them are also somewhat passive in doing writing practices or pay attention to error correction.

This study faced a few limitations. There could have been a better quality if the reliability and validity of the research tools were more visible. It was not possible in this study to test validity and reliability as the questionnaire and interview instruments were based on real problems found in the participants' writing samples in the research context. Secondly, categories of the framework were formulated not from the review of literature but were chosen from the questionnaire items. This limitation was visible in the fact that although the values of all collected data were properly perceived, there was no homogeneity. There are very good implications of this study. If the results of this study are referenced strictly, the EFL schools could find the basis to adjust their curriculum and teaching methods to enhance students' confidence and English Writing ability. This study would not only facilitate sophomores to major in English but also help them achieve good grades and learning output of students.

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