A Study of Students' Errors on Paragraph Writing

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the most important skills for foreign language students to master. Writing skill is essential since it is needed frequently in business and higher education. However, writing is one of the skills that is considered difficult by most students where they often make errors and mistakes. In the field of language learning, error analysis plays an important role. By knowing at least common mistakes, the students can learn and they will not make the same mistakes again in the future. This study concerns an analysis of students' errors in paragraph writing. This study employed an observation research method to analyze the data from students' tasks in paragraph writing. The data were collected, identified, and analyzed. The findings indicated that the most errors that made by the students were in spelling and tenses. In addition, students' errors were also found in verb arrangement.

Keywords: error analysis, writing skill, paragraph writing

INTRODUCTION

English is an international language used to communicate among the people of entire the world (Wahyuni et al., 2017). It is widely used in many fields such as industries, science, arts, tourism, politics, and economics. Then to understand the meaning of all of that, someone should learn the English language (Zawahreh, 2012).

In English language learning, writing is one of the most important skills for foreign language students to master. Writing is an important language skill because it means learning, discover, develop, and improve language skills (Astuti et al., 2020). Writing is important because it is commonly used in the workplace and higher education. Ramelan (1992) states that writing plays a very important role in modern society. If people do not understand how to express themselves in writing, they have difficulty interacting well with professors, employers, colleagues, or just about anything else. It is an important medium of communication. It is also regarded as an indicator of students' success in learning English as well as their future professional jobs. Writing is a way to express

personal meanings through composing. Individuals create their own opinions on a specific subject.

In writing, learners produce phrases in a particular order and in specific ways connected. However, when trying to produce sentences or to write English paragraphs, learners encounter many problems. For many English students, written production is one of the most difficult tasks (Harris and Cunningham, 1994). Rachmawati et al. (2017) states that writing skills are complicated and difficult to teach because not only grammatical and rhetorical elements but also conceptual and judgment elements are required in writing mastery. Some components must be understood in writing, they are content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Writing is difficult since the writer does know what the writer wants to write or the writer has no ideas.

In the terms of foreign language students, writing helps students learn. First, the grammatical constructs, idioms, and terminology taught to students are strengthened by writing. Second, they still have an opportunity to be creative in the words as students write, to go beyond what they have already learned to express, to take chances. Third, while they write, they are motivated to get interested in the new vocabulary; they attempt to express concepts, as well as the constant use of the eyes, hand, and brain, is a unique technique to increase learning. They also learn something new to write or a new means of presenting their thoughts as students struggle with what to bring down next or how to put it down on paper. They feel a real need for the right term and the right sentence to be found.

However, there are many problems faced by students in writing. The majority of English students feel that mastering writing is the hardest skill to master (Harsyaf et al., 2009). Students' lack of enthusiasm and concentration in writing, and also the capability to express themselves using proper language, vocabulary, and punctuation are two indications of writing failure (Febriana et al., 2018). Another indication of students' writing problems is the difficulty in constructing English phrases into readable and acceptable compositions using accurate grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. Richards & Renandya (2002) also argued that when composing writing, content, organization, and language are needed. Due to their limited language proficiency or limited linguistic skills, writing has been considered the most problematic challenge for EFL learners (Weigle, 2002).

Some problems in writing have been investigated in previous research such as the study by I Gede et al. (2013) who found the cause of students got difficulties in writing are limited vocabulary, low ability in mastering grammar and spelling, difficulties to construct paragraph and generating ideas. However, the difficulty in writing can be solved by guiding the students to write that aims to support writing during the different stages of the writing process.

Furthermore, learners should not only learn how to write, but they should also know their weak points to write a successful piece of English writing, so error analysis is needed. In the field of language learning, the study of errors takes on great importance, as error analysis is the study of the language acquisition process (Dulay et al., 1982; Ellis, 2002). It is often believed that information about the strategies used by learners to acquire language is contained, so mistakes can be used to measure learners' language performance.

As mentioned above, error analysis plays an important role in language learning. Through error analysis, common writing errors made by students can be identified and to find out how far students understand the rules of English in writing sentences, so this study aimed to investigate what errors are often made by students, especially in paragraph writing. By knowing at least common mistakes, the students will not make the same mistakes again in the future. The results of this study can be a reference for teachers to improve the writing skills of students.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Teaching Writing For EFL Students

To teach English writing effectively, there are several steps to take. At the very least, there are five steps to teaching writing (Harmer, 2004). Demonstrating is the first step in this case. Teachers provide students with examples of a text type that will be learned at this grade. The text details, such as its goal, social functions, and linguistic qualities, are discussed. They are explained the differences between different text types.

Motivating and stimulating is the second step. The teachers are about to provoke and motivate them to develop ideas in basic and simple methods. Teachers should prepare what they will do before entering the classroom to inspire the students' ideas. Support is the third step in teaching English writing. The children require a great deal of support from the teachers. As a result, teachers should be ready whenever students request help in the

classroom. Students must have questions to ask during the writing process. They will inquire about grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and any other aspects of writing. The fourth step is to react. The teachers make suggestions for the students' work in this step. It has to do with how teachers correct their students' writing. Instead of marking students' work with a correction symbol, the teachers will make comments or suggestions.

The final step is to evaluate. Every task or activity must include it. Teachers evaluate their work as though it were the finished product. When it comes to grading, the teachers will each receive a score. On the students' work, they generally write correction symbols. It can also be used for academic purposes. They can learn the grammatical errors and inappropriate words they made and how to revise them after they receive their scripts, which are already filled with correction symbols. From the statements above, it can be concluded that five steps to teach writing for EFL (English Foreign Learning) students based on Harmer are demonstrating, motivating and provoking, supporting, responding, and evaluating.

Common Errors on Students' Writing

Nunan (2003) argues that writing is the thinking method for creating ideas, thinking on how to express effective writing, and simply organizing the ideas into statements and paragraphs. It is important for expressing one's emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and viewpoints. People can exchange thoughts, emotions, persuade and encourage others by writing. For personal amusement or some other reason, people can write. In related to individual pleasure, internal and external problems of some students have also occurred in writing based on some experts as follows:

1. **The Internal Writing Problems**
    a. Grammatical Problems

Grammar is a crucial and required ability for students to master (Gunn and McCallum, 2005:41). Students with subject-verb agreements, pronoun references, and connectors have grammatical problems, according to Kharma (1987).

    b. The problem of Word Choice

For students, writing in a second language with the correct words in the correct places is a problem. The effort to impress the reader leads to a diction problem.

    c. Cognitive Problems

1) Problems with Punctuation

The fact that punctuation was never normal to the level of spelling, according to Byrne (1988), makes it troublesome.

2) Problems of Capitalization

Capital letters are helpful for sentence initials, the beginnings of major sentences, themes, and titles. The problems are due to the difficulty of classifying nouns as proper and general nouns (Gowere, 1995).

3) Problem with Spelling

The English spelling system, which has been unreliable, is complicated for learners due to the presence of other languages, variant pronunciations, and other historical factors (Gowere, 1995)

4) Material Problem

As a second or foreign language, learners of English often experience difficulties exploring concepts and dreaming to connect with others.

5) Organization Problem

Learners struggle to structure a paragraph, create a topic for a paragraph, organize the entire discourse and a topic inside a discourse, identify a topic, and support concepts or generalizations and particular specifics.

2. The External Problems in Writing

a. Lack of Writing Stages Understanding

Byrne (1988) classifies the complexity of writing into psychological, linguistic, and cognitive problems. It means that writing does not come easily, but rather it becomes a complex skill, learned by continuous effort and much practice.

b. Lack of Motivation for Learners

Writing activities may be simply created when students' needs and desires are recognized when they are given numerous opportunities to write, and when they are motivated to participate. It means that if writing activities inspire them and keep them motivated, learners would be encouraged to compose.

c. Insufficient Time

Learners needed time to collect, organize, and write drafts, as well as read and rewrite proof. According to Guantum et al. (2000), writing which is an important element of

language learning is a reflective activity, which takes enough time to think about specific topics.

d. Lack of Practice

According to Davies (1998), writing is essentially a creative process, and skilled writers must master the ability to effectively communicate their ideas to an invisible audience. Therefore, if successful learning is to take place, learners must take responsibility for their learning. In addition, a writer needs to write a lot to become a good writer.

e. Feedback from Teachers

According to Byrne (1988), if teachers are truly readers rather than judges, they should focus on what students have already achieved rather than what they have tried. This may enable student writers to comprehend and incorporate feedback into their revisions.

METHOD

The method used in this research was case study. The case study is defined by Young (1985: 247) as "a detailed study of a social unit, whether that unit is a person, a group, a social institution, a district, or a community." In simple terms, the case study method is a type of qualitative analysis in which an individual, a circumstance, or an institution is closely studied, and efforts are made to examine each aspect of the concerned unit in minute detail before making generalizations and inferences from case data. Then, the researchers used an analysis method in analyzing students' errors especially in paragraph writing. The data for this research are students' errors in paragraph writing and the source of the data is the third semester students' assignment in the paragraph writing course. The material used for this research were the paragraph writing assignment from the third semester of English Department students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo. The researchers, then, collaborated with the writing lecturer and asked the students to write a paragraph where it used to analyze the students' errors in paragraph writing. After collecting and analyzing the data, then conclusions were drawn based on the data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
RESULTS

After collecting students' tasks in paragraph writing, the next step was analyzing

students' errors particularly in writing. The error analysis in paragraph writing were shown in the following.

1. Spelling

According to the writer's findings, the student had some problems in spelling words. Spelling is the skill of correctly writing words. Spelling errors can occur due to a lack of understanding or the effect of their native language.

Table 1. The Identification of Error on Spelling

No.	Examples	Error	Explanation	Correction
1	like going outside to breathe while listening to your <u>favourite</u> song	Favourite	Favourite replaced by favorite	like going outside to breathe while listening to your favorite song
2	Many new stadiums are being built with old style make architecture excited to looking for inspiration <u>though</u> history and historical building	Though	Though replaced by through	...make architecture excited to looking for inspiration through history and historical building
3	<u>Dinning</u> out with friends is enjoyable	Dinning	Dinning replaced by dining	Dining out with friends is enjoyable
4	One of my bad <u>habbit</u> is in decision making	Habbit	Habbit does not appear in dictionary, it is replaced by habit	One of my bad habit is in decision making
5	<u>I'am</u> still so easy	I'am	I'am not in dictionary and replaced by I'm or I am	I am still so easy
6	to chill and have a <u>coffe</u>	Coffee	Coffe replaced by coffee	to chill and have a coffe

It is possible that the students' problem with incorrect spelling came from their unwillingness to read the dictionary and a lack of knowledge of the word's correct spelling before writing. If they can not spell a word, they try to guess it rather than looking it up in the dictionary.

2. Tenses

One of the most important aspects of written products was the use of tenses. It was a rule most writers follow when writing. As a result, they must agree to it and make use of it. The writer discovered that almost every student has problems with grammar,

especially in the tenses, after analyzing the students' written predictions.

Table 2. The Identification of Error on Tenses

No.	Examples	Error	Explanation	Correction
1	My clothes are stylish because I buy them from a fashion online shop that always <u>update</u> their stuff	Update	Update replaced by updates because the subject is single (fashion online shop), so it is must be add "s"	My clothes are stylish because I buy them from a fashion online shop that always updates their stuff
2	so that every <u>students</u> should have their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to support them in learning	Students	Students replaced by student, because singular quantifiers (every) must be matched with a singular countable noun or an uncountable noun (student)	so that every student should have their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to support them in learning
3	Both types of motivation <u>will helps</u> students to develop their good study habits and achieve the learning goals	Will helps	Help replaced by help. Because the verb **helps** after the modal verb **will** does not appear to be in the correct form	Both types of motivation will <u>help</u> students to develop their good study habits and achieve the learning goals
4	Their expressions that I don't know are too dark or they don't <u>understood</u> yet	Under-stood	Understood replaced by understand because it appears that the verb **understood** is incorrectly used with the helping verb **do**	Their expressions that I don't know are too dark or they don't understand yet
5	I often overthink about trivial things that <u>makes</u> me dizzy.	Makes	Makes replaced by make because the subject (**I**) is singular, do not need "s/es" in verb	I often overthink about trivial things that make me dizzy.
6	My joke can't be accepted by all my friends, but sometimes <u>my joke it's work</u>	My joke it's work	My joke it's work replace with my joke works	My joke can't be accepted by all my friends, but sometimes my joke it's work
7	<u>It is give me</u> a lot of memories	It is give me	It is give me replaced by it gives me because this is present tense. The verb is adding with s/es	It gives me a lot of memories

The sample above shows that the students had problems using tenses in their written work. The use of incorrect tenses may happen because the student lacks a thorough understanding of the tenses and how to use them effectively in each context of the phrase. As a result, students should understand how to apply the tenses in their written work before they begin writing.

3. Punctuation

The practice or system of putting various marks in written tests to facilitate interpretation is known as punctuation. There are also several punctuation problems, such as incorrect placement of the period and comma.

Table 3. The Identification of Error on Punctuation

No.	Examples	Error	Correction
1	Before doing online classes it would be nice to maintain a good mood, if we are in a bad mood, then online classes will feel boring, maintaining the mood can also be done by doing things that can please yourself, such as listening to music or others	Error in placing the correct punctuation	Before doing online classes it would be nice to maintain a good mood. If we are in a bad mood, then online classes will feel boring. Maintaining the mood can also be done by doing things that can please yourself, such as listening to music or others
2	How come? so far we have been busy with tasks that we do almost every day, of course with that we feel tired, bored and lose our enthusiasm for doing assignments	Error in placing the correct punctuation	How come? So far, we have been busy with tasks that we do almost every day. Of course, with that, we feel tired, bored and lose our enthusiasm for doing assignments
3	For example, we become aware that to be a successful person we must have the intentions and goals for our future, and to make it happen we have to study hard	Error in placing the correct punctuation	For example, we become aware that to be a successful person, we must have the intentions and goals for our future, and to make it happen, we have to study hard

4. Word Choice

Vocabulary is a list of words used in books or the entire amount of words that make up a language (Crowther, 1995). Vocabulary is the core of language and without adequate vocabulary one will have difficulties understanding others or express our ideas (Agassy et al., 2020). Some students have problems with vocabulary. They struggle with finding the right words to use in their sentences because not all words can be used in every

sentence. They also have a problem due to the lack of vocabulary.

Table 4. The Identification of Error on Word Choice

No.	Examples	Error	Explanation	Correction
1	<u>there are many people who can't</u> study because of economic problems	There are many people who can't	There are many people who can't replaced by many people can't study. Usually sentences that start with *there* or *it* can usually be shortened	Many people who can't study because of economic problems
2	we must have <u>the</u> intentions and goals for our future	The	'The' replaced by 'good' to make the sentence more appropriate	We must have good intentions and goals for our future
3	<u>there are many things that make</u> me worry	There are many things that make	There are many things that make replaced by many things make	Many things that make me worry

DISCUSSION

Based on the aforementioned findings, the researchers discovered that students frequently made four types of errors: spelling, tenses, word choice, and punctuation. According to the findings, the most common errors made by students are in spelling and tenses. When it comes to spelling, students rarely use dictionaries. One of the examples was 1) **favourite** 2) **habbit** 3) **I'am** 4) **coffe**. The examples demonstrate that the words in concern are wrong. The student must write 1) **favorite** 2) **habit** 3) **I'm** 4) **coffee**, but the student spelled it incorrectly. It is clear from the example that students did not write correctly or do not know how to spell words correctly.

Then, in the tenses, students commonly made mistakes in grammatical organization, particularly when it came to verb arrangement. The adjustment of a verb (verb) and the subject of a phrase in terms of number, namely singular or plural, is known as verb agreement. One example of errors in tenses was 1) **every students** 2) **will helps** 3) **It is give**. The examples demonstrate that the words in concern are wrong. The student must have written 1) **every student** 2) **will help** 3) **It gives**. Students made a mistake in adjusting the arrangement of the verb agreement with the subject in the sentence they created, as shown by the sample.

The result of this study especially tenses or grammar was by the study of Kharma (1987)

that states that students with subject-verb agreements, pronoun references, and connectors have grammatical problems. Where students made a mistake when they do verb arrangement in their task. Then, for spelling, Gowere (1995) stated the English spelling system, which has been unreliable, is complicated for learners due to the presence of other languages, variant pronunciations and other were so many letters that need to be memorized. Students also prefer to guess rather than open and consult their dictionary.

CONCLUSION

Writing is an important way for expressing one's feelings, thoughts, ideas, and points of view. People can use writing to express their thoughts, feelings, persuade, and encourage others. If writing in a second language with the correct words in the correct places is a challenge for students, not be surprised if they make errors in their writing.

The reseachers find the errors made by the students on spelling, tenses, punctuation, and word choice. Then, the most error which has been made by the students is on spelling and tenses. In addition, students' errors were also found in verb arrangement when the students arrange the sentences.

Furthermore, it is hoped that the future research will discuss strategies for teaching students error analysis so that they will be more aware of the errors they have made in writing and will teach students to reflect on and evaluate their writing results.

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