

Error Analysis of Written English Paragraphs by Kurdish and Arab Students: A Comparative Study

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Received: 11/17/2023

Accepted: 02/28/2024

Published: 03/20/2024

Abstract

Competence in writing is an indispensable skill crucial for both academic and professional success, enabling effective expression of ideas, thoughts, and information. Writing proficiency encompasses more than word arrangement, extending to organizing ideas, utilizing proper grammar and punctuation, and conveying meaning clearly. However, second/foreign language learners often grapple with challenges in cultivating proficient writing skills. This investigation meticulously examines errors in a dataset comprising 40 English paragraphs authored by Kurdish and Arab learners. Employing error analysis, the study identifies and categorizes errors with the aim of discerning potential variations in error types and frequencies between the two student groups. Additionally, the research delves into gender-related differences in error occurrence. The results provide valuable insights for crafting language teaching materials and strategies tailored to English learners from Kurdish and Arab backgrounds, illuminating linguistic hurdles these students confront. The study's findings underscore that punctuation errors prevail among both groups, exhibiting no significant disparities between Kurdish and Arab students. Similarly, gender differences among students do not yield any noteworthy distinctions.

Keywords: Arab student, English paragraphs, error analysis, Kurdish student, written error, writing skill

Cite as: Barzani, S.H. H., & Baiz, A.B. M. (2024). Error Analysis of Written English Paragraphs by Kurdish and Arab Students: A Comparative Study. *Arab World English Journal*, 15(1): 258-268. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol15no1.16>

Introduction

English language is the one language with a global reputation and interest. Nowadays, English plays a major role in our lives. It is becoming more and more habitual, and it is extensively used in many areas. Since English has become the world's lingua franca, most countries around the world have incorporated English courses into their educational system. Numerous countries are starting at the beginner level, and students are learning the language at an increasingly early age (Jenkins, 2009). Gaining competency in all language skills is the aim of language learning. According to Brown (2000), language comprises four main skills: speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, to achieve proficiency in the language, students should acquaint themselves with all aspects of the language. In this line, writing can be considered an important aspect of language skills due to its multiple uses and fruitfulness. It can give access to the vast grasps. It boosts learner's vocabularies. Also, it is a big push to integrate learner's opinions with language proficiency. Nevertheless, teaching writing is not a trouble-free task. The process needs careful effort and using certain strategies that would effectively enable the learners to write freely. Educators must be aware learners about the significance of grammar and sentence structure. It is highly recommended to give students positive reinforcements which motivate them to do better and reach the right destination. Seitova (2016) claims that good English writing proficiency is widely accepted as an effective skill for academic, professional, and individual reasons. Writing ability improvement has been described as a difficult process requiring several movements from different directions and movements among the written text and the writer as well (Harris and Cunningham, 1994). Aziz (2011) states that since the impact of the foreign language (FL) system is different in writing, therefore training writing skills is more challenging than training other skills. According to Richard and Renandya (2000), for non-native English speakers and writing EFL teachers, English writing is one of the most challenging skills to master. Consequently, this study concentrates on the frequency of committed errors in written paragraphs of high school level students who learn English as a foreign language from the elementary school. However, the students might have a good proficiency level in oral communication; this does not guarantee to perform well in written tasks. To this end, this study, especially strives, to present the frequency of the errors and assess the significant difference between the two groups in terms of common writing errors of both Kurdish and Arab English language learners. To do so, the study endeavors to address the following questions:

1. What are the Kurdish EFL learners' most common writing errors?
2. What are the most common types of writing errors of Arab ESL learners?
3. Is there a significant difference between Arab and Kurdish learners regarding the types of writing errors?
4. Is there any significant difference between male and female students regarding the frequency of writing errors?

Literature Review

Error Analysis

Many efforts have been made to define error analysis and the causes behind error occurrence Keshavarz (2015). The followings are some definitions that some scholars set. According to Dualy, Burt, and Krashan (1982), error analysis is a process for examining errors made by ESL and EFL students. And this can show how to teach in a way that helps students acquire the language while

also letting teachers and other people know what difficulties students have. According to James (2001), "error analysis involves the study of linguistic knowledge, investigating what learners do not know and are able to perform and what they lack and attempt to manage in certain circumstances" (p.62). According to Hasyim (2002), the scope of error analysis is to:

- a) "Determine how skillful someone is in the language."
- b) "Determine how someone learns the language."
- c) "Gather information on common challenges in language learning to aid in developing teaching materials" (p. 43).

According to certain academics, errors are essential components of the language learning process (Corder, 1974). However, writing errors cannot be entirely eradicated, as they serve as indicators for teachers to assess students' writing skills, identify their weaknesses, determine their origins, and provide appropriate remedies. Writing errors shall therefore be taken into account and should not be overlooked because they help students improve their writing skills (Omar & Barzani, 2022).

Source of Errors

Various scholars identify sources of errors committed by language learners. Richard (1974) categorizes errors into two main sources: interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors occur when learners incorrectly apply rules from their native language when constructing sentences in the target language. While learning a new language, learners typically make the second type of error. This group includes overgeneralization, incorrect analogy, and other errors. Similarly, Heydari and Bagheri (2012) support the idea that both interlingual and intralingual errors are basic sources of errors committed by EFL and ESL learners. James (1998) proposes that interlingual errors, intralingual errors, communication strategy-based errors, and induced errors are the four causes of errors. According to Lado (1975), interference from the learner's native tongue in the target language learning process is the most frequent cause of inaccuracy. In conclusion, the learner's first language significantly influences the occurrence of errors. A significant misunderstanding settled in the learner's mind leads to confusion. They believe that learning a language involves substituting their first language with the target language. Learners often overlook the fact that different languages convey distinct meanings with their words. Thus, educating learners about the variations in conveying meaning across languages is crucial, highlighting that direct transfer isn't universally applicable.

Classification of Errors

Interlingual and intralingual errors are two broad categories of errors, as classified by Brown (2000). Negative interlingual transfer refers to faults resulting from the influence of the learner's first language, while errors stemming from the incorrect application of target language rules are termed as intralingual errors.

Accordingly, Corder (1971) categorized errors into "Errors of competence" and "Errors of performance," indicating that learners can detect and rectify performance errors but may struggle with competency errors. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) further divided errors into six classes based on their characteristics: missing grammatical morphemes, redundant semantic markers, irregular rule application, incorrect word forms, code-switching, and disordered structures. Additionally, Hengwichtikul (2006) structured and analyzed errors at the sentential level,

categorizing them into subject-verb agreement, tense usage, parts of speech, participial phrases, relative clauses, passive voice, parallel structure, punctuation, run-ons, and fragments.

Previous Studies

As previously indicated, academics and researchers are becoming increasingly interested in error analysis methodically. Numerous investigations have been made into the errors made by learners of English as a second and as a foreign language so that writers can examine them and improve.

Zheng and Park (2013) have analyzed the errors of Chinese and Korean learners which they committed in writing English essays. The findings showed that these two groups' errors were diverse. Utilizing articles, punctuation, and word order was challenging for them. In a related study conducted by Liu (2013), Chinese learners appeared to make errors when writing English sentences. She blamed this on carelessness and the detrimental effects of the subjects' first language. Mahmood (2016) conducted a study at two universities in the Kurdistan region to identify and assess the writing errors of EFL learners. This is done by administering the Cambridge standard writing test. According to the study's outcome, the participant's biggest writing struggles were grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Alhaysony (2012) looked at a sample of 100 Arabic EFL freshmen women from the University of Hail. The findings showed that students frequently used the article incorrectly, especially when it came to omissions. The results were mixed because both interlingual and intralingual were considered in this study. Huang (2001) examined the various grammatical errors that committed by 46 majors at Taiwanese universities. The results showed that the first, second, and third most common errors were verbs, nouns, spelling, articles, prepositions, and word choice. The causes included overgeneralization, negligent rule restriction, simplification, insufficient rule application, and first language negative transfer. Women are motivated to improve their proficiency in both native and second languages, according to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991). Language traits may be more systematically organized in women than in men, according to Dingwall (1998). Comparing how men and women use writing strategies was another investigation by Mutar and Nimehchisalem (2017). Female students used writing skills more frequently than male students, which was another significant difference they discovered between the two genders. Bumroongthai (2011) studied errors in English paragraphs. The results unearthed that Thai EFL students made a variety of errors regarding grammar and the paragraph format. Ahmed (1981) did a study with the aim of investigating, classifying, defining, and elucidating the sources of most grammatical and usage problems in scientific students' English writing. This study's errors were broken down into 14 categories, including misuses of adjectives, prepositions, noun groups, spelling, and punctuation. Following this, evaluating writing errors made by Kurdish EFL students at Cihan University in Duhok affronted the interest of Omar and Barzani (2022). The research conclusions showed that the participants made eight different types of writing errors: spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, prepositions, verb misuse, and pronoun misuse. Likewise, Abdullah (2020) analyzed written performance errors of EFL Kurdish students in Kurdistan, focusing on writing mechanics. It compared errors between male and female Kurdish EFL learners using a composition test and inter-rater reliability estimation. Findings showed that capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphing were major challenges, with female students generally performing better. In a similar line, Qadir and Bostanci (2023) analyzed errors in English writing by Kurdish EFL undergraduate students. Focusing on 57 argumentative essays, the research considered grammatical, lexical, spelling, and punctuation errors, exploring their

frequencies and subcategories. Results revealed a high overall frequency of errors, with grammatical errors being the most prevalent and lexical errors the least common. Additionally, using a mixed-method approach, Alolaywi (2023) investigated the most common writing errors made by undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language. Errors including verb tense, subject-verb agreement, article misuse, sentence fragments, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. Spelling errors emerged as the most frequent, indicating a need for enhanced instructional techniques and corrective feedback to improve EFL students' writing proficiency. Ultimately, Ali (2024) assessed English writing errors among Kurdish learners through the error analysis technique. Thirty-two students from different disciplines participated, and their answer sheets from the academic English curriculum were analyzed. Fourteen types of writing errors were identified, with grammar, punctuation, wordiness, spelling, and capitalization being the most common.

The Study Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive analytical approach using a series of steps. A descriptive analytical approach is a research method that aims to describe and analyze data in a detailed and systematic manner. It involves collecting data through various methods, such as surveys, interviews, or observations, and then analyzing the data to identify patterns or trends. Thus, the study followed these steps: defining the research question, sample selection, collecting data, analyzing the collected data, and finally drawing certain conclusions based on the results.

Participant and Setting

The present study contained 40 (20 Kurdish & 20 Arab) learners of English language. All participants were from Canadian international school, in Erbil. They were ranging from nine to 12 high school levels. They learn English from the initial stages. English is the medium of instruction, and they were engrossed with the language. The research took place between the academic years 2022-2023. Participants' statistics are shown in the table below.

Table 1. *Participants Information*

Nationality	Stage				Gender		Number
	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	Male	Female	
Kurdish	8	3	6	3	7	13	20
Arab	3	9	8	0	10	10	20
Total No.	11	12	14	3	17	23	40

Data Collection Instruments

For this study, participants, comprising Kurdish and Arab language learners, were tasked with creating a concise, authentic paragraph in English on “the most inspirational person in their life.” Clear and necessary instructions were provided, specifying that participants should write approximately 8 to 10 lines without consulting any dictionaries. The researcher supervised the class throughout the activity, and all participants willingly participated without any administrative pressure.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, 40 short paragraphs were read and analyzed. Initially, the researchers reviewed the paragraphs to identify the types of errors present in the students' writing. Subsequently, these errors were categorized according to the classification proposed by Chanquoy (2001). Finally, using SPSS, the frequency of occurrence for each type of error was quantified.

Results

The most frequent sort of writing errors made by Kurdish and Arab pupils, according to Table 2 (figure 1), are punctuation (frequency = 110, 106, percentage = 47.83%, 46.7%). This is followed by those error pertinent to capitalization (frequency = 27, 49; percentage=11.74%, 21.59%). Grammar errors were the third most frequent committed error (frequency = 32, 27; percentage = 13.48%, 11.89%). Some other types of errors such as spelling (frequency=17, 12; percentage=7.39%, 5.29%). Articles (frequency = 17, 10; percentage 7.39 %, 4.41%). Misuse of verbs (frequency = 12, 13; percentage = 5.22%, 5.73%). Misuse of pronouns (frequency = 8, 6; percentage = 3.48%, 2.64%). prepositions (frequency=8, 4; percentage=3.48%, 1.76%) were also appeared in the Kurdish and Arab student's writing.

Table 2. Errors performance of both Kurdish and Arab students

Types of Error	Kurdish Students		Arab Students	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Spelling	17	7.39%	12	5.29%
Capitalization	27	11.74%	49	21.59%
Grammar	31	13.48%	27	11.89%
Punctuation	110	47.83%	106	46.70%
Misuse of Pronouns	8	3.48%	6	2.64%
Prepositions	8	3.48%	4	1.76%
Articles	17	7.39%	10	4.41%
Misuse of Verbs	12	5.22%	13	5.73%
Total	230	100%	227	100%

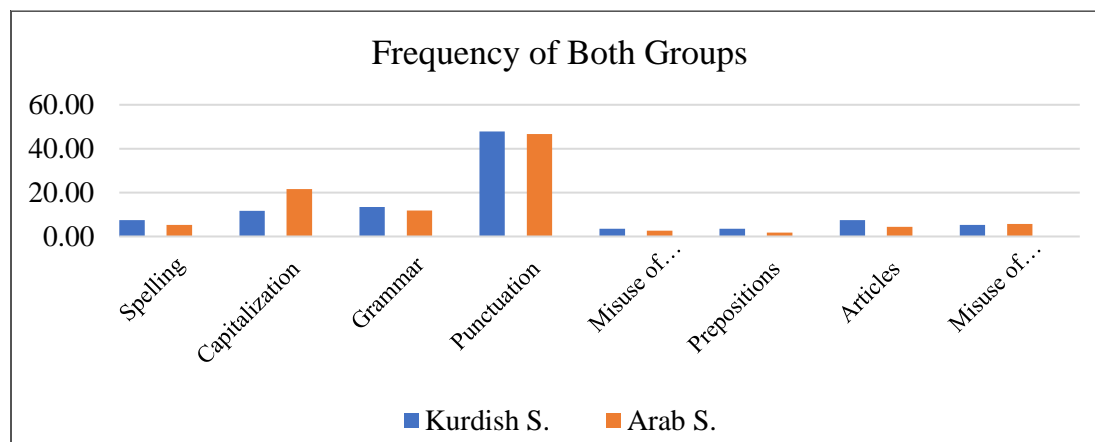


Figure 1. Errors performance of both Kurdish and Arab students

A t-test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between groups in terms of the types of written errors. For both the Kurdish and Arab student groups, the mean error rate, standard deviation, and standard error mean are presented. The standard error mean serves as a gauge for how accurately the sample mean represents the population. The data shows, as depicted in Table 3, that both Kurdish and Arab students made a similar number of errors in spelling and grammar (M=.85, Std.= 1.663; M=.60, Std.= .883, respectively), but Arab students made more errors in capitalization and punctuation (M=2.45, Std.= 2.164; M=5.30, Std.= 2.273); while Kurdish students made more errors in the use of articles (M=.85, Std.= .671). Regarding the other types of errors, both groups have relatively low mean error rates. Yet, no statistically significant difference, as the result shows, is found between Kurdish and Arab students in all types of errors.

Table 3. The error difference between Arab and Kurdish students

Types of Error	Kurdish Students			Arab Students		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Spelling	.85	1.663	.372	.60	.883	.197
Capitalization	1.35	1.309	.293	2.45	2.164	.484
Grammar	1.55	1.234	.276	1.35	1.268	.284
Punctuation	5.50	3.069	.686	5.30	2.273	.508
Misuse of Pronouns	.40	.681	.152	.30	.571	.128
Prepositions	.40	.503	.112	.20	.523	.117
Articles	.85	.671	.150	.50	.688	.154
Misuse of Verbs	.60	.754	.169	.65	.933	.209

Moreover, as Table 4 indicates the results of male and female students in various types of written language errors. The mean error rate, standard deviation, and standard error mean are reported for each group, along with the significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) of the difference between the two group means. The data demonstrates that the mean error scores of both genders are alike for the most error types, such as spelling, grammar, punctuation, verb tense, and preposition usage. However, there are some differences in the mean error rates of the two groups. Female students make more errors in the use of pronouns (M=.60, Std=.699), while male students make more errors in the use of articles (M=.80, Std=.789). The capitalization error rates of the two groups are also different, with male students making more errors. The findings demonstrate that while variations in other types of errors are not statistically significant, differences in pronoun and article usage are. Thus, since the general difference level is less than .05 it could be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female learners concerning the types of written errors.

Table 4. *The discrepancy in errors between female and male students*

Error type	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Spelling	male	.50	.707	.224	.626
	female	.70	1.059	.335	.626
Capitalization	male	2.90	1.969	.623	.366
	female	2.00	2.357	.745	.367
Grammar	male	1.30	1.160	.367	.866
	female	1.40	1.430	.452	.866
Punctuation	male	5.60	2.066	.653	.569
	female	5.00	2.539	.803	.570
Misuse of pronouns	male	.00	.000	.000	.014
	female	.60	.699	.221	.024
Prepositions	male	.30	.675	.213	.407
	female	.10	.316	.100	.412
Articles	male	.80	.789	.249	.048
	female	.20	.422	.133	.053
Misuse of verbs	male	.70	.949	.300	.818
	female	.60	.966	.306	.818

Discussion

The present study delves into the persistent challenges encountered by Arab ESL and Kurdish EFL students in written English communication. The findings reveal a spectrum of errors spanning punctuation, verb tense, capitalization, grammar, pronouns, prepositions, articles, and spelling. Notably, punctuation errors emerged as the most prevalent among both groups, echoing the findings of previous studies conducted by Zheng and Park (2013) on Chinese and Korean learners and Mahmood (2016) on EFL learners in the Kurdistan region.

Interestingly, despite the diverse linguistic backgrounds, the study showed that there is no significant difference between Arab and Kurdish students, indicating that writing challenges transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries. This finding suggests a universal need for targeted instructional interventions to address common writing errors among ESL and EFL learners.

Furthermore, gender differences were observed, with male students exhibiting more article errors compared to female students' pronoun errors, a trend that resonates with the findings of Mutar and Nimehchisalem (2017) and Abdullah (2020) regarding disparities in writing strategies between male and female learners. These gender-specific insights underscore the importance of tailored instructional interventions to address the distinct needs of male and female students.

Comparisons with prior research conducted by Huang (2001) on Taiwanese university students and Alhaysony (2012) on Arabic EFL learners reveal consistent patterns of error types, such as verb misuse, noun errors, and article misuse, indicative of cross-cultural challenges in English writing acquisition. Moreover, the comprehensive analysis of writing errors undertaken by Qadir and Bostanci (2023) and Alolaywi (2023) underscores the multifaceted nature of language acquisition, highlighting the need for holistic instructional approaches encompassing grammatical, lexical, and punctuation aspects. Considering the findings, it is evident that addressing the diverse array of writing errors requires targeted instructional strategies informed by both linguistic and gender-specific considerations. By drawing upon insights from previous studies and employing innovative instructional techniques, educators can effectively enhance EFL students' writing proficiency and facilitate their journey toward linguistic fluency.

Conclusion

Writing proficiency is a crucial skill for non-native English speakers, particularly for ESL and EFL learners. Despite the efforts of language experts to enhance written communication skills, challenges persist. This study aimed to identify prevalent writing errors among Arab ESL and Kurdish EFL students. The findings revealed punctuation errors as the most frequent among both groups. Additionally, errors related to verb tense, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, pronouns, prepositions, articles, spelling, and misuse of verbs were common. Notably, the study showed that there is no significant difference between Arab and Kurdish students, indicating that writing challenges transcend linguistic backgrounds. Interestingly, gender differences were noted, with male students exhibiting more article errors compared to female students' pronoun errors. These findings echo previous research by Omar and Barzani (2022) and Huang (2001), indicating the need for further investigation into effective strategies for addressing these errors.

Pedagogical Implications

Below are some suggestions to be considered:

- Language Educational programs should give a considerable attention to writing skills.
- Writing teachers shall give students adequate awareness about the significance of grammar, sentence structure, and content.
- Explicit instruction and feedback shall be frequently provided to the learners.
- Teachers shall foster a supportive classroom environment and design daily activities that lead to better writing.

Funding:

This research is not funded.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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