

A Case Study of Error Analysis in Mexican EFL Middle School Students

Otoniel Serrano de Santiago¹, Juan Manuel Velazquez Recendez¹, Gabriel De Avila Sifuentes¹, Lizzete Gabriela Acosta Cruz¹, Martha Alicia Méndez Murillo¹

¹Autonomous University of Zacatecas, Mexico

Correspondence: Otoniel Serrano de Santiago, Autonomous University of Zacatecas, Mexico.

Received: February 7, 2022

Accepted: March 20, 2022

Online Published: April 4, 2022

doi:10.5430/elr.v11n1p20

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v11n1p20>

Abstract

The present study intended to examine written errors made by 9th-grade students at a representative middle school at Zacatecas, Mexico. As an essential curricular subject, English as a foreign language is the target for this research due to the variety of errors committed by students when they perform a writing task. The analyzed variables were covert errors (interpretation), overt errors (interpretation), correctness deviation, and appropriateness deviation. Participants were selected due to their proficiency level in English and the background on how they reached the expected level. Students' productions were taken as specific samples; the aim was to highlight errors according to Corder's classification. Results showed certain mistakes were prevalent, which is helpful for teachers to decide what to tackle when programming classes and overall to be fully aware of students' processes to develop EFL in a particular context.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing skill, Error Analysis (EA)

1. Introduction

1.1 Intent of Study

English language teaching began decades ago in Mexico as a result of the globalization process, the government decided to start classes from kindergarten in 2010. The reason was clear, the increase in the number of people who are learning this foreign language in this country nowadays; many of them depend on it to have better employment or to acquire promotion in it. Linguistic competency in English is no longer a privilege but a necessity in different production sectors (Biava & Segura, 2010). As mentioned, English is the most extended language globally, so much, it has been considered the lingua franca (UNESCO, 2009).

In order to cope with the latter, *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica* (PNIEB) started in México in 2010-2011 school year (SEP, 2017). It was adapted to the elementary schools in the different regions of the state of Zacatecas as an attempt to enhance the learning of this language at an early stage in education. Regarding this program, it is important to highlight the deficiencies it presented, one of them and perhaps the most relevant was the fact it did not offer English classes statewide in elementary schools, but for the major cities.

Consequently, students that are in 9th grade have completed EFL classes since kindergarten, so it becomes significant to understand their learning process to evaluate their development; productive skills are essential, especially writing, perceived as the most difficult among the four core ones (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013).

1.2 Importance of the Study

The learners' errors or mistakes in the process of Language Acquisition are very important providing "insight into how far a learner has progressed in acquiring a language and showing how much more the learner needs to learn" (Ringbom, 1987, p.69). Another important factor to consider is that by knowing the pattern of inaccuracies there might be the possibility of modifying the curriculum or changing the teaching method to prevent the students from committing the same errors repeatedly. The benefits of having these changes in the method or the curriculum can give the students a better chance to successfully learn English as a second language. It is expected to shed light on the types and frequency of grammar errors in their writings to design an appropriate curriculum and make specific modifications.

2. Error Analysis

Error analysis (EA) is one of the most significant theories of second language acquisition. It is concerned with the

analysis of the errors committed by second language learners by comparing the learners' assimilated norm with the target language rules and explaining the recognized errors. Error Analysis is based on the identification, description, and explanation of mistakes that learners produce. It is very important to have an overview of them to discover their source. In accordance to Corder (1967) errors committed by learners are important in three specific aspects: 1) they provide the teacher a pedagogical tool that allows him/her to be aware of what the students have already learned and what they have not yet. 2) They function as a research aid by giving the teacher solid proof that a second language is learned, and 3) they have the purpose of serving the learners with a device by which they can bring to light the rules of the new language.

Corder (1967), explains that error analysis has two objects: one theoretical and another applied. The theoretical objective is to understand what and how an apprentice learns when he is immersed in the process of developing a second language. The applied object is to allow the scholar to learn more efficiently by using the knowledge of his language for pedagogical purposes. At the same time, the examination of errors can serve two purposes, diagnostic and prognostic.

In addition, there is a qualitative form to classify errors, Corder (1974) explains that error analysis involves two principal purposes. The first one is the theoretical objective which has to do with the process of how learners develop linguistic skills. The second is the practical one which is focused on how to assist apprentices in the process of developing language with their previous knowledge of it. Corder (1974) also mentioned a five-step procedure of error analysis which consists of 1) Data collection (words), 2) Error Recognition, 3) Error description, 4) Error Explanation and 5) Error Evaluation.

Error Analysis in language learning is the study of the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a language, especially a foreign language. According to James (2014, p. 62), EA refers to "the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance".

Another definition of error analysis is given by Brown (2014, p. 160). He defined error analysis as "the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second languages and then to reveal the systems operated by learner". In other words, Corder (1967) views errors as valuable information for three beneficiaries: for teachers, it provides clear information on the progress of the students; for researchers, it offers evidence as to how language is learned or acquired; for learners themselves, it gives them resources to learn and be conscious of their development process.

Zamel (1983) defines the progression of writing as "non-linear, exploratory, and generative which involves the sub-processes of planning, collecting data, drafting, revising, rewriting and editing" (p.165). Writing is a complex, challenging process that includes multiple skills such as identifications of syntax rules, writing supporting details, reviewing, and editing.

Norrish (1995, p.76) comprehends *errors* as "systematic deviation when a learner has not learned something and consistently gets it wrong". In addition, the author expresses that when a learner of English commits systematic errors it is because there is a lack of knowledge. Firstly, students make mistakes unconsciously and these can be corrected when there is an opportunity to revise a text again or sometimes by auto monitoring speech. When a student learns the correct form of an expression, but sometimes he doesn't use it properly, in this situation we call this deviation a mistake. In contrast, errors happen when there is no knowledge of an issue or because it has not been understood, meaning that, students are unable to identify errors, hence they cannot correct them unless help from a mentor is provided.

2.1 Previous Studies

The teaching and attainment of English as a second language has been a field of study with plenty of contributions. Ngangbam (2016) examined the English syntactic problems, frequency, and patterns in 60 Arabic students through mixed research, analysis arose that the frequency of the errors committed might be influenced by many causes and strategies. It also showed the interference of first language L1 in interpreting or translating to the second language.

Learning another language can be more challenging whenever there are differences in linguistic and orthographic features. In higher education, being in a different field of study might enable students to present varied difficulties when learning English. Specifically, the difficulty of learning or teaching writing skills is because it involves comprehensive knowledge of grammar, appropriate vocabulary, writing procedure, (e.g. punctuation and capitalization), organizational skills, style, and imagination (Nuruzzaman, Islam & Shuchi, 2018).

Sermsook, Liamnimit, and Pochakorn (2017) carried out a study at a Thai University. The researchers worked with 26 second-year English major students to examine the language errors in specific writing and to explore the sources

of the faults. This qualitative investigation found seventeen types of errors in written English sentences. The most prominent errors were: punctuation, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, fragments, tenses, and word order; this investigation was separated into different levels to synthesize errors; Word level: articles, nouns, pronouns, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, literal translation from the Thai language, parts of speech, word choices, spelling, and transition words. Other levels were types, frequency, percentage, and rank of the errors.

Following the same line of investigation in error analysis in English as a foreign language (EFL), authors Karim, A. et al (2018) led a study in which 9th and 10th-grade pupils, belonging to three middle schools' in Bangladesh were studied through 70 essays. These findings indicate that grammatical errors are the most frequently committed. These results were significant in the sense of collaboration and teacher interaction, suggesting that it is urgent to modify teaching practices focused on the Bengali language.

Investigation reveals that both L1 and L2 learners make mistakes when trying to convey a message in written or spoken language, but they are able to correct themselves with appropriate feedback (Atmaca, 2016). The latter means that students' EFL development can be conducted positively if there is evidence of the errors they make.

Learning a language is complex because of differences in structure, apart from the four core skills and occasionally these include a different alphabet and calligraphy (Mustafa, Kirana, & Bahri, 2017). Their findings demonstrated that the most common type of error in the surface strategy taxonomy was mid-selection. They were usually concerned with the rules of word-formation which are abundant in English, and thus require a lot of effort to learn. The study showed that making errors is unavoidable for EFL learners, either inter-lingual or intra-lingual.

Researchers concerned in error analysis observed that faults are advantageous for both apprentices and educators. Providing information to the instructors on students' errors. This helps the teachers in three ways: firstly, to correct their mistakes, secondly to improve their instruction, and thirdly to emphasize those areas that need strengthening (Alhaysoni, 2012).

As stated above there have been many types of research to analyze writing errors made by EFL apprentices to synthesize the prominent errors committed in written English performance. They diagnosed some common worldwide types of errors in the writing by EFL students, it is found consistent three categories of errors in learners' works; Grammar, Semantics, and Interference of L1. Among them, the most relevant category was grammar, divided into two specific levels: verb tense, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, and word order.

2.2 Sources of Errors in Language Learning

There have been numerous proposals about the sources of errors committed by second language learning students, the following paragraphs are composed for some of these scholarly proposals.

Brown (2014) states that there are two main sources of errors, namely, interlingual errors and intralingual errors.

James (2014) states that there are four sources of errors: interlingual errors, intralingual errors, communication strategy-based errors, and induced errors.

Richards (1974) declares that there are two main causes of errors: interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual denotes errors committed when students make use of rules from their first language when expressing a written idea in the language they are developing. The intralingual cause is based on the target language rules conflict like overgeneralization, false analogy, and others.

Schumann and Stenson (1974) propose three main sources of errors: incomplete acquisition of the target grammar, demands of the learning/teaching situation, and errors due to regular problems of language performance.

Kaweera (2013) states two key causes of errors. Interlingual Interference is a negative transfer of learners' first language, on the other hand, Intralingual Interference happens when there is an unfinished knowledge of the developed language.

In sum in the field of error analysis, two major sources are leading to errors made by EFL and English as second language learners, the first one is Interlingual interference, and the second is referred to as intralingual interference.

2.3 Interlanguage Theory

The concept of interlanguage was suggested by Selinker (1972) to draw attention to the possibility that the learner's language can be regarded as a distinct language variety. This theory explains that learners build up a system for themselves that is different in some ways from their first language and second language systems.

Brown (2014) explains interlingual (Interference) errors are those errors that are traceable to first language interference. These errors are attributable to negative interlingual transfer. As mentioned above the term *interlingual*

was first introduced by Selinker (1972). He used this term to refer to the systematic knowledge of a second language which is independent of both the learner's first language and the target language.

The transfer is of two kinds: positive and negative. The transfer may demonstrate to be acceptable because the structure of the two languages is similar, this case is termed as positive transfer or facilitation, or it may show unjustified because the structure of the two languages is dissimilar, that case is named negative transfer or interference. In this sense the major differences between mother tongue and target language, the more errors learner may commit during the development process.

3. Method

3.1 Approach for This Research

The approach that has been chosen for the development of this investigation is a qualitative one. Several articles, books, and sources of information have been thoroughly reviewed to come up with this conclusion. The most important reason why this method has been chosen is that the object of study is related to social interactions within a small group of students.

Since this investigation is dealing with human linguistics aspects, it is most attainable to establish this approach due to the following reasons; first, the number of students is limited and it is not suitable enough to be quantitative research; second, the evaluation material is going to be analyzed based on a personal interpretation, third and final, it is because error analysis, in this case, is better interpreted by a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2018).

Qualitative research will be conducted as it is very important to comprehend the context and scenario in which the subject of study addresses the linguistic issues as well as the material implemented in this study case. The target studied population is an atypical group of students because of their age and studying opportunities, therefore there exist certain gaps in the clear understanding of how they learn and attain English as a foreign language. The uniqueness related to their age and reasons to learn English as a foreign or second language is what makes this type of approach more suitable for its purpose.

The supportive theory for this research is the one proposed by Corder (1974): classification and errors; and his steps to having an efficient error analysis. These are centered on a clear and sequential procedure;

3.1.1 Collection of Words

The first step in error analysis is the gathering of pieces of work of students that are learning a second language. According to the samples, researchers identify three different forms of analyzing data: massive, specific, and incidental. The main objective of this stage is selecting a proper type of error to collect a specific sample of language, retrieved from a certain number of learners.

3.1.2 Identification of Errors

After the first stage has been completed, errors must be marked, therefore it is essential to define how to point them out. Certainly, error identification is linked to four considerations. The first consideration is to select the target language in which evaluation will be set. The second one has to differentiate errors and mistakes, recalling that errors are related to a lack of knowledge while mistakes are linked to fails in language competence in the target language, these are often corrected immediately by apprentices. The third one is related to the interpretation, which might be overt or covert. The first one is easily recognized because deviation is clear in form (He ate a hamburger) and the other happens in expressions that present appropriate syntax and semantics but unusual pragmatics (What do you read?). The fourth consideration is emphasized on deviations, which kinds are correctness and appropriateness. Their characteristics are easily distinguished, correctness has to do with language usage, presenting a deviation (We did run yesterday morning); appropriateness is related to language use (you can to study whatever you want).

3.1.3 Description of Errors

The report of learner errors encompasses a contrast of the learner's productions with a rebuilding of those productions in the aimed language. Investigators suggest the existence of two error descriptive taxonomies: linguistic categories and surface strategy. Linguistic categories are connected with a traditional error analysis focused on pedagogical purposes; categories can be established according to the ones found in textbooks or those described in the syllabi. This type of description permits a precise account of errors and also for the reckon of a collection of errors. Linguistic categories, as Richards expresses (1974), learners' errors had to do with first language interference. From another perspective, surface strategy taxonomy points out how surface structures are transformed employing such processes as omissions, additions, misinformation, and misorderings.

3.1.4 Explanation of Errors

Foreign Language learning presents two major considerations on the foundation of errors. One states that errors are made because of their first language interference. The other, called the creative construction theory, suggests that the development of the mother tongue language and a second or foreign one are equal consequently learners' errors will be similar to those that children make when learning their first language. A different possibility from the ones presented is that errors cannot be related to any of the alternatives presented, this means that these are not a result of the crosslinguistic influence nor to the phases of language development (Corder, 1967).

3.1.5 Evaluation of Errors

When evaluating errors three basic categories can be identified: comprehensibility, seriousness, and naturalness of the grammatical structures and specific language use. In this part of the process, it is significant to consider global and local errors. A global error distresses general expression organization (my dog playful big), and a local one is an error that affects particular elements in an expression (I want to study in an university abroad). Whenever evaluating errors of a student, it is important to consider that standards to evaluate are not clear on how to judge whether expressions are well structured or not, this will mainly depend on specific contexts in which identified errors seemed to be committed.

3.2 Participants

The population of the study consisted of five students of EFL who studied their final school year in 2020-2021, at the middle school of the *Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas* (Mexico). Students who attend this institution come from all neighborhoods of Zacatecas and Guadalupe City (2 of the major cities of the state), which means it is representative. These five students were selected because they received English classes since kindergarten in the regular educational system and were the only ones that had reached the expected proficiency level A2 (according to the common European framework of reference for languages). Therefore, to achieve this investigation purpose, writing samples of paragraphs from students were collected as data to analyze. The students were asked for a paragraph about "My Daily Routine".

4. Results

The written production examples herein involve a modest range of grammar errors, the following is an attempt to describe them in a general and specific view, based on EA from Corder's perspective (1974). Regarding the mistakes or slips these have been highlighted with blue color, the deviations in form (overt) were highlighted with green color as for the syntactically and semantically correct but pragmatically odd (covert) with a yellow color, while the red colored ones are some words or expressions that should be taken out from the text. The errors related to the correctness, which means a deviation in the grammar rules have been underlined for them to be recognized; meanwhile, the errors inappropriateness, saying it in another way, with a deviation of the usage of the language were all crossed out to be identified.

Each paragraph was examined expression by expression to reveal and characterized errors (these were identified in contrast with the National Syllabi and the coursebook). After the identification of errors, samples were classified and marked. After being analyzed, each written production had a specific description of the errors encountered, to explain why they occurred.

My Daily Routine (1)

My day begins in the morning (,) I got up around 8 or 7:30, ~~I start by picking up my bed along with my room~~ as the ~~obligation that is~~, later (,) under the stairs, where my dog is waiting for me then (Frequency adverb needed) I got to make my breakfast, but normally my mom makes it for me, but since i'm on vacation I do it. After having breakfast, I help with the housework as I touched myself according to the toilet roll. Finishing the housework. I got to bathe or shower, then ~~I proceed to fix myself~~ so as not to be flabby.

I'm just doing my crafts for a while, like crochet (knitting) or making jewelry. Later (,) I sometimes help to make the meal. We eat around 3 or 3:30 ~~when finish~~, I help clean and walk my dogs for about an hour, then go home, wash my dogs' paws, watch tv for a while and ~~put on my leopard pajamas a bit~~.

And finally, I eat dinner, brush my teeth and go to sleep, for the next day I do the same activities ~~with some vacations~~.

Errors presented on this written production example belong to a wide range of language misuse and deviations. Several serious issues go from first language interference to errors regarding the lack of knowledge of the target language as well as to syntactic and semantic mistakes. The phrase *I start by picking up my bed along with my room*

may look odd to a native English speaker, as it lacks a coherent structure, but this case may not look strange to a Spanish speaker learning English as a second language. The term *picking up* means *levantar* or *recoger* in Spanish. It is often used in Mexico as to tidy up a place or area, especially one's room or house. This student was trying to convey that particular meaning.

There are plenty of slips in the usage of formal writing, but it looks like the student just ignored and omitted the pertinent punctuation mark rules herein. It is the case with the most errors of them all. They are not to be presumed to be on purpose as one of them particularly resembles a mixture between L1 interference and a total misunderstanding of how the forms operate in the target language. The part where the pupil says *I touched myself according to the toilet roll* would impact any English reader who is not familiarized with the Spanish language. For this particular phrase, there has to be a deeper understanding of what the student tried to convey, when in Spanish the phrase *me tocó a mi* is translated literally word by word to English it may denote a senseless expression.

My Daily Routine (2)

I get up in the morning to be ready for my clases. first, I brush my teeth and prepare my breakfast, then I change my clothes and turn on my computer. I check my schedules, I take out the books and notebooks that I am going to use and join the classes, I take the necessary notes and pay attention. After classes (,) I am going to eat, when I finish (,) I review the topics seen and (,) do the corresponding tasks and I send them out, I usually finish at 9 at night. ~~when that happens I keep my notebooks~~ and books and turn off my computer. I have a dinner with my family and we watch some series or movies.

Then I go to sleep to get up with a lotof energy for the next day

The first written production example shows interference of the student's mother tongue. Many of the errors in this example occur by showing a structural deviation. The most notorious case is when the student writes: *when that happens I keep my notebooks*, the example may look syntactically and semantically well-formed, but it is not appropriate for what the student is trying to convey. The interference of the Spanish language is easily identified, as the word *keep* has multiple translations into Spanish, one of them is *guardar* but in this particular case it does not apply as the appropriate term the student would like to use for this case would be: pack my notebooks or put my notebooks away.

The other errors can be associated with the student's lack of understanding of English grammar rules. These can be considered as misinforming when trying to construct more elaborate sentences. The part where it says *I review the topics seen* may seem semantically correct, but the order of the terms is switched unconsciously by the student. Regarding this case, perhaps it does not seem like a big mistake, as the form again, English written language but Spanish syntax. A correct way of writing this phrase would be: I review the studied topics.

My Daily Routine (3)

In my ordinary day(,) the first thing i do is watch tv and eat cereal, i finish breakfast, get dressed and make my bed, then i start studing for my preparatory exam, then I eat and go back to studing then I go to bathe and then I go have dinner, finally i go to sleep.

Errors committed in the second written production show a significant lack of coherent structure in English (Target language). The section where it expresses *the first thing i do is watch tv* it is totally clear that there is a deviation based in grammar rules. In English, when the user wants to put two verbs together, it is necessary to modify the second verb in the infinitive form, some verbs are followed by the gerund and some verbs are followed by a phrasal verb.

Capitalization plays an important role in formal documents that is the reason all of them are marked too. According to grammar rules, it is only necessary to capitalize other pronouns when they begin a sentence. However, the pronoun *I* should always be capitalized, no matter where it falls in a sentence.

In the sentence "i start studing for my preparatory exam" it is an obvious example of the first language interference and the lack of knowledge of the target language. It is possible to observe that the student is omitting the general gerund rule. According to the grammar and structure rules to change a verb into its gerund form is just to add *-ing* at the end of the verb, in this particular case the student follows the second gerund rule that says: when a verb ends in *e*, drop it and add *-ing*. In the second part of the sentence, the term *preparatory* comes from a first language interference. The student tries to transfer the word from Spanish to the target language referring to *high school*.

-No title- (4)

When I wake up in the morning, i go to the bathroom and brush my teeth, i take a shower, i put on clothes and ~~i go to the kitchen for my breakfast~~. Later (,) i do my homework, i take a little break and then i ~~study guitar~~.

When my mom comes to the house (,) we eat together. Again i brush my teeth and finally i go to my bed.

In this particular written production, the reader can quickly observe the lack of the title. The style of writing is shown since the beginning, the heading of the document is usually the first introduction for the assignment.

In the second line of the first paragraph, the sentence *I go to the kitchen for my breakfast* there is a pragmatic deviation, the sentence is semantically and syntactically correct but pragmatically odd. The student tried to use the word *for* as the word *por* in Spanish. The word *por* is always used to indicate a place. In this particular sentence, it is possible to observe the first language interference of the student.

There is a deviation in form highlighted in green in the final paragraph of this written production. The part *when my mom comes* shows the first language interference, the verb “come” means move in the direction of the speaker. For example: Please come here for a minute. On the other hand, “arrive” means finishing coming or coming to a destination.

My Daily Routine (5)

I wake up early, then I go with my mom and my brothers to the kindergarden, we came back home and I clean part of the house, when I finish, we had lunch, later (,) I study a little for the ceneval exam, or I also draw for a while. Later (,) my mother and me go to the kindergarden for my brothers, arriving at the house (,) we eat, we rest for a while and later (,) they take my brother to his therapy of language, while I take care of my sister. ~~In the night we had dinner early~~, later (,) I go to my room to study or talk with my friends. I brush my teeth, and I go to sleep.

As stated above the difference between errors and mistakes is the previous knowledge of the rules. In this case, the student wrote *kindergardent* instead of *kindergarten*, the student fails in his/her competence in the target language.

Talking about the same paragraph, in the section *we came back home* the student used the past tense correctly but, in this case, it is incorrect because all the other sentences are in present simple tense referring to a routine. The function of the present simple tense is to talk about habits and routines.

Besides the misuse of verb tenses as a way to establish a routine pattern, it is clear this student has a first language interference throughout his reflection. For example, the part: *in the night we had dinner early*, the first thing to notice is the tense of the verb *to have*; like it has been mentioned before, the student is using the past tense of this verb instead of the present simple form to refer to a habit or routine.

There is one more important part to consider in this sentence as a first language interference manifestation. The sentence starts *in the night*, which this translated to Spanish would be *en la noche*. The student ignores there is a special preposition in English: at, to refer to specific places or locations and times. After analyzing this phrase, it can be stated that there is an error based on the lack of knowledge.

Following the same line, there is a part in the paragraph where the student refers to another of his habits, he states: *talk with my friends*, the conjunction *with* in this example is referred to the student’s friends he talks to. Again, it can be stated by this manifestation of language interference the student is showing a lack of knowledge regarding how to correctly use certain prepositions.

The five samples collected from students presented similar characteristics in style and structure, all of them showed the four types of errors commonly made by basic users of English. There is nothing beyond omissions, additions, misinformation, and misordering in all of them. The probable reason for this fact is the experience of the five students regarding the appropriateness and correctness of the language usage was similar.

There has to be a space for these types of errors with students who are beginning to learn a second language. The interference of their first language is more than evident in all the cases aforementioned. Perhaps, the only difference among them is the length and extension of each one. It is obvious that the more extensive they pretended to be, the more errors they presented; anyhow, they all show the same variety of mistakes. Something to point out from these cases is the fact that they show few overt mistakes, which means they all kept a proper form in their writing.

There is a sense of optimism regarding the semantic accuracy, as there are a few cases where there is a deviation in this field. Unfortunately, it is not the case in the syntactic field because it manifests a high frequency of slips or mistakes. Again, this would not be a big surprise for any well-trained teacher considering the student’s experience.

The presence of deviation of the language rules indicates there is a lack of knowledge when it comes to the correct and appropriate usage of the language in common and simple text production as the written assignment examples above. Appropriateness should be considered one of the key factors for them to be wary of as there is a high degree of these mistakes in all the cases that were subject to study.

5. Discussion

From the previous analysis, it is detected that EFL students are more likely to commit grammatical errors when writing. These discoveries go parallel with the findings of Nuruzzaman, Islam, and Shuchi Y. (2018) study, indicating that grammar mistakes are the most commonly committed by learners. Conversely, Sermsook, Liamnimit, and Pochakorn's (2017) investigation exposed that grammatical errors are less committed by Thai English learners, although there is considerable variance between Thai and English grammar.

Following the same line of investigations, the contributions of the study done by Ngangbam (2016) show the interference of the first language in interpreting or translating to the second language. The second language learners were found with certain specific difficulties in empowering the second language. The reason behind this may be multidimensional and varied. A situation like a group size, learning styles, classroom discourse, the educational setting might have been an impact on this study.

This research has abundant deviations of language basic rules such as capitalization and punctuation. According to the results of the investigation, there is a wide range of errors in capitalization and punctuation. For instance, studies carried out by Sermsook, Liamnimit, and Pochakorn (2017) also highlighted that capitalization and punctuation are the most prominent errors found in their investigation.

Mostly, the outcomes of data analysis displayed that participants made errors because of interlingual and misinformation difficulties. The reason behind this fact might be that learners base their options of communication in literal translation before they recognize patterns in the target language. Furthermore, they tend to perform this translation process word by word, instead of considering the complete expression.

In addition, results revealed that appropriateness errors were produced due to participants' lack of necessary vocabulary for expressing their thoughts appropriately. As a result, it is common for students to make a considerable number of grammatical mistakes.

This investigation also revealed that EFL students from the middle school of the "Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas" presented weakness in grammar competence, vocabulary, spelling, mechanics, and semantics which were also consistent with some revised studies.

As mentioned throughout this paper a linguistic analysis has been performed as an attempt to unveil the sort, frequency, and sources of writing errors by students that are in process of learning English at middle school. The main objective of the study was to reveal the most common mistakes and after the analysis provides suggestions to design teaching strategies to improve students' proficiency levels.

A clear conclusion is that participants committed grammatical, lexical, semantic, and mechanic errors. Most of the students' errors occurred because of their first language interference. As a suggestion, language teachers need to take careful stock of the transfer and interference of the students' mother tongue in their written production. In addition, in the students' written paragraphs considerable appropriateness deviations due to the lack of knowledge were found. These findings unveil difficulties in writing presented by the participants and consequently help educators to reflect on weaknesses presented on learners when teaching. As an attempt of recommendation, teachers have to encourage reading within their classrooms to make students acquire sentence structures and become familiar with the style of writing.

To conclude, teachers should always consider counting with plenty of activities and drills that promote the practice of the target language in a real context, should include aside real-life teaching materials to complement the ones provided in the textbook given by the government. These extra materials can aid in the strengthening of the expected knowledge of the students and they can be of motivation for the learners and of high relevance to promote the practice of the four language skills.

The most common grammatical errors for students were sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization; therefore, EFL teachers can prioritize the teaching and learning process based on that order of errors to encourage students to increase their self-confidence, keeping in mind that this was a case study carried out on a particular setting, therefore each context requires a particular analysis to make decisions on how to encourage EFL teaching and learning.

References

- Alhaysony, M. (2012). An analysis of article errors among Saudi female EFL students: A case study. *Asian Social Science*, 8(12), 55. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n12p55>
- Atmaca, Ç. (2016). Error analysis of Turkish EFL learners a case study. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 234-241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.007>
- Biava, M. L., & Segura, A. L. (2010). ¿Por qué es importante saber el idioma inglés? [Why is it important to know

- English Language]. Retrieved from
<http://www.cepuanxxiii.edu.ar/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Por-que-es-importante-saber-ingles.pdf>
- Brown, H. D. (2014). Principles of language learning and teaching: A course in second language acquisition.
- Corder, S. (1967). The significance of learner's errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language*.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161>
- Corder, S. (1974). *Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*. London: Longman.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches. California: Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- James, C. (2014). Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis. London: Routledge.
- Karim, A., Mohamed, A. R., Ismail, S. A. M. M., Shahed, F. H., Rahman, M. M., & Haque, M. H. (2018). Error analysis in EFL writing classroom. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(4), 122-138.
<https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v8n4p122>
- Kaweera, C. (2013). Writing Error: A Review of Interlingual and Intralingual Interference in EFL Context. *English language teaching*, 6(7), 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n7p9>
- Mustafa, F., Kirana, M., & Bahri, S. (2017). Errors in EFL writing by junior high students in Indonesia. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 6(1), 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsll.2016.1366>
- Ngangbam, H. (2016). An analysis of syntactic errors committed by students of English language class in the written composition of Mutah University: A case study. *European Journal of English Language, Linguistics and Literature*, 3(1), 1-13.
- Norrish, J. (1995). *Language Learners and Their Errors*. Prentice-Hall Europe 1995.
- Nuruzzaman, I. &. (2018). An Analysis of Errors Committed by Saudi Non-English Major Students in the English. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.9n.1p.31>
- Penny, W. K. (2001). Student Difficulties Writing in English: Suggested Techniques to help, and Their Potential Beneficial 'Side-effects'. London of Birmingham. Retrieved from
<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/cels/essays/language-teaching/Penny1.pdf>
- Richards, J. C. (1974). *Error analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition*. London: Longman.
- Ringbom, H. (1987). *The role of first language in foreign language learning*. U.S.A.: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.
- Schumann, J. H., & Stenson, N. (1974). *New Frontiers in Second Language Learning*. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education., & G. (1985). *Issues in English language development: Information exchange*. Rosslyn, Va: Inter-America Research Associates.
- Secretaría de Educación Pública-SEP (2017). *Aprendizajes claves para la educación integral [Key learnings for comprehensive education]*. México.
- Selinker. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language*.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209>
- Sermsook, K., Liamnimit, J., & Pochakorn, R. (2017). An Analysis of Errors in Written English Sentences: A Case Study of Thai EFL Students. *English Language Teaching*, 10(3), 101-110. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n3p101>
- Toba, R., Noor, W. N., & Sanu, L. O. (2019). The Current issues of Indonesian EFL students' writing skills: Ability, problem, and reason in writing comparison and contrast essay. *Dinamika Ilmu*, 19(1), 57-73.
<https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v19i1.1506>
- UNESCO (2009) *The second world conference of higher education: The new dynamics of higher education and research for societal change and development*. Paris: UNESCO, 2009. ED.2009/CONF.402/2
- Watcharapunyawong, S., & Usaha, S. (2013). Thai EFL Students' Writing Errors in Different Text Types: The Interference of the First Language. *English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 67-78. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n1p67>
- Zamel, V. (1983). The Composing Processes of Advanced ESL Students: Six Case Studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(2), 165-186. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586647>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).