

Error Analysis of Narrative Writing among Secondary School Students in Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract

Writing complexity is a significant challenge for ESL students since students are pressured to master a variety of linguistics skills, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. For students to develop a strong command of English in writing, they must be able to integrate these skills effectively, which can be a daunting task. This issue is increasingly recognised by educators and researchers, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address the complex challenges of writing in a second language. Employing the Error Analysis framework (Corder & Brown, 1988), this study aims to determine the frequent errors in narrative writing among secondary school students. The research design chosen for this study is a quantitative content analysis of the student's narrative writing corpora. Data collection involved 52 writing samples of secondary school students with varying levels of English proficiency, ranging from beginner to intermediate. Students' corpora were marked, tagged, and analysed based on surface and linguistics taxonomies (Dulay, 1982) using the TagAnt and Antconc software. The findings show that the most common errors were related to grammar (42.64%), followed by omission (18.29%), morphology (12.51%), lexical issues (12.22%), addition (6.35%), misformation (3.85%), semantics (2.40%), and misordering (1.64%). The results and discussion suggest that students frequently make errors in the application of grammar rules and the omission of function words in sentences, indicating a need for targeted assistance in these areas of language learning.

Keywords: Corpus Analysis, ESL, Error analysis, Linguistic Taxonomy, Surface Taxonomy

Introduction

Writing skills have been among the most discussed topics by many scholars in the English as a Second Language (ESL) field. Teachers and scholars are concerned about current secondary students' writing competency. Writing skills are often challenging for second-language students to learn and develop, as they require complex composing rather than simply writing down information (Mohamed Rubiaee et al., 2020). Like any other standard language, English requires mastering four key linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, writing is particularly challenging for learners, as it involves putting words on paper and integrating the other three skills. Effective writing requires a strong foundation in reading

to understand and analyse texts, speaking to articulate thoughts clearly, and listening to absorb and reflect on feedback. Together, these skills contribute to developing proficient writing abilities in English. Writing is creative and highly complex, and writing in a second language, like English, makes it even more challenging. In Malaysian schools, the curriculum significantly emphasises writing as an essential component of language learning. This focus reflects its importance for academic achievement and professional success. Students are expected to demonstrate their ability to produce a variety of writing genres, including narratives, argumentative essays, and reports, all of which must adhere to the conventions of standard English. To meet these expectations, students need a strong grasp of English language rules. According to Sa'adah (2020), Shahid et al. (2024), and Woo et al. (2023), writing is a significant aspect of the English language, serving as a crucial skill in language development. It is considered an extension of social language, enabling individuals to express concepts, ideas, feelings, and thoughts through text. To articulate ideas clearly in English writing, students must effectively convey their opinions while simultaneously working on proper sentence structure. While being cautious with their writing, students may commit errors, depending on the student's level of proficiency.

On top of that, students' writing competency can be observed through their writing product. As discussed by Mellati et al. (2022), Kouankem (2024), and Shah et al. (2023), the writing produced by students can reveal their strengths and weaknesses. The transition from sentence-level writing to coherent paragraphs and essays can be particularly challenging for many learners. Errors in writing are a common challenge among Malaysian secondary school students learning English as a Second Language (ESL), with issues like subject-verb agreement, tense misuse and sentence structure, these errors can hinder students' ability to produce coherent texts, affecting both their academic performance and confidence. Identifying and addressing these patterns is essential to improving the learners' writing skills. Educators and other involved parties can utilise these mistakes as a guide to develop appropriate solutions or strategies. In writing, several steps, such as prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading, contribute to the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of students' writing development. By progressing through these stages, students can master writing skills and achieve the appropriate standards of writing proficiency. Regular practice, constructive feedback, and a focus on developing clear and coherent ideas are essential to this process. Furthermore, identifying errors helps both teachers and students recognise their strengths and weaknesses, allowing for more targeted improvement in writing. The current view on Error Analysis in ESL classrooms is that it is a valuable tool for understanding learners' language development, diagnosing learning difficulties, and providing targeted feedback to facilitate language acquisition (Samad, 2022; Hazarika, 2022). By systematically identifying and analysing errors, educators can gain insights into the linguistics challenges faced by students, thereby tailoring instruction to address specific needs and promote more effective learning outcomes. In light of providing useful insight to improve language acquisition in the classroom, this study reviews and discusses the most frequent errors made by secondary school students using Error Analysis of surface and linguistics taxonomies. For Malaysian ESL students, EA has been used to differentiate between errors stemming from developmental stages of learning and those caused by interference from the student's first language. Consequently, EA is viewed as a practical and effective approach for identifying specific areas where students need targeted support, enabling educators to design suitable teaching strategies.

Statement of the Problem

Writing is a complex component for ESL students to acquire since it involves both procedural and declarative knowledge. Students are required to utilise different sets of skills simultaneously to produce a writing piece. The skills encompass grammar, syntax, morphology, and lexical formation and selection. These can be challenging for some students because certain areas may need to be thoroughly covered in their learning. In particular, the English proficiency of Malaysian secondary school students has increasingly become a focal point for many scholars like Tan and Miller (2007), Tan et al. (2019), and Ibrahim and Othman (2021). These studies have shown that students in Malaysian secondary schools face significant challenges in both learning and practising English, whether in writing or speaking (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Ghulamuddin et al., 2021; Siddek & Ismail, 2021). The Malaysian Ministry of Education's Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (p33, p114) reports that 3,500,000 students in Malaysia—equivalent to 72% of the future workforce—fail to achieve the minimum English proficiency expected of secondary school graduates, putting them at a disadvantage. This includes inadequate comprehension of key points on common topics, difficulty in writing or speaking clearly about familiar subjects, and challenges in communicating past experiences, explaining incidents, and expressing opinions concisely, which disadvantages 72% of the future Malaysian workforce. Reasons behind this could be related to several issues like students' lack of motivation, poor attitude towards learning the language, and the choice of suitable classroom pedagogy for the students' needs. Such issues may have stemmed from the fact that pedagogical practices in schools do not sufficiently address the complexities of the rapidly changing Malaysian society and varied educational environments (Rashid et al., 2022; Adan & Hashim, 2021; Ishak & Jamil, 2020; Singh et al., 2020; Zakaria et al., 2018). Besides, studies like Al-Khresheh (2016), Bogdanova and Snoeck (2018), Pan et al. (2020), and Magsi et al. (2023) suggested that by changing and improving the pedagogy approach in the English classroom through the insights gained from EA (Error Analysis), educators can mitigate challenges such as low motivation in the school by employing interactive and engaging methods. They can enhance students' attitudes towards the English language by fostering a safe and positive environment that supports students' development. However, some educators claimed that they are having difficulties setting their pedagogy according to their students' needs (Mohamad et al., 2023) due to factors such as an overreliance on textbooks, syllables-focused teaching, and a reluctance to adopt new approaches. Therefore, this study suggests that by using Error Analysis as the first step to gain insight into the student's needs, educators and researchers can determine these areas and design appropriate interventions and pedagogy approaches that can enhance students' learning and language acquisition.

Significance of Study

In Malaysia, English has a prominent role in predicting students' success in the academic context since most subjects and lessons in higher institutions are conducted in the English language. In secondary schools, stakeholders like teachers and syllabus designers have come up with different approaches to improve secondary students' writing quality. Among these efforts is the design of instructional interventions tailored to students' strengths and weaknesses, with Error Analysis (EA) as a valuable tool for understanding and addressing their specific needs. This study aims to identify the most common errors made by secondary school students in narrative writing, utilising two error taxonomies as the framework for analysis. By highlighting recurring issues, the findings can inform the development of targeted teaching

strategies and interventions, ultimately supporting students in mastering English writing and preparing them for higher education and beyond.

Objective of the Study

The study aims to determine the most common errors made by secondary students in their narrative writing. In order to achieve the research objective, the study is guided by this research question:

- What are the most frequent errors made by secondary school students in writing based on surface taxonomy and linguistics taxonomy of errors?

Literature Review

Error Analysis was first introduced by Corder in 1967, which focused on viewing learner errors simply as mistakes to be corrected to understand them as valuable insights into the language acquisition process. This system works by identifying, categorising, and understanding the mistakes that learners make in their use of a second language. Over time, Error Analysis focuses on the types of errors, their sources, and their implications for language learning and teaching (Calderón & Plaza, 2021). By examining the errors in learners' written or spoken output, researchers and educators can gain valuable insights into the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition (Basturkmen & Fu, 2021), the specific challenges faced by the learners (Mlakar et al., 2024), and the areas where instructional interventions are needed (Limoudehi et al., 2021). Error Analysis is, therefore, a crucial tool in applied linguistics, contributing to more effective teaching strategies and better learning outcomes.

Recently, studies on writing errors have mainly focussed on determining the language learning needs of students. The studies include students' weaknesses and strengths in the area of language, like speaking and writing (e.g., Lopez et al., 2021; Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Masruddin & Nasriandi, 2022). These errors work as a framework for the instructional intervention design that can cater to the student's current needs. In identifying the errors, researchers and educators are able to determine the patterns of errors made by students ranging from grammatical errors such as singulars, plurals, articles, prepositions, adjectives, subject-verb agreements as well as tenses. Studies like Ang et al. (2020) and Setiyorini et al. (2020) found that students have difficulties grasping subject-verb agreement elements like the subject-verb agreement of person, number, subject, and coordinated subject as well as the notional agreement and proximity. Another common error identified was the lexical choice in composing the writing, which involved word choice between noun and adjective, verb and adverb, as well as adjective and adverb. A study conducted by Altabaa and Zulkifli (2024) found that students made errors in the part of speech where the usage of word class is confused, usually between adjectives and nouns like the words beauty (noun) and beautiful (adjective). Overall, most of the studies classified errors according to grammatical rules and examined their effects on the clarity and effectiveness of communication within the ESL classroom environment.

Since the scope of this study is to investigate the most common errors within the span of the surface taxonomy, like omission, addition, misordering, and misformation, as well as the linguistics taxonomy encompassing grammar, lexical, morphology, and semantics. This dual taxonomy approach enables a more detailed examination within the research scope. Most existing studies did not classify the errors into these taxonomies but rather explained them

as violations of grammar rules (Walasari et al., 2021). Categorising the errors into these taxonomies is helpful to guide teachers and students in determining their needs in learning the target language as well as improving the current teaching strategies in the classroom (Özkayran & Yilmaz, 2020). The detailed explanation of the pattern of the errors can be seen through the specific grouping of the errors. Moreover, the current investigations in the secondary school context (Moonma, 2024) were concentrated on creative writing as it emphasised artistic expression and originality where students were encouraged to evoke a wide range of emotions, thoughts, and imagery, fostering their ability to engage the reader's imagination and uniquely convey personal or abstract concepts. This style of writing offers substantial freedom and creativity as students experiment with language, form, and content to create compelling and imaginative pieces (Abdalrahman, 2021). Consequently, researchers and educators can gain insights into students' current language knowledge and assess the effectiveness of their application of these language skills through their writing. On the other hand, this study shifts the focus to narrative writing, a genre that revolves around storytelling with a well-defined plot and structure. It often involves recounting events, whether fictional or based on real-life experiences, coherently and engagingly. Therefore, it requires students to develop a clear sequence of events, establish characters, and create settings that guide the readers through a storyline. In composing this genre of writing, students are required to apply complex language knowledge, such as the use of descriptive language that makes effective connections between parts of the story, as well as the use of transitions, verb tenses, and pronouns.

The corpus linguistics approach is employed as a key component of the analytical process when examining errors made by secondary school students. This approach is used because it supports the systematic identification of recurring patterns and provides a quantitative basis for understanding the common linguistic challenges faced by ESL learners (Biber et al., 2020; Díez-Bedmar, 2020). Error Analysis (EA) and corpus analysis are closely correlated in studying the writing development of ESL students. EA helps identify common mistakes made by learners, providing valuable insights into areas that need improvement. Corpus analysis, on the other hand, involves examining large collections of written texts to identify patterns and trends in language use (Durrant, 2022). Combining Error Analysis with corpus tagging represent

Corpus analysis, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of ESL learners' writing strengths and weaknesses. This integrated approach facilitates the development of targeted instructional strategies to enhance the writing proficiency of ESL students. According to Lopez (2009), corpus analysis and error analysis are two useful tools that allow researchers and educators to understand important facts in language learning and support language pedagogy. Integrating Error Analysis with corpus tagging is the latest data analysis in this field, as it allows better examination of the specific grammatical constructions and minimises the chances of overlooking certain patterns (Leng et al., 2020). As a result, this approach not only enhances the precision and depth of linguistic analysis but also significantly contributes to the development of more effective instructional strategies for improving the writing proficiency of ESL students in Malaysian secondary schools.

Scope of Study

This study is intended to cover the scope within the context of secondary school students in an ESL environment where Malay is the primary language of instruction. It was conducted on the subject of two classes of lower secondary school students in this school only. This narrow scope limits the generalisation of the findings to a broader population, such as students from other educational levels or different linguistics backgrounds. As for the analysis of the errors, a learner corpus of the subjects' essays of narrative writing will be analysed for surface and linguistic errors. As for the corpus software utilised to analyse the data, not all of the features it provides are utilised for this study.

Research Methodology

Research design: The research design for this study employed a quantitative approach to systematically analyse and quantify the errors made by students in their narrative writing. Specifically, content analysis was used to identify and classify various types of errors, which are then measured in terms of their frequencies. This allows for a detailed examination of the occurrence of each error type across the students' work. The data was further analysed by converting the frequencies into percentages, clearly representing the most common errors. This approach enables the identification of error patterns, helping to determine which types of mistakes are most prevalent among the students, thereby offering insight into areas that require targeted instructional intervention.

Research population and sample: The study applied purposive sampling to adapt to the research's objectives. It focused on public school students between the age of 13-14 years old with a range of beginner to intermediate English competency levels. Students were required to complete a writing test of narrative writing that involves planning, translating, and revising (Maghfira & Hastini, 2024) that involve the process of writing. The subjects selected were below 21 years old, and a consent form was given before the investigation, which was approved by the Ethics Committee at Universiti Putra Malaysia (research ethics number JKEUPM-2022-1048).

Research tools and instruments: During the writing test, students were given time to plan their writing using the template of narrative writing that includes the opening, complication, and resolution. Afterwards, students were given 45 minutes to complete their writing with a range of words between 150 to 200 words. The writing test was collected afterwards to be marked, tagged, and analysed using the Error Analysis procedure developed by Brown and Corder (1988) using the surface and linguistics taxonomies. The marked and tagged writings were then compiled to develop the target students' corpora using the TagAnt and Antconc software. Next, the errors' frequency was tabulated using percentages based on their category. In order to keep the reliability of the errors found in the writing test, this study opted for an inter-rater reliability test using the percentage of agreement to ensure its reliability. Lastly, the nine most frequent errors were recorded and used for reference.

Findings

This study aimed to identify the most common errors made by secondary school students in narrative writing, focusing specifically on surface and linguistic taxonomies of Error Analysis. The research addressed the central question: What are the most frequent errors made by secondary school students in writing based on surface taxonomy and linguistics taxonomy of

errors? Through this analysis, the study aimed to uncover key areas where students face the greatest challenges, which can inform targeted strategies for improving their writing development. Data for the study were gathered using a writing test, followed by an error analysis of 52 writing samples. The identified errors were then organised and presented in terms of frequency and percentage for clearer interpretation.

Type of Errors: The writing errors were analysed with two types of taxonomies that work as its framework in identifying the most common errors made by students in writing. The two taxonomies are surface taxonomy, which covers the errors made by omission, addition, misformation, and misordering in writing structure, and linguistics taxonomy, which covers the errors made by incorrect lexical choice, morphological, syntax structure, and semantics. Surface taxonomy concerns the errors that are made by an omission or addition of function words like the verb to be subject, article, conjunction, preposition, and relative pronouns. Errors recorded in the test showed that students tend to omit certain words like the verb to be, article, subject, and conjunction. In addition, students tend to add extra verbs to be, prepositions, and relative pronouns in composing the sentences. Next, students also made errors in misordering and misformation of words that involved incorrect placement of words or incorrect insertion of words in the sentences. These errors are categorised as surface taxonomy since it is apparent on the surface level of language production.

In addition, the study also analysed the errors categorised in linguistics taxonomy that cover the linguistics aspect of writing production. Based on the result of the test, students made errors in grammar, such as the wrong use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, and spelling. As for the lexical errors, students committed errors that involved incorrect selection of words like prepositions and conjunctions. These function words, known as part of speech (POS), are essential to the meaning of the sentence, as the wrong selection of prepositions or conjunctions in a sentence can alter the whole meaning. Another error in linguistics is morphological, as it involves the misapplication of word forms, such as incorrect use of prefixes, suffixes, and inflections. Since students made frequent mistakes in the tenses and subject-verb agreement, students also made similar errors in forming the word with prefixes, suffixes, and inflections. Lastly, the errors in semantics refer to the incorrect use of words or phrases that do not convey the intended meaning.

Percentage of Frequency Errors: To address the research question, "What are the most frequent errors made by secondary school students in writing based on surface taxonomy and linguistic taxonomy of errors?" this study utilised TagAnt software to tag the errors, which were then processed through AntConc for easier calculation. The total number of errors and the percentage of each error category were then analysed in terms of frequency and percentage. Table 1 presents the total number of errors from both taxonomies, along with their corresponding percentages.

Table 1

Total Number and Percentage of Errors Based on Surface and Linguistic Taxonomies

Errors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grammar	443	42.64
Lexical	127	12.22
Morphology	130	12.51
Semantics	25	2.40
Omission	191	18.29
Addition	66	6.35
Misformation	40	3.85
Misordering	17	1.84

Most Common Errors: Based on the data collected, the study further broke down each error category to identify the more specific errors made by secondary school students. This detailed analysis was conducted to provide valuable insights into the frequent patterns of errors to educators, which can help them pinpoint targeted areas to focus on in order to improve students' writing proficiency. The analysis works by observing the common errors they made under each category along with its common patterns. Hence, the study found 9 of the most frequent errors made by secondary school students, encompassing both surface and linguistics taxonomies. This result shows that the most common errors made by secondary students are:

1. Tenses (verb tense use)
2. Subject-verb agreement (SVA)
3. Omission of articles, verbs, conjunctions
4. Morphology (inflections, suffixes)
5. Lexical (word choice)
6. Addition (conjunction)
7. Misformation (insertion of words)
8. Semantics (meaning of words and phrases)
9. Misordering (placement of words)

Table 2

The Nine Most Frequent Errors in Secondary School Students' Writing Based on Surface and Linguistic Taxonomies

Taxonomy	Error	Example	Corrections
Linguistics	Grammar - tenses	My age at that time <u>is</u> 9 years old.	My age at that time was 9 years old.
Linguistics	Grammar-SVA	She really <u>like</u> drawing, so am I.	She really likes drawing, and so am I.
Surface	Omission - articles	I felt very lucky and grateful because I had him as * friend.	I felt very lucky and grateful because I had him as <u>a</u> friend.
Surface	Omission - verb	We became close and * our break * <u>lunch time</u> together.	We became close and <u>spent</u> our break and <u>lunchtime</u> together.
Surface	Omission - conjunction	At first I met her at school she was a very snob * actually she was a kind person.	At first I met her at school she was a very snob, <u>but</u> actually she was a kind person.
Surface	Addition - verb to be	We <u>play</u> almost <u>everyday</u> and <u>became</u> <u>a</u> close friend.	We played almost every day and became close friends.
Linguistics	Morphology - inflection	My bestfriend <u>name's</u> is Amy Ellysha.	My best <u>friend's</u> name is Amy Ellysha.
Linguistics	Morphology - suffixes	I hope we can stay like this forever and <u>hopping</u> nothing <u>can't</u> break our friendship.	I hope we can stay like this forever and <u>hope</u> nothing <u>can</u> break our friendship.
Linguistics	Lexical - word choice	After <u>a</u> exam we studied together <u>about</u> our next exam.	After <u>an</u> exam, we studied together for our next exam.
Linguistics	Semantics	She <u>sit</u> beside <u>by name</u> roll.	She sits beside me.
Surface	Misformation - insertion of words	* Teacher <u>say</u> that he is a new student from <u>other</u> school moving here.	<u>The</u> teacher <u>said</u> that he is a new student from <u>another</u> school, moving here.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the most common errors made by secondary school students fall under the linguistics taxonomy, such as tenses, subject-verb agreement, morphology, and lexical. The data recorded shows that 42.64% of errors made by students are related to grammar, and this includes errors in spelling, verb tense usage as well as subject-verb agreement. The findings are aligned with previous studies of Error Analysis in the Malaysian context as students are most struggling with the use of correct verb tenses like Ang et al. (2020), Singh (2020), Ibrahim and Othman (2021), and Sazali et al., (2024). The primary causes of these errors can largely be attributed to the complexity of English grammar rules and the over-generalisation of those rules, leading students to apply them incorrectly in sentences (Lim, 2021; Eng & Lim, 2020; Khairunnisa & Samad, 2023). Furthermore, ESL students require a longer period and more rigorous training to master them. Unlike native speakers who absorb these rules naturally through consistent exposure and practice from an early age, ESL learners must consciously study and apply these rules, which can be cognitively demanding. Alongside tense usage, subject-verb agreement is a key area where students often need help because English requires the verb to change based on whether the subject is singular or plural, and this rule can become confusing in complex sentences. Both tenses and subject-verb agreement require more than just memorisation- they must be understood in a real-world context. Students need to practice applying these rules in sentences that express different actions and times. Grasping these rules takes time, and error analysis can help by identifying common mistakes like tense misuse and subject-verb agreement issues. By focusing on these patterns, teachers can provide targeted feedback, helping students improve their language skills more effectively in the classroom.

Next, an 18.29% common error in the writing test is categorised as the omission of the surface taxonomy, which involves the omission of part of speech (POS) in the sentence, which can interrupt the meaning of the composition. The most common POS omitted in the sentences are articles, conjunctions, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs. When key elements like articles, conjunctions, prepositions, or auxiliary verbs are left out, the sentence often becomes incomplete or confusing. For example, omitting an article like “a” or “the” can cause ambiguity, while missing conjunctions may result in fragmented ideas. Similarly, the absence of prepositions can lead to unclear relationships between objects or ideas, and leaving out auxiliary verbs may affect the tense and meaning of the action being described. These omissions often stem from students not fully understanding the role each part of speech plays in constructing clear and grammatically correct sentences. Addressing this issue requires students to practice recognising and properly using these elements in context to ensure their writing is both grammatically accurate and meaningful.

Furthermore, the result also showed that 12.51% of the common errors were contributed by the morphology of linguistics taxonomy, as the students are having difficulty using the correct inflection of the part of speech that is used in the sentence. The most common inflection errors would be the inflection of plural/singular -s for verbs and nouns, progressive tense -*ing*, and past tense -*ed*. Moreover, morphological errors also include incorrect word formation, and the most common error written is “bestfriend” instead of “best friend” with a space in between to describe the noun friend with the adjective best that conveys the meaning of closest or most valued friend. These errors indicate a lack of understanding of grammatical rules governing word modifications, leading to confusion over verb forms and

the omission of plural markers. As a result, students often misinterpret the structure and meaning of words, which distorts their intended messages. To address these issues, targeted instruction focusing on word formation, affixation, and the proper use of inflections is necessary to help students improve the accuracy of their writing.

Besides, 12.22% of the most common errors reported are pertinent to lexical choice in the composition. Most errors of lexical choice include verbs that have the same pronunciation but are spelt differently and differ in semantics, for example, “hopping” and “hoping”. In this example, students may not realise the former refers to jumping while the latter expresses a desire or expectation. This confusion often leads to sentences that are grammatically correct but semantically incorrect, resulting in unclear or unintended meanings. Such errors highlight the importance of understanding not just the sound or spelling of words but also their precise meaning and context of use. Addressing lexical choice errors requires practice in vocabulary building, exposure to varied contexts, and learning to distinguish between similar-sounding or closely related words to ensure more accurate word selection in writing. This is followed by 6.35% of addition errors in the surface taxonomy where additional or repetition of the verb to be and preposition. The unnecessarily repeated words that disrupt the flow and clarity of the sentence are contributed by the lack of understanding regarding when these elements are necessary or how to properly structure sentences without redundancy. The remaining errors related to misformation (3.85%) where involve errors found in sentence structure like the incorrect insertion of POS in the structure that can be considered unnecessary. These errors often arise when students mistakenly add words that are unnecessary or that alter the grammatical integrity of the sentence. Likewise, these types of errors highlight the need for students to better understand the functional role of each word in a sentence.

Following that, 2.40% of errors are contributed by semantics as it refers to issues pertinent to the meaning of words and phrases. These errors occur when words or expressions are used incorrectly or ambiguously, leading to misunderstandings or incorrect interpretations of the intended message. In this data, it was observed that students made up confusing and incoherent sentences like “She sit beside by name roll.” This indicates that student struggles with choosing appropriate words or phrases to clearly express their thoughts, leading to incoherent or ambiguous sentences. Lastly, 1.64% of the errors are contributed by misordering, which involves incorrect placement of POS in the sentence structure that can be overtly idiosyncratic; for example, “me and my friend” is considered incorrect because in referring to oneself and another person, it should be written “my friend and I”. In this example, the writer places the subject in incorrect order. Even though this expression may seem acceptable in casual speech, it does not follow the formal rules of English grammar, where the speaker should come last in a subject phrase. Such errors point to a need for a better understanding of sentence structure and word order conventions in English.

Concisely, addressing these various errors requires focused instruction on sentence formation, proper use of grammatical elements, and the meaning and placement of words in a sentence to ensure clarity and grammatical correctness.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the frequency and type of errors made by 52 Malaysian secondary school students in the suburban area of Selangor with proficiency between beginner and intermediate. Based on the analysis carried out, the study identified the nine most common errors made by secondary students in writing a narrative essay. The errors recorded in this study showed that the most common errors, like subject-verb agreement and verb tense, remain the most challenging aspect of learning English writing and also the common result reported by previous studies. There are multiple reasons behind this, and it could be attributed to students' lack of exposure and practice, language transfer as well as inconsistent teaching methods. Likewise, narrative writing has more language features that students have to be fluent in order to produce a high-quality piece of writing. These features include tenses, subject-verb agreement, and complex sentence structure to retell the story. Students also seem to be struggling to choose the correct verb inflection in the sentence when it involves the tenses and subject-verb agreement. The confusion also extended to lexical and morphology errors because students made errors in word selection, like adjectives to describe the context and incorrect word formation. To improve the delivery of content in the form of text, students must be able to select the correct inflection and tense. Besides, the omission of function words like articles, verbs, and conjunctions in the sentence also contributes to the second most common error made by students in their writing. Lastly, due to poor knowledge of word application and sentence structure, students made errors in misformation, misordering, and, substantially, the semantics. From these insights, it becomes clear that the recurring errors, such as incorrect verb inflections, omission of function words, and confusion with lexical choices, suggest that students need more targeted practice and exposure to these core elements. Furthermore, the inconsistencies in teaching methods and language transfer issues may be hindering students' ability to internalise these rules. To improve students' writing proficiency, highlighting these errors and incorporating them into language learning through a structured, context-rich environment can be highly effective in improving overall language development. This approach would not only help reduce surface-level errors but also strengthen their overall linguistic competence, enabling them to produce clearer, more coherent narrative texts.

Future research could simultaneously examine students across various educational levels, such as primary, secondary, and tertiary, to compare the different types of errors that occur and explore the underlying reasons for the common errors shared among these groups. Additionally, it is crucial for educators to utilise the study's findings to develop effective intervention strategies for teaching key language aspects, like verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, lexical choice, parts of speech, and semantics, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of language learning.

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