



Comparative Analysis of Syntactical Errors in the Writings of ESL Students at Secondary Level in Pakistan



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Abstract: *In this comparative study, the researchers analyzed the syntactical errors in English writings of secondary-level Pakistani ESL students; though syntactical errors are commonly found in each language, it is mostly committed by ESL students in English language writings. The present study was formed on the quantitative method. The population of the study was one government and one private secondary school in the district of Lahore. Due to ethical considerations, the schools' names were not mentioned. The researchers selected 60 students' sample from both schools; the G-group 30 students represent government schools and P-group 30 students represent private schools; the questionnaire was divided among these students as a research instrument for data collection. The data was analyzed in statistical charts, and mentioned in numbers and percentages. The findings of this comparative study disclosed that private school students committed fewer syntactical errors than government school students justifying the role of medium of instruction.*

Key Words: Syntactical Errors, Standard English Writings, ESL Students, Secondary School Level, Private & Public Sector

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Introduction

The merchants of the East Indian Company promoted the English language in the subcontinent by means of trade and business under British rule. But after the partition of the subcontinent, the Pakistani community realized that the English language is a significant way of communication to survive in the worldwide community. The Pakistani

community speaks different languages, generally termed Indo-European languages, these all are local languages and Urdu is the national language of Pakistan. English as a non-native and second language is widely used in the Pakistani educational system because Pakistanis realized that competency in the English language will provide opportunities for success to secure future careers.

Each standard language comprises four skills, similarly English has four linguistic skills among these skills writing is considered an equally creative and extremely complicated skill, and while writing in another language makes it more tough so, the writers need to have a grasp of the English language rules to become an active writer. According to Ahmad, Farhat & Choudhary (2022), writing is a significant feature of the English Language, an important skill in language formation, and is considered an extension of social language to express concepts, ideas, feelings, and thoughts in the form of text. This is supposed that writing started with the political development in the earliest nations, and writing is the most significant creation in anthropological history, which offers an eternal record of views, opinions, states of mind, advice, descriptions, philosophies etc. Writing permits us to share our message not merely, with our age group, but also with future generations.

Syntax is the branch of linguistics which, describes that how words and phrases are organized to form comprehensible sentences. Jayasinghe, (2007) stated that the system of rules and categories that, underlies sentence formation is called syntax. He detected the different changes in sentence structure from the writings of English language learners. Furthermore, he specified that the knowledge of syntax is very important in the examination and assignments. But the Pakistani ESL students of different levels commit grammatical and syntactical errors in organizing phrases and sentences. Sarfraz, (2011) stated that most errors in Pakistani students' written English, began from native language intrusion. Communication is a part of language; a way to convey messages verbally and nonverbally and error is a part of human communication. Errors can be of various categories like tense, aspect mood, word order, vocabulary and spelling. In the present study, researchers

comparatively analyzed the syntactical errors in the English writings of ESL students at the secondary school level.

Statement of the Problem

Although English is a second language in Pakistan, trained as a compulsory subject in all classes and is an entry to accomplish more education. García & Isabel (2018) stated that, when students start their carrier as employees in companies or in different organizations, they are measured by their writing skills. Many companies and organizations promote their employees on the basis of their writing skills. English as a second language in Pakistan is used almost in all fields and departments. English language talent is vital for financial growth (Mahboob, 2003). English is a way of development at personal and national levels (Shamim, 2011). Nowadays English is widely used in the Pakistani education system on all levels. Exams and assignments are taken in written form. ESL students often committed errors in their assignments and examinations. So, there was a need to conduct research on the English writings, to overcome these syntactical errors. For this purpose, researchers settled the following research questions.

Research Question

- I. What types of syntactic errors do government school and private school students make?
- II. Is there any role of medium of instruction in syntactical errors?

Significance of the Study

Errors are regarded as significant in the second language learning method. Errors are the sources for instructors to judge students' abilities. Errors committed in the structure of sentences are called syntactical errors. In speaking to some degree, errors can be ignored, but in writing, errors cannot be

ignored, because in writing the reader is aware of the thought presented on the paper or whiteboard. Errors are inevitable and offers valued awareness and diverse learning policies. The main purpose of conducting this research was to make the students aware of their syntactical errors in English writing, the students of different levels unintentionally commit different types of syntactical errors in English sentences. The researchers have made an effort to aware the teachers and students about the sources of syntactical errors so that they can avoid these errors in the future.

Research Limitation

Contemporary research has some limitations follow as,

- The population was limited to only two secondary schools, which can add more institutions.
- The sample size was limited to only sixty students from both groups, which can be enlarged.
- The questionnaire also contained only four questions, which can be increased.
- The research was limited to schools but can conduct at other educational levels.
- Limited to the students of the English department can be expanded to the other departments.

Research Gap

Researchers from different countries conducted their research on grammatical and syntactical errors, but there is no single research conducted on syntactical errors which is satisfying to the writers of the modern age. In Pakistan, the research work on grammatical and syntactical errors is insufficient and disappointing. There is no researcher who has comparatively analyzed syntactical errors on this level. Previously conducted studies on syntactical errors were

lacking proper discussions and suggestions. Keeping these points in mind the researchers conducted this research to fulfill the demand of the modern age.

Literature Review

Different researchers have made their research in finding syntactical errors in the English language and other languages such as Chinese, Arabic, etc. On the topic of syntactical errors several researchers have done their research, because this is a common issue faced by students in their writing skills. There is some previous literature linked to this topic is presented in two parts, first part contains previous research conducted at a secondary level, while the second part contains previous research conducted at a higher level.

Syntactical Errors and English Writings

There are four linguistic skills, known as productive and respective skills. The productive skills (writing and speaking) permit ESL learners to produce written and spoken language (Ahmad, Iqbal, & Rao, 2023). Among these skills, writing is a tough skill for both native and none native writers. Tangpermpoon (2008) stated that writers need to have much vocabulary and syntactical knowledge to yield decent writing. The students face several kinds of complications in their writing, such as in organizing language and in using the right spellings. Sarfraz (2011) said writing is an extremely difficult skill, and writing in other languages makes this skill much tough. Farooq (2012) stated that ESL learners face various problems with sentence structure, which is a tough field in writing. While writing sentences and passages in a precise style, ESL students face various types of complications. The organization of sentences play a significant role in the writing procedure, everybody identifies words of an

object, but a maximum of them do have not the ability to form the right sentence and commit grammatical and syntactical errors.

Khansir (2008) stated that second language errors describe students' inability to use grammatical rules. Errors are an inescapable part of the procedure of language learning. The errors in sentence structure are commonly found in English writings, these errors are known as syntactical errors. The students often unintentionally commit syntactic errors in their writing, because they do not focus on their writing procedure. Sattayatham & Honsa (2007) stated that less talented students committed a large number of syntactical errors in writing. Ababneh (2017) and Darus & Subramaniam (2009) stated that EFL students encounter several challenges in the use of subject, and verb agreement, punctuation marks, definite articles, and appropriate words in sentences.

Previous Researches Conducted on Secondary Level

Kharma (1983), in his contrasting analysis type study of English and Arabic languages, focused on the syntactical complications confronted by the students of high school in Kuwait. Darus & Subramaniam (2009) observed errors in seventy-two essays written by seventy-two secondary school students in Malaysia. The results of this study disclosed that the errors made by the students linked to verbs, and choice of words. Sheng (2016), analyzed syntactical errors of college ESL learners in China. The outcome showed that the major cause of the syntactical errors was the transference of the mother language. Sattar, Javed, & Baig (2019) conducted research to detect syntactical errors in the English writings of FSc students in two government colleges. The results exposed that, the maximum number of students committed errors in punctuation marks, article, and tense. Shaikh & Jibrán (2020) in their study found verb, tense, article and

spelling errors in essay writings of FSc medical department students in a government college in Sindh. Iqbal, et, al (2021) studied the English essays of secondary-level students of district Multan and found many errors made by the students in nouns, pronouns, verbs, spellings and articles.

Previous Researches Conducted on Higher Level

Ferris (2002) investigated syntactic errors, the outcomes showed that 22.5% of the errors were because of the structure sentence, 2.9% of errors occurred due to unsuitable combinations, and 1.8% due to imperfect sentences. Parvaiz & Khan (2010) in their study found 47% of errors in English papers mostly committed in verbs and tenses, by the 30 BSc students of Sargodha University. Al-Khasawneh (2014) in his study explored that, the students of Ajloun National University have made various errors in spelling, grammar, and sentences in their English writings. Sultan (2015) examined the syntactical errors in the English writings of 88 undergraduate Pakistani students by using Coder's error analysis procedure. The research was directed at a private university on BS students. The results showed various syntactic errors in the writings of these students. Ngangbam (2016) investigated the syntactical errors in the written English of Mutah University students. The results showed, the students faced complications because of their native language intrusion. Ababneh (2017) directed research on the writings of 50 ESL female students in Saudi Arabia. The results showed that these female students committed tense, verb, and spelling errors in sentence structure. Napitupulu (2017) explored syntactic errors in English writings of undergraduate English learners in Indonesia. This study discovered that learners made 26.7% of syntactical errors. Mehmood (2019) conducted research on the undergraduate students of GC University

Lahore and revealed that the students of GC University made errors in spelling, tenses, punctuation marks, and articles.

From the literature review, which is presented above we can conclude that these kinds of complications were confronted by the second language learner students. we perceived that second language learners are inclined to misuse in organizing sections, and they face problems in grammar which leads them to commit errors

Research Methodology

The methodical study of the procedure is called the research method. The research method is employed for data collection to resolve the problems and accomplish the purposes of the study (Ahmad, Maitlo & Rao, 2022). The present research work was constructed by using quantitative methods; the method in which data was gathered and investigated in numerical form. The outcomes of the study were presented in the pie charts and graphic figures. In the quantitative study, researchers collect data from a proper group and interpret it in the form of numbers and percentages; the quantitative study is the suitable technique to collect data, as in this process data is gathered from reliable sources, using this technique researchers select

sampling and population for data collection.

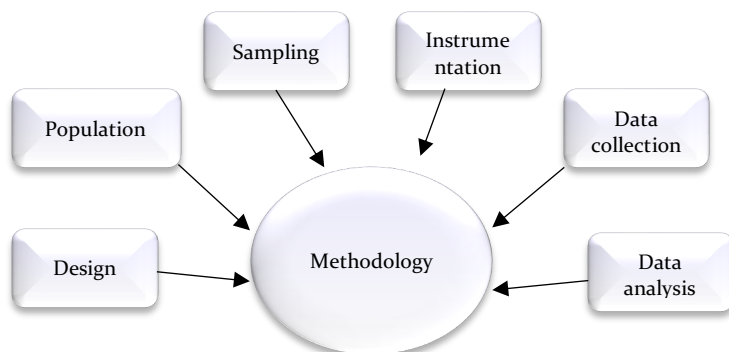
The research population is defined as a large group of persons or things for the purpose of research investigation. The students of one government and one private secondary school were the population of this research study, and for sampling a total of 60 students were selected, from both schools named as G-group and P-group. The G-group represents government schools with 30 ESL students and the P-group represents private schools with 30 ESL students.

Research instruments perform an important role in research methodology, and help to collect precise data from the participants. For this study, researchers printed question papers as research instruments, contained on two questions first close-ended question in which four wrong sentences were given and students were asked to correct these sentences. While the second question was an open-ended question in which students were asked to write a paragraph on the Pakistani education system.

For data collection, the researchers visited both schools and sought permission to collect data from the students. The researchers were easily granted permission from the head of these schools. The researchers analyzed the data by using statistical charts and the analyzed data was mentioned in numbers and percentages.

Figure 1

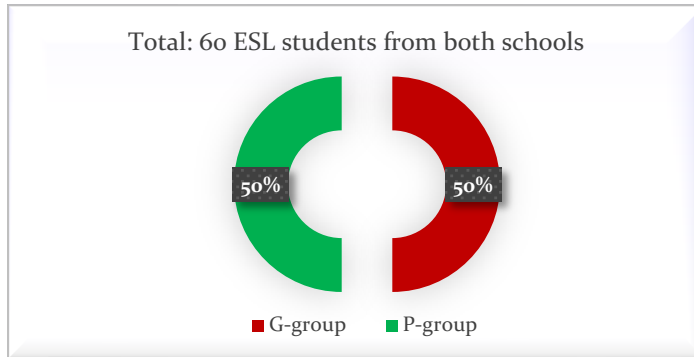
Research Methodology



Results and Findings

Figure 2

Frequency of the students



The figure above shows that a total of sixty ESL students from both schools participated in this research, as research contributors, thirty students were selected from a government school named G-group, while another thirty students were selected from a private school named P-group.

In the close-ended question, the ESL students were given four wrong sentences containing (punctuation marks, tense, definite article, and appropriate words). They were asked to correct these sentences. The G-group represents government school students, whereas the P-group represents private school students.

Results of Close-ended Question

Figure 3

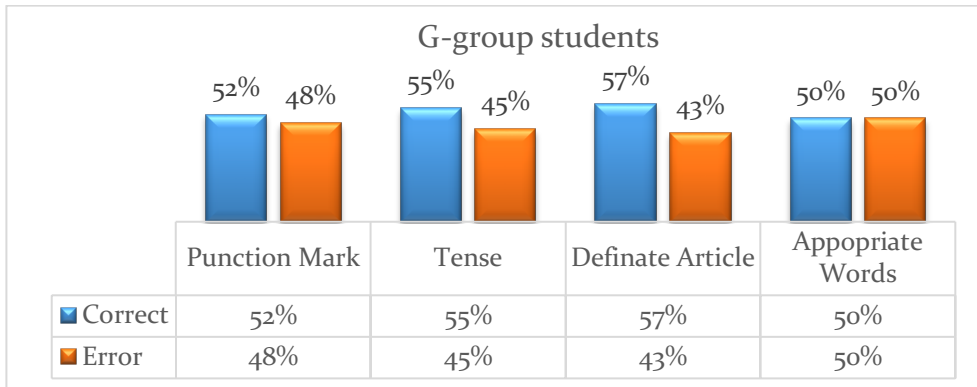


Figure 3 above showed the results of government school students, the G-group represents the government school students. In the "punctuation mark" the G-group students 52% corrected, and 48% committed errors. The "tense" was corrected by 55% of students in the G-group and 45% of students

committed errors. The "definite article" was corrected by the G-group 57% of students and 43% of students committed errors. In the use of "appropriate words" from the G-group 50% of students committed no errors and 50% of students committed errors.

Figure 4

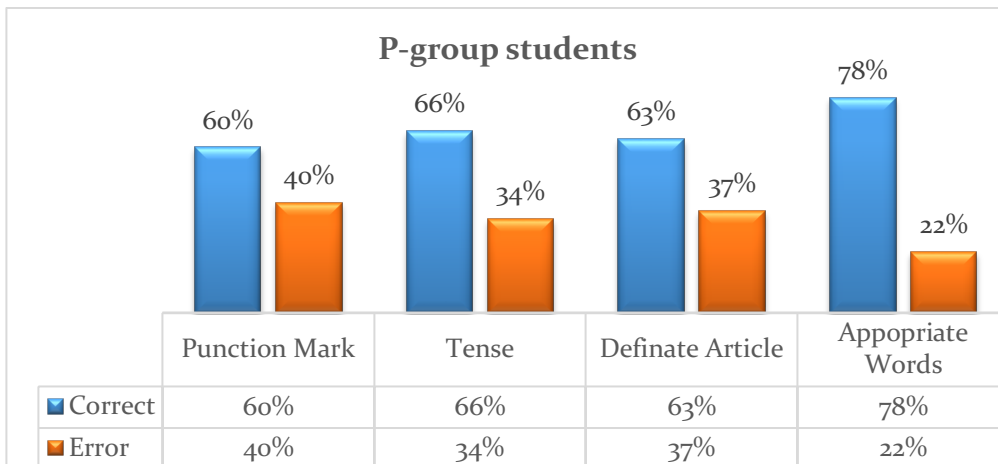


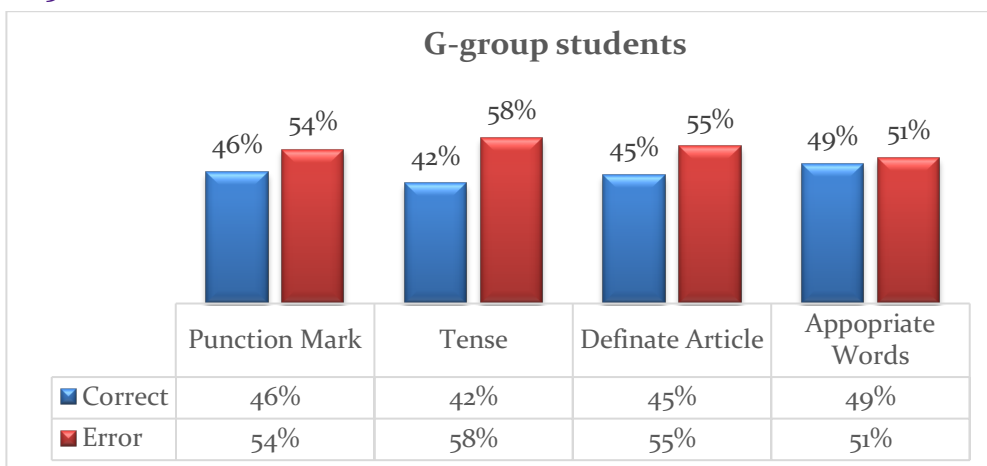
Figure 4 above showed the results of private school students the P-group represents private school students. In the “punctuation mark” the P-group students had 60% corrected and 40% committed error. In the “tense” the students of P-group 66% committed no errors and 34% committed errors. In the "definite article," the P-group students 63% students committed no errors and 37% committed errors. In the use of “appropriate words” from the P-group students 78% of students corrected and 22%

of students committed errors.

Results of Open-Ended Question

In the open-ended question, the ESL students of both schools were questioned to write a paragraph on the Pakistani educational system. The purpose of this question was to make a comparison of the syntactical errors of these students of both schools.

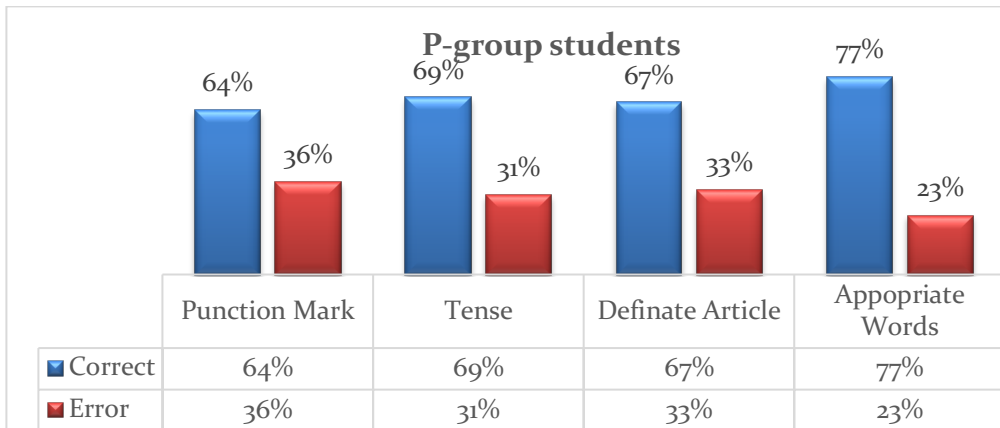
Figure 5



In the open-ended question, the students of government secondary school were asked to write a paragraph on Pakistan's educational system. The written paragraph was analyzed by the researchers and they found that in the government ESL school 46% of students correctly used punctuation marks and 54%

committed errors in this field. Tense was correctly used by 42% and 58% used this incorrectly. In definite articles, 55% make errors and 45% are used correctly. Appropriate words were correctly used by 49% and 51% used inappropriate words.

Figure 6



The ESL students of private secondary schools were similarly questioned to write a paragraph on Pakistan's educational system. The written paragraph was analyzed by the researchers and they found that in the private school, 64% of students correctly used punctuation marks and 36% committed errors. Tense was correctly used by 69% and 31% used this incorrectly. Definite article 67% make no errors and 33% used it incorrectly. Appropriate words were properly used by 77% and 23% used inappropriate words in the paragraph.

Discussion and Conclusion

In Pakistan, there are generally two types of schools named as government and private schools. In Pakistani government schools' Urdu language is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects, but English subject is taught by using the English language as a medium of instruction. On the other hand, in private schools, the English

language is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects. The researchers in this comparative research study comparatively analyzed syntactical errors committed by ESL learners at the secondary level. The results showed that the government school students committed more syntactical errors than the private school students in punctuation marks, tense, definite articles, and appropriate words. In the punctuation mark G-group students committed more errors than P-group students; in using tense the G-group students committed more errors than P-group students because they ignored switching the tense and made more errors in using the correct tense. The definite article is a practical part of writing skills, Chen (2006) explored article errors first of all in this field G-group students also committed more errors than P-group students. In using appropriate words G-group students made more errors than the students of the P-group.

For the development of English writing skills, it was vital to technically analyze the

students' English writings. Sheng (2016), analyzed syntactical errors of Chini ESL students but the present studies analyzed syntactical errors of Pakistani ESL students; Sattar, Javed, & Baig (2019) detected syntactical errors in English writings in two colleges similarly present study analyzed syntactical errors in two schools. Shaikh & Jibran (2020) found verb, tense, article and spelling errors; Iqbal, et, al. (2021) studied the English essays of secondary-level students of district Multan and found many errors made by the students in nouns, pronouns, verbs, spellings and articles, similarly in the present study researchers find four types of syntactical errors. Dinamika & Hanafiah (2019) exposed syntactical errors in the writings of undergraduate-level students in the English literature department. The present research study was directed to detect syntactical errors in English writings of the government and private secondary schools. Talosa & Magundayao (2018) stated, that higher levels students commit fewer syntactical errors, than lower levels students. This statement is to some extent applicable to the present study as in private schools the standard of instruction is best than in government schools; that is why private school students committed fewer syntactical errors than government school students.

The findings of the comparative study disclosed that the main source of these syntactical errors is that, some ESL students were unaware of the fundamental rules of the English language, while others ignore these rules to save time and use language only for the purpose to convey a message. They use the wrong tense because they ignore switching the tense and made errors in using the correct tense. Some students do not think of appropriate words for sentences, just they use the word in order to convey the meaning. Appropriateness of words in sentences plays

a vital role in writing development. The use of suitable words in sentences needs a huge amount of vocabulary. But some students do not have a good vocabulary to use the right words in sentences.

Recommendations and Suggestions

The researchers have given some recommendations which will be helpful for ESL students in improving their writing skills and overcoming syntactical errors in their English writing. Some students committed errors in "punctuation marks" to avoid these errors the researchers suggest that through short story teaching students can get rid of errors in punctuation marks. ESL students must be taught dialogues stories and dramas because, from the dialogues between actors, students can learn punctuation by observing the intonations of dialogues, which show the functions of punctuation marks in the form of intonations. One more type of error often committed by the students is "usage of tense" because they are unaware of the use of sentences, they were not being taught practically, and the researchers proposed that students must be taught tenses in a practical way. The use of "inappropriate words" in sentences a syntactical error is often committed by the students, the researchers have recommended that it is because of a deficiency of vocabulary and in this situation, the use of a dictionary in the proper way can improve their vocabulary. In the future, this contemporary research study can be used by researchers for upcoming research in this area and also in other fields of education. This is significant to investigate ESL learners' writings to identify errors and highlight errors for the purpose to progress English writing skills and become a beneficial researcher for future generations.

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