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Barriers Faced by Intermediate Students in Written Expression of English

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a qualitative research study that identified barriers faced by intermediate students in their written expressions and possible solutions. The study included 50 intermediate-level students from diverse language, cultural, and educational backgrounds at Intermediate colleges of Islamabad. Analysis uses Pit Corder's model to categorize participants' errors. Grammar and vocabulary, with 50% and 23.3% errors, were the most difficult for participants, according to the manuscripts. The study suggests adding grammar and vocabulary exercises and assignments to language learning programs to help students overcome these obstacles. The study stresses the importance of identifying language learners' weaknesses and treating them. This study can help language instructors and curriculum developers design effective courses and tools for intermediate-level students of English language.

Keywords: Qualitative Research Study, Barriers, Intermediate Students, Written Expressions, Pit Corder's Model, Grammar, Vocabulary

Introduction

Second language learners at the intermediate level are those who have attained the fundamentals of a second language and are now pursuing more advanced degrees of competency. Although they are proficient in grammar, vocabulary, and communication, they could nevertheless find it difficult to understand more intricate language structures and idioms. These students can frequently speak clearly in social settings, but they could struggle to use more technical or academic language. Intermediate-level learners may start to concentrate on certain areas of interest, such business or academic language, as they continue to hone their language skills.

Lack of possibilities for outside language practice is one of the biggest problems intermediate-level second language learners encounter. Although they might speak the language rather well, they might not have access to native speakers or opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the language and culture. This may result in a language development plateau and impede their advancement to advanced proficiency. The initial enthusiasm of studying a new language may wear off, so intermediate-level students may also have trouble staying motivated and interested in the subject.

Background of the Study:

Intermediate-level students may find it difficult to successfully express themselves in writing due to a variety of obstacles, including language, cognitive, sociocultural, and technical challenges. These challenges might adversely affect their capacity to communicate effectively and clearly in English.



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Statement of the Problem:

Students at the intermediate level struggle with a number of challenges while seeking to express themselves clearly in writing. The challenges that people could run into can include linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and technological aspects. The presence of these barriers may negatively impact students' writing abilities as well as their ability to communicate effectively in English. The researcher's goal is to identify the obstacles intermediate students have when writing, and to investigate the factors that contribute to these obstacles. The study's objective is to examine successful instructional approaches that can address the issues mentioned above and enhance students' writing abilities. The outcomes of this investigation could potentially impact the field of language pedagogy, as they offer valuable perspectives on strategies to improve the writing proficiency of English language learners at the intermediate level.

Research Questions:

The research questions for the study are following:

What are the prevalent linguistic obstacles encountered by intermediate-level students in their written expression?

What is the impact of socio-cultural factors on the obstacles encountered by intermediate-level students in written expression?

What are the efficacious teaching methodologies to surmount the obstacles encountered by intermediate-level students in written communication?

Objectives of the Study

The study is aimed at to

Determine the linguistic obstacles encountered by English language learners at an intermediate level in the context of written expression.

Examine the socio-cultural elements that contribute to the obstacles encountered by intermediate-level students in their written expression.

Investigate efficacious pedagogical approaches that can be employed to surmount the hindrances encountered by intermediate-level students in the domain of written expression.

Significance of the Study:

The importance of this study resides in the fact that it deals with a significant problem in the teaching and learning of the English language. English language learners at the intermediate level encounter a number of barriers when writing that may impair their ability to communicate clearly. This study can assist build effective teaching strategies to help students overcome these barriers and improve their written expression skills by identifying these barriers and looking into the variables that cause them. For those involved in the development and implementation of language instruction programs, such as curriculum designers and policymakers, the study's findings may be helpful. The study can also assist students in developing their written expression skills and communication abilities in English, which will ultimately boost their career and personal development.

Review of Literature:

According to Corder (1974, p. 25), "It is very difficult to assign the cause of failures in comprehension to an inadequate knowledge of a particular syntactic feature of a



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misunderstood utterance". In fact, a deviation from the rules of the target language qualifies as an error. Several studies have been conducted on the relevance of error analysis in the English writing skills of intermediate level students. Sarkar & Dave (2022) conducted a case study to prove the scope of error analysis in English written texts of ESL students. Jabeen et al. (2015) analyzed the writing assignments of university students as well as intermediate English learners for the purpose of error analysis.

For L2 English speakers, learning to correctly use English articles can be difficult, especially if their L1s do not have a similar article structure. The use of articles in oral and written narratives by Korean English language learners at various competence levels was explored by Lee, J. (2013). The findings demonstrated that learners had cognitive and performance challenges while accurately constructing articles in oral narratives. More substantial problems than the definite article were presented by the indefinite article. The study discovered that whereas advanced learners had stabilized in their usage of articles, intermediate learners had a considerable gap between their implicit and explicit knowledge of English articles. The results imply that writing exercises can help beginners better understand the English article system. Advanced learners can employ speaking activities to encourage appropriate article generation while making use of their explicit understanding of English articles in both speech and writing.

The objective of the study by Aghayani, B., and Janfeshan, K. (2017) was to examine the effect of self-directed learning on Iranian EFL students' writing proficiency at the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. 30 male EFL students in all were chosen at random to take part in the study, which included a control and an experimental group. Both groups completed a post-test following the treatment and the results were compared to the pre-test scores. An independent sample t-test was used to examine the efficacy of the two strategies. According to the results, self-directed learning significantly improved the students' writing skills at both levels. The growth of writing abilities between the two groups at each level also differed significantly.

Al-Seghayer (2014) identified the four most common constraints affecting English teaching in Saudi Arabia, which include the tendency of students to memorize grammatical rules and passages of written English. Khazaal (2019) found that error analysis is important for learners and teachers as it provides a good methodology for investigating learners' errors in English. Zawahreh (2012) conducted a study to identify the written errors of English committed by the tenth grade students in Ajloun schools, Jordan. Nadya & Muthalib (2021) aimed to find out the types of errors made by students in written English. Povolná (2012) analyzed a corpus of Master's theses written by non-native novice writers to find out which discourse markers Czech students of English use when expressing causal and contrastive relations.

The role of error analysis in comprehending the tactics and procedures utilized in the process of second and foreign language learning is examined in the study by Jabeen, Kazemian, and Mustafai (2015). According to the authors, error analysis is an essential component of learning second and foreign languages as well as applied linguistics since it offers insights into the intricate processes of language development and a methodical technique to recognize, describe, and explain students' errors.

The study focuses primarily on the causes of the poor written English performance of Iranian and Pakistani EFL students, who must take English at all levels in their educational institutions and schools. Through an analysis of the written assignments produced by university students and intermediate English learners, the researchers discovered a deficiency in grammatical accuracy and a lack of confidence in applying grammatical rules in their English writing. The research findings suggest that the



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grammatical proficiency of English language learners is significantly influenced by the grammatical rules of their primary language (L1).

The results obtained from this research hold noteworthy consequences for the pedagogy and acquisition of additional languages. According to their assertion, enhancing language acquisition programs requires a more comprehensive comprehension of the methods and tactics employed by learners to attain proficiency in a second or foreign language, in addition to the capacity to identify and evaluate their mistakes. The research underscores the significance of facilitating the growth of learners' primary language (L1) alongside their acquisition of a secondary or non-native language. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for language instructors to be cognizant of this impact in their pedagogical approach.

Research Methodology:

This study aims to look into the challenges intermediate-level students encounter when writing. To achieve this, the researcher employed a qualitative study design, which includes techniques for acquiring and interpreting qualitative data.

Participants:

The participants of this study comprised of intermediate-level college students who were registered at the Federal Government College of Islamabad. To guarantee the incorporation of a diverse group of individuals with differing linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences, the study employed a purposive sampling method to select its participants. A group of 50 students, classified as intermediate level, and with ages spanning from 15 to 20, were subjected to observation.

The methodology employed for the gathering, categorization, and examination of data was founded on Pit Corder's (1973) framework. Error analysis is a widely used term in the field of language acquisition that pertains to the identification and analysis of errors made by learners during the process of acquiring a new language. The method of error analysis involves a sequence of steps, which can be enumerated as follows:

Data Collection:

The first step is to gather data from language learners. This was accomplished by using examples of spoken or written language, such as essays, speeches, and casual chats. The writing that intermediate students generated served as the main source of data for this study.

Error Identification:

Identifying the mistakes that language learners make is the next stage. This can be done by comparing language samples to the target language, such as the English grammar rules. It was done in this study by carefully analyzing the primary data.

Error Categorization:

Once errors are discovered, they are categorised according to kind, such as grammatical, lexical, or syntactical errors. Grammatical, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure problems were the main categories for errors in this study. Additional categories for mistakes in omission, addition, misformation, order, substitution, deletion, and conflation were also used to aid in comprehension.



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Error Analysis:

The errors are then examined in order to ascertain their origin. The context in which the errors were made, the learner's first language, or the learner's degree of skill can all be taken into account to accomplish this.

Error Correction:

The last step is to give language learners feedback so they may fix their mistakes. This can be accomplished in two ways: explicitly, by giving the appropriate form, or implicitly, by giving instances of proper language usage.

Error analysis with Pit Corder's approach to error analysis in second language learning was also utilized in this study which is based on the following:

Error Type	Description	Example
Omission	Errors due to leaving out a required element	"I have book"
Addition	Errors due to adding an extra element	"She eated lunch"
Misformation	Errors due to using incorrect verb tense, pluralization, or other form	"He writed a letter"
Misordering	Errors due to incorrect word order	"Yesterday I have seen a movie"
Substitution	Errors due to using the wrong word or form in a sentence	"I go to work by walk"
Deletion	Errors due to leaving out an element that should be included	"She gave me a present on my birthday, and I was very happy _ it"
Conflation	Errors due to combining two or more forms or rules inappropriately	"I have been in Paris last summer"

This table shows the different types of errors that Pit Corder identified in his approach to error analysis in second language learning. The categorization of errors can help teachers and researchers to identify areas of difficulty for second language learners and develop targeted interventions.

Analysis & Interpretations

Based on the collected data, the errors were identified by using English language's basic rules of grammar and syntax. Some of the following were the results after the careful analysis of the written texts of intermediate students.

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Grammar	150	50%
Vocabulary	70	23.3%
Spelling	20	6.7%
Punctuation	30	10%
Capitalization	10	3.3%
Sentence Structure	20	6.7%



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Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Total	300	100%

The table offers an examination of the errors found in the 50 intermediate-level students' writing projects. Grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure were the six areas used by the instructor to grade the assignments.

The table reveals that grammar-related errors account for 150 of the total errors, making them the most prevalent form of error. The errors included incorrect usage of the articles, subject-verb agreement, and verb tense, among other things. Vocabulary errors are the second most frequent form of error, accounting for 70 errors overall and 23.3% of all errors. These errors included misusing words or putting them in the wrong situations.

With 20 errors found, or 6.7% of all errors, spelling mistakes are the third most frequent form of problem. These mistakes included erroneous capitalization or misspellings of words. Thirty errors, or 10 per cent of the total, were punctuation errors. Misuse of commas, periods, and other punctuation marks was among these mistakes.

There were only 10 capitalization errors, or 3.3% of all errors, in the sample. These mistakes included using capitalization in the wrong places for proper nouns, titles, and other words. Last but not least, 20 errors—or 6.7% of all errors—were due to mistakes in sentence construction. The errors included run-on phrases, incorrect word placement, and flaws in subject-verb agreement.

Overall, this error analysis reveals that the most common areas of difficulty for this course's students are grammar and vocabulary. The teacher would want to consider including more focused instruction on these subjects, including grammar drills and vocabulary-building exercises, to address these problems. Additional practice with spelling and punctuation, which were also noted as frequent areas of error, may also be helpful for students. Students can enhance their writing abilities and become more equipped for future academic and professional activities by tackling these problems.

Omission:

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Omission	30	10%

Omission errors happen when a sentence lacks a necessary component. 30 instances of omission mistakes were found in this case, making up 10% of all errors found.

Addition:

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Addition	10	3.3%

Addition errors happen when a sentence has an extra element. 10 instances of addition errors were found in this research, making up 3.3% of all faults found.

Mis-formation:

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Mis-formation	70	23.3%



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Misformation errors occur when incorrect verb tense, pluralization, or other form is used in a sentence. In this particular analysis, there were 70 instances of misformation errors, accounting for 23.3% of all errors identified.

Mis-ordering:

Misordering errors occur when the word order in a sentence is incorrect. In this particular analysis, there were 20 instances of misordering errors, accounting for 6.7% of all errors identified.

Substitution:

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Substitution	150	50%

Substitution errors occur when the wrong word or form is used in a sentence. In this particular analysis, there were 150 instances of substitution errors, accounting for 50% of all errors identified.

Deletion:

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Deletion	0	0%

Deletion errors occur when an element that should be included in a sentence is left out. In this particular analysis, there were no instances of deletion errors identified.

Conflation:

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Conflation	0	0%

Conflation errors occur when two or more forms or rules are combined inappropriately in a sentence. In this particular analysis, there were no instances of conflation errors identified.

Table: Error Analysis Using Pit Corder's Method

Error Type	Description	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Omission	Errors due to leaving out a required element	30	10%
Addition	Errors due to adding an extra element	10	3.3%
Misformation	Errors due to using incorrect verb tense, pluralization, or other form	70	23.3%
Misordering	Errors due to incorrect word order	20	6.7%
Substitution	Errors due to using the wrong word or form in a sentence	150	50%
Deletion	Errors due to leaving out an element that should be included	0	0%
Conflation	Errors due to combining two or more forms or rules inappropriately	0	0%



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Based on the given data, the majority of errors (50%) fall under the category of substitution, which includes errors such as using the wrong word or form in a sentence. This shows that vocabulary and/or proper grammatical usage may be issues for some students. Misformation makes up 23.3% of errors and includes mistakes like employing the wrong verb tense or pluralizing, suggesting that students may potentially be having trouble with grammatical structures.

Misordering makes up 6.7% of errors in sentence structure, which suggests that students may struggle with word order. Similar to this, 10% of mistakes involve punctuation, which could potentially be indicative of problems with sentence structure.

Spelling and capitalization mistakes make up fewer than 7% and 3.3% of all errors, respectively. This implies that students may understand spelling and capitalization standards rather well, but may be having more difficulty with grammar and vocabulary.

Pit Corder's taxonomy, used as a whole, offers a more thorough explanation of the particular types of errors committed by the students, which can assist in identifying areas where students may require more assistance or teaching. For instance, educational strategies could be adjusted to concentrate on expanding vocabulary and enhancing learners' capacity to select the appropriate term or form if they frequently substitute words or forms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to examine the difficulties intermediate-level students have in expressing themselves in writing, as well as the solutions to these difficulties. The study examined the written work of 50 intermediate-level students in Pakistani institutions using a qualitative research design and Pit Corder's approach to error analysis. The findings revealed that students struggled most with grammar and vocabulary, which accounted for 50% and 23.3% of errors, respectively. Other areas where students erred were in capitalization, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling. The study concludes that in order to help students improve their written expression, teachers should give students more targeted teaching in grammar and vocabulary, including grammar drills and vocabulary-building activities. In order to assist students in correcting their mistakes, teachers can also offer feedback and adjustments. The efficacy of various tactics and treatments to enhance intermediate English language learners' written expression can be investigated in more detail.

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