

An Analysis of Common Errors in EFL Writing among Albanian and Montenegrin Upper High School Students

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Abstract

This study focuses on the writing errors of Albanian and Montenegrin high school EFL students. The research will focus on identifying the EFL students' writing errors and investigating the students' perception regarding their exposure to English Language writing. The instruments used for the collection of the data were a questionnaire and an essay examination. The participants of the research were 100 students from "Beco Bašić" High school located in Plav, Montenegro, and "Džafer Nikočević" High school, located in Gusinje, Montenegro, where classes are held in two languages, Albanian and Montenegrin. The method which was used to obtain the data was Stratified sampling.

Keywords: Writing problem, Punctuation, Language use, EFL context
Grammatical Mistake, Error, Cause, Type, Native Language Interference

1. Introduction

Writing skills are of the utmost importance in school as it is crucial for language learning and performance, and it enables students to transmit their knowledge while sharing their opinions and ideas with others. Regardless of how long the EFL (English as a foreign language) students have been learning English, they tend to commit errors in their English language writing for the reason that it is considered to be a difficult task for most of them (Wee, Sim, and Jusoff, 2009). According to Hammadi and Sidek (2015), writing is a mechanism for students to communicate professionally with their classmates and teachers while also engaging in learning activities. Hence, it can aid in the development of social skills and the promotion of critical thinking in students, as it helps learners think critically when presenting an argument and making a decision. Writing has long been regarded as a difficult skill and a complex recursive process requiring a wide range of information (e.g. grammar, genre, vocabulary, and metacognitive competencies). As it has been proven through various research over the last few decades, the ability to correctly organize thoughts using appropriate structures could be a way of assessing writing proficiency (Amalia, H., Abdullah, F., & Fatimah, A.S.(2021). The main goal of language teaching is to ensure that students are proficient in at least some of the core language skills. In Montenegro, research regarding English writing in upper high schools, on the other hand, has received relatively little attention. Furthermore, researchers have paid close attention to the structural and functional changes in language, where a representation of the errors is a core area of this study, as good writing necessitates a text with a wide range of vocabulary, as well as a text with a complexity of syntax and morphology (Leki, 2001). The main goal of this study is to determine whether Albanian and Montenegrin EFL students have efficient English writing skills, correspondingly, evaluate the student's writing errors. Moreover, it aims to determine the profile of the student's age, native language, academic year, available resources at home, and utilization frequency. This study focuses particularly on the context of Albanian and Montenegrin EFL students in "Beco Bašić", Upper High School in Plav Montenegro, and "Džafer Nikočević", Upper High School in Gusinje Montenegro.

2. Literature review

The aim of the study was to look into EFL learners' writing challenges, the variables that stifle their ability to grow their writing skills, and ideas for improving their writing abilities. Students' errors reveal the language learning outcomes and the strategies or approaches the teacher utilizes in language teaching. Corder (1967) asserts that EFL students' errors are essential since they are a reflection of the language learning process. Over time, the term "error" has been defined in a variety of ways. Lennon (1991) highlights that errors are defined as "[a] linguistic form or a combination of forms, which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production, would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speakers' native counterparts," (p. 182). Leading to the significant importance of this study, James (1998) addresses the issue that the students' errors are a reflection of their fluency and progress toward the target language.

The written language differs from spoken language in that it must be precise and concise because the target audience is unknown and not present to respond. Moreover, because the audience is unknown or unavailable to provide a direct response, students must be careful with word choice and sentence construction in order to create a text that can stand independently (D. Talosa and N. Maguddayao, 2018). Writing is a difficult skill to master or teach since it is not viewed as a simple cognitive activity, but rather as a complex mental process that requires attention, discipline, and careful thought (Grami, 2010). Studies prove writing to be a skill that enables students to organize and produce ideas, improve critical thinking in students, as well as increase vocabulary and grammatical syntax. The written language must be clear, which indicates the immense importance of the development of writing skills when learning English as a foreign language, which is why this study focuses on the written errors EFL learners make.

As a further matter, when students are being taught English, they should be exposed to aspects such as rich vocabulary, appropriate sentence constructions, and paragraph organization based on punctuation marks and conjunctions (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). Moreover, Leki and Carson (1997) when comparing writing assignments in EAP and disciplinary courses, note that there is little or no reference by students toward reading selections, even though additional readings out

of school are vital for learning and developing writing skills. However, he denotes that problems with writing would not be caused by a lack of language exposure, social/emotional issues, or cultural differences. This study aims to distinguish between these two contradictions and find out whether exposure to English reading and writing affects students' writing skills.

Additionally, Hyland (2002), indicates that teaching writing is a process, and EFL students should be given as many opportunities to write as feasibly. As a result, students may be able to enhance their writing fluency and accuracy. Essays and other forms of written work are commonly used by students to demonstrate their learning outcomes. Despite this, students are frequently more perplexed about what comprises a successful essay than they are about the requirements of the assignments (Elander et al., 2006).

Forbye, educators play a critical role in helping students to become more aware of the consequences of self-reference, as well as in assisting them to identify both the choices available to them and the consequences of those choices. If students acquire this understanding, they will be able to manage their work better and overcome the considerable challenges of academic writing in a second language (Hyland, 2002). The findings of AlKhairy (2013) further highlight the importance of having competent, trained, and motivated teachers. He emphasizes the importance of restricting criticism, giving constructive feedback, and holding writing competitions to encourage and motivate students to write.

This research intends to determine which are the errors of EFL learners. In a research by Haider (2012), the most common language issues in the learners' writing were in grammar and syntax and he discovered comparable issues with vocabulary. The flaws included prepositions, articles, tenses, singular/plural, verbs, sentence structure, and the use of informal and spoken idioms. Because they are uninformed of the collocational and connotational meanings of words, students have difficulties with vocabulary. However, when the participants of this study were interviewed, none of the participants mentioned these inaccuracies as a source of concern while being interviewed. Punctuation and spelling problems were also identified in abundance in writing samples (Megaiab, 2014). Alternatively, EFL students have a tendency to spell words depending on how they sound, a process termed as phonetic perception (Al-Khairy, 2013), which leads to incorrect spelling.

Students, on the other hand, lack expertise in certain fields. Students cannot write properly if they do not have information on what they're talking about, which could consequently be a result of the student's lack of interest in reading and writing practice (Nik et al., 2010). Heavy workloads in an array of subjects, personal and financial responsibilities, family history, and just a lack of interest are all possible factors. Students tend to use their first language as a backup technique if they are experiencing difficulty writing in English. They have a tendency to translate words and borrow the grammar of their mother tongue, which is very different from English, resulting in poor writing (Myles, 2002).

English is used in a wide range of international connections, according to Al-Khasawneh (2010), including non-native to non-native communication, business, diplomacy, tourism, journalism, technology and science, politics, and so on. As a result, in today's world, the presence of excellent English writers and speakers is critical. Since the role of the English language in the world is highly increasing every day, it is assertive that speaking and writing efficiently is of great importance, which leads to the purpose of this study, which to give insight into the errors the students commit, so that both teachers and students are aware on how to improve the writing skills.

3. Methodology

This study aims to identify the writing errors of Albanian and Montenegrin students, with the intention of determining the students' exposure to English language reading and writing. Students' identities, as well as their exposure to reading and writing, were determined using a descriptive-quantitative approach. Quantitative research, according to Babbie (2010), is a technique that focuses on collecting numerical data and generalizing it by groups of individuals or understanding a specific phenomenon.

The study was conducted at "Beco Bašić" and "Džafer Nikočević", Upper High Schools, in Plav and Gusinje, Montenegro, where the classes are held in Montenegrin and Albanian languages. The main tools which were used in gathering the data were an essay collection, a questionnaire, and an interview. The questionnaire which was completed by 100 participants was separated into two parts, the first part of the survey dealt with the students' demographic

characteristics. The information included students' age, native languages, resources available at home, and average grade in English. Meanwhile, the second part dealt with the exposure the participants had with reading and writing in the English language. On the other hand, the essay collection consisted of 60 written essays by 60 participants and required the construction of a maximum of 500 words of composition based on the participants' choice. The collection of the essays helped to gauge the common errors of the EFL learners.

3.1 Participants

The focus group of this research were Upper High School students from "Beco Bašić", in Plav Montenegro, and "Džafer Nikočević", in Gusinje Montenegro, where classes are held in Albanian and Montenegrin. Hence, 50% of the students were Albanian and 50% were Montenegrin. The number of students selected as participants was 100 students; they were all a part of the questionnaire, while 60 anonymously submitted their essays. Furthermore, the majority (53.1%) of respondents were in their fourth-year level of Upper High School, furthering 26% from the third-year level of Upper High School, 13% from the second-year level of Upper High School, denoting that the majority of the respondents were the fourth-year level of Upper High School students. The participants of the questionnaire were selected by using the snowball sampling technique. The participants were of ages 15 to 19 years old. There was an equal number of participants in each school regarding the questionnaire and the collection of essays. In addition to the interview process, the English teacher Marije Dushi from "Džafer Nikočević" Upper High School was interviewed.

3.2 Procedure

The process of conducting the results started by choosing the focus group of this research and then choosing the sampling method. The participants of the study were informed beforehand that their answers and their identity will remain confidential and anonymous. They were informed that if they wanted to quit filling out the survey, they could do it without any penalization. The participants were encouraged to complete the survey honestly since the study's goal was to

identify their exposure to English Language reading and writing. Hence, 60 of the participants were asked by their teachers to write short essays with a maximum of 500 words on a topic of their own choice. Furthermore, an interview was conducted with Marije Dushi, an English teacher in “Džafer Nikočević” Upper High School with the aim of analyzing and classifying the common writing errors of EFL students. For this research, stratified sampling was chosen to collect the data.

3.3 The purpose of the study

Researchers of foreign language acquisition reached a consensus that mistakes or errors are an inevitable characteristic of foreign language learning and teaching. Error analysis has influenced the way errors are seen and dealt with in foreign language learning. When learning English as a foreign language, writing errors are frequent, therefore identifying, assessing them, and being aware of the sources is crucial in helping students learn to write effectively.

Furthermore, this study aims to identify the writing errors and the exposure the students have to English writing with the purpose of helping educators use corrective feedback, develop new strategies, and use adequate approaches, as English writing is one of the most challenging skills when it comes to English language teaching and learning.

3.4 Research questions

The study was based on two research questions: What are the writing errors that Albanian and Montenegrin EFL students make? And what is the exposure that Albanian and Montenegrin EFL students have in regard to English writing?

3.5 Measuring Instrument

In order to obtain the necessary data in conducting this study, regarding students’ English writing errors, an essay collection was made from the “Beco Bašić”, Upper High School in Plav

Montenegro and "Džafer Nikočević", in Gusinje Montenegro, where classes are held in Albanian and Montenegrin. Firstly, 60 essays were collected, 30 from Albanian students and 30 from Montenegrin students with the assistance of the teachers in these schools. Secondly, an online questionnaire from Google forms was created and utilized, as a convenient, complimentary, and easily accessible means of data collection. Using this approach enabled the design to measure more than one facet of the subject of interest. The survey which was used in gathering the data was divided into two parts. Part one of the survey dealt with the demographic characteristics of the students. The information included age, native language, as well as the resources available at home. The second part of the survey focuses on students' exposure to reading and writing. The opening part of the questionnaire consisted of an overall description presenting the aim of the study, with the intention of effectively informing students with a general idea of the content of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the manner in which the questions were designed, consisted of excluding inquiries about personal information to effectively provide respondents with anonymity while attempting to gather data from the students. In addition, every method of obtaining data has its strengths and weaknesses, therefore, an interview with one of the teachers from "Džafer Nikočević" Upper High School was conducted to gain information on the teacher's experience with EFL students' writing errors.

3.6 Piloting

The piloting process for the questionnaire was done in order to successfully gain the data needed for the research. Piloting has had an important role in the improvement of the questionnaire. The respondents' honesty and willingness to help gave suggestions that were very helpful and their experience showed some things which went unnoticed. The approach used to share the questionnaire was the snowball approach, where the questions for the feedback were shared beforehand so they are familiar with what we needed from the respondents regarding the completion of the questionnaire. The piloting process was distributed to students of the "Beco Bašić", Upper High School in Plav Montenegro and "Džafer Nikočević", in Gusinje Montenegro, and was conducted by 20 students. After receiving the participants' feedback, some of the answering options were revised. The feedback was mainly positive, however, the respondents

detected some technical mistakes which were improved right away. Some of the participants of the piloting process gave feedback on two of the questions at the end of the survey which were short answer questions, encouraging students to mention some of the mistakes they encounter when writing in English and what needs improvement. The feedback suggested that the participants preferred the multiple-choice questions since the last questions require writing and a lot of thinking, however, the feedback suggested that it benefited them since it made them reflect and think on what they can do to better improve their writing. Therefore, minor changes were made after the feedback of the respondents of the questionnaire.

3.7 Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, there were 100 participants were chosen from the Upper High Schools "Beco Bašić", in Plav Montenegro and "Džafer Nikočević", in Gusinje Montenegro.

The participants were selected for the survey and essays, meanwhile, for the interview, a teacher was chosen. There were high achievers, middle achievers, and lower achievers so the data is more relevant to see the challenges of each level of achievers. It took approximately 5 minutes for the respondents to fill out the questionnaire.

The research was handled through a questionnaire that was sent to students through an online link. The snowball sampling was utilized for the data collection process, as a result of the current pandemic situation, it was considered a safer and more convenient method. The questionnaire was distributed online to 100 respondents, from the Upper High Schools "Beco Bašić", in Plav Montenegro, and "Džafer Nikočević", in Gusinje Montenegro. The essays were collected with the help of the English teachers in the schools where the students were asked to write an essay with a topic of their choice with a maximum of 500 words. Lastly, the interview was conducted with the English teacher Marije Dushi from "Džafer Nikočević" Upper High School. The interview lasted 30 minutes and was performed online through the Google Meet platform.

3.8 Data Analysis

Following the completion of the survey, interviews, and essays, the data was analyzed. The data gathered was collected and analyzed using a qualitative method. The researcher examined each response, interview, and essay. Excel and Spreadsheets were utilized to analyze the data for the purposes of data analysis. In addition, the Google Forms record was really useful for the study, the respondents' answers were already registered in the Google forms response section, where the collected data was directly analyzed with the provided summaries of the gathered responses, subsequently, leading to the thorough analysis of each question of the survey by the members of the group. In addition, the essays were transcribed and examined using Microsoft Word. Following data collection, data analysis was carried out as the next phase in the quantitative research method.

4. Results

The results of the information were obtained through three instruments; a questionnaire, essay collection, and interview. This questionnaire intended to obtain insight into the participant's profiles and their exposure to English language writing and reading with the aim of determining if the exposure to the English language is connected to the student's development of efficiency in their writing skills. Meanwhile, the essay collection enables the thorough analysis of the written errors they commit when writing in the English language, for which a detailed classification will be made. Following a thorough content evaluation of the questionnaire instrument with the written essays and the interview, the detailed analysis of the data is presented in the results and discussion section.

The results of this research can be put to use by the professors since it provides them with ideas for improving the student's writing skills. The findings of this study have been categorized into

the following three major areas: Analysis of the essays, Analysis of the questionnaire, and Summary of the interview.

4.2 Analysis of the essays

The first and main instrument used for the gathering of the data was the essay collection, where 60 essays were collected, 30 from Albanian students and 30 from Montenegrin students with the assistance of the teachers in the "Beco Bašić" and "Džafer Nikočević" Upper High Schools. The essays demonstrated that the common EFL writing errors occur with spelling, homophones, capitalization, tense use, word order, direct and indirect speech, articles, singular and plural forms, punctuation, verb form, negative forms, linking words, determiners, prepositions, repetition of words, pronouns, incomplete sentences, and word choice. The following is a classification of the errors detected in the essays:

Classification of errors:	Number of errors:
Spelling errors:	450
Homophones:	28
Capitalization:	64
Tense:	167
Word order:	59
Direct & Indirect Speech:	32
Articles:	88
Singular and Plural forms:	98
Punctuation:	135
Verb form:	110
Negative forms:	47
Linking words:	29
Omission of the determiners:	58
Prepositions:	64
Repetition of words:	22
Pronouns:	138
Incomplete sentences:	75
Word choice:	97
Total errors:	1771

Table 1. Classification of errors

1. Spelling errors

Spelling errors have proven to be one of the most common writing errors for the majority of the participants, where 450 spelling errors were found in the essays analyzed.

Some of the students appear to struggle with the correct usage of the double letter “t”:

Students’ errors:	The correct way of spelling:
“Writen”	Written
“Functtion”	Function

Another common spelling error was found with the improper use of “l” and the double letter “ll” in the participants’ sentences, for example:

Students’ errors:	The correct way of spelling:
“Joyfull”	Joyful
“Vallued”	Valued

Other spelling errors occurred with the improper use of “m” and the double letter “mm”:

Students’ errors:	The correct way of spelling:
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“Sumer”	Summer
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Furthermore, errors that are found in a majority of essays are listed below:

Students’ errors:	The correct way of spelling
“Essey”	Essay
“Birdhday”	Birthday
“Speas”	Species
“Gumnastics”	Gymnastics

2.Homophones

Furthermore, 56% of EFL learners tend to confuse homophones in their writing for example "They're," "their," and "there", words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings, for example:

- Affect/ Effect.
- Accept/Except
- All right/ alright
- Altar/alter
- Assure/Insure/Ensure
- Breath/breathe
- Complement/Compliment
- Emigrate/immigrate
- Lead/Led
- Loose/lose

- Its past/ passed
- Principal/Principle
- Than/Then
- You're/Your
- To, two and too
- Hear and here
- Buy, by and bye

3. Capitalization

Capitalization is another common error made by the participants in their essays, where 67% of the participants seem to use incorrect capitalization. One of the biggest mistakes made in regard to capitalization was with the days of the week, the months of the year as well as capitalization of cardinal directions. Some students capitalized the center for example, “ In the Center of Croatia” and did not capitalize the names of islands, cities, and countries, for example, “Island peninsula”. Especially, the capitalization of the nominative (subjective) form I, which is always capitalized in the English Language, was written in lowercase in 32% of the essays.

4. Tense

The majority of the participants seemed to struggle with the use of tenses in their English language writing, where 70% of the essays contained errors while using tenses. A list of examples of the incorrect use of tenses is listed below:

Students' errors:	The correct way of spelling:
“It is snowing for two days.”	It has been snowing for two days.
“My brother is sleeping for three hours now.”	My brother had been sleeping for three hours.
“I have seen her yesterday.”	I saw her yesterday.
“He has returned from Podgorica last week”	He returned from Podgorica last week

“See that you will not do any harm.”	“See that you do not do any harm”
“He will help if you will ask him.”	He will help you if you ask him.

5. Word order

Moreover, there were 32% of word order mistakes found in the students' essays, as the majority of the sentences lacked the SVO(Subject + Verb + Object) word order, which changed the whole meaning of the sentences, for example:

Students' mistakes:	The correct way of spelling:
“We have also a lot of cats.”	We also have a lot of cats.
“We went today to the big castle”	We went to the big castle today
“He played yesterday football”	He played football yesterday
“I don't know very well Manchester”	I don't know Manchester very well.

6. Direct and Indirect Speech

Another common mistake which was encountered in the essays was the incorrect use of the direct and indirect object, for example:

Students' mistakes:	The correct way of spelling:
“I bought yesterday a new phone.”	I bought a new phone yesterday.
“Please finish quickly the essay.”	Please finish the essay quickly.
“He'll put on the table the food.”	He'll put the food on the table.

“He gave to Joni the bags.”	He gave the bags to Joni.
“Please send to me the homework.”	Please send the homework to me.

7.Articles

Many essays contained misused articles and missing articles, mainly errors with ‘a / an’ with uncountable nouns and omission of ‘a/an/the’ were prominent.

Students’ errors:	The correct way of spelling:
“Last Sunday, my sister took me to the good restaurant.”	Last Sunday, my sister took me to a good restaurant.
“I live in the small house in the village.”	I live in a small house in the village.
“ There is the park near my school.”	There is a park near my school.

Furthermore, examples of the omission of articles:

“The world would be much better..”	The world would be a much better place
“which also makes it very special place..”	which also makes it a very special place..

8. Singular and plural forms

It seems that students tend to make a literal translation since they translate nouns that are countable in Albanian and mistakenly assume that the uncountable nouns in English are countable. 63% of the students appeared to make incorrect use of the singular and plural forms, for example:

Student's mistakes:	The correct way of spelling:
"You will learn new <u>thing</u> "	You will learn new things
"I had one <u>exams</u> "	I had one exam
" I was doing my <u>homeworks</u> "	I was doing my homework
" I had a few day left"	I had a few days left
"Should encourage <u>student</u> to.."	Should encourage students to..
" .. us womens"	Us women
"Ideas and advice"	Ideas and advices

9.Punctuation

A major error found in the essays was the incorrect use of punctuation. Where five out of sixty essays had absolutely no punctuation marks used. Furthermore, a major issue with punctuation was in lengthy paragraphs where there is the incorrect use of commas. The students tend to link phrases with commas when it is needed to start new sentences and use full stops. In an essay, there were 103 words in a paragraph with no full stops, only four commas, and no linking words. The omission of apostrophes in pronouns "it's" and "you're" was prominent, as well as the incorrect use of columns and semicolons.

10. Verb patterns

Another common mistake distinguished in the essays was the confusion of past tenses by the students which resulted in using the incorrect verb forms, for example using “ I had learned” instead of “I learned”. It should be noted that 43,7% of the essays consisted of the use of incorrect verb forms.

1. Negative forms

Subsequently, 48% of the essays had errors with the negation of words, there were several mistakes with double negation, for example: “I did not talk to nobody”, “I did not like nothing “ and “ I don’t see nothing impressive”, which consist a negative verb and a negative pronoun. Moreover “I did not see neither the sea nor the mountains” are used as a negative verb with a negative form of conjunctions neither/nor. Also, mistakes with the negative verb and negative adverb “never” were found in the essays, for example, “I didn’t never thought that I would go there.”. Where some of the students struggled with the past simple using “I didn’t went..”, or “ I not went..” instead of “ I didn’t go..”, for example, “He did not do his homework” instead of “He hasn’t done his homework”.

2. Linking words

There was a lack of linking words in most of the essays, which creates confusion for the reader and makes the sentences less understandable. There was no connection and no logical flow between the ideas in their sentences. For example “It was funny, they made a joke” needs a linking word to show cause for example “It was funny because they made a joke.” or “We canceled the picnic, it started raining” instead of “We canceled the picnic because it started raining”.

3. Omission of determiners

Another problem found in the students' essays was the omission of determiners and the use of nominals instead of the determiners that should precede the noun phrases, for example:

Students' errors	The correct way of spelling:
"This is place for you"	This is the place for you
"Informing students about negative impact"	Informing students about the negative impact
"World would be much better.."	The world would be much better.

4. Prepositions

The majority of the students committed the errors of adding unnecessary prepositions and the misuse or the misplacement of prepositions was a major error in 63,5% of the students' essays, for example:

Students' mistakes:	The correct way of spelling:
" <u>In</u> this way"	This way
"It will help <u>to</u> improve"	It will help improve
" <u>In</u> the same time"	At the same time
"In honor <u>on</u> "	In honor of
" <u>Into</u> the classroom"	In the classroom
"My sister is afraid <u>from</u> dogs"	My sister is afraid of dogs.

“My grandmother comes home <u>in</u> Monday”	My grandmother comes home on Monday.
“She will not be available <u>in</u> that time”	She will not be available at that time.
“Sara’s birthday is <u>on</u> July.”	Sara’s birthday is in July.

5. Repetition of words

Subsequently, another common error is word redundancy and repetition in a sentence, for example: “ We searched for the bags, my bag, and my friend’s bag were not there, so we went looking for the bags” or “One of the most beautiful clubs was Trokadero which was one of the most beautiful clubs in Budva”.

6. Pronouns

A common error with pronouns in the essays was that of referring to objects with personal pronouns used for a specific person instead of an object. There is also the incorrect omission and addition of pronouns as well as the incorrect use of pronouns, examples of these errors are listed below:

Students’ mistakes:	The correct way of spelling:
“Whoever does their homework he will get a prize.”	Whoever does their homework gets a prize.
“I and she are sisters.”	She and I are sisters.
“My all toys were lost”	All of my toys were lost.

“Your problem is bigger than me”	Your problem is bigger than mine
“He didn’t let we move”	He didn’t let us move.

7. Incomplete sentences

Whereas 20% of the essays pertained to incomplete sentences, where the sentences had no natural flow and the meaning was lost. For example: “Many teenagers have plenty of freedom even though.”, “I couldn’t find.” or “This week.”

8. Word Choice

It appears that the majority of the students struggle with choosing the correct word based on the meaning of it, whereas 36% of the students had made this mistake. For example: “Attend in all the activities” instead of participate, or “Students in lessons” instead of classes.

3.3 Analysis of the questionnaire

The survey’s focus was on gaining data on the participants’ profiles and their English language reading and writing exposure. This part of the research may guide EFL teachers in understanding the reason behind their student's difficulties with the learning process.

The questionnaire is aimed at determining the students' profiles as well as their exposure to reading and writing. Additionally, this part of the study evaluated whether there is a significant relationship between the students’ writing errors and their profile and writing exposures. The online questionnaire was created and disseminated through Google Form. The survey which was used in gathering the data was divided into two parts. Part one of the survey dealt with the demographic characteristics of the students. The information included age, mother tongue, and average grade in English, meanwhile, part two dealt with the exposure of the students to reading and writing.

1. Students' profiles

The first part of the survey consisted of information on the student's profiles, such as their nationality, native language, age, and their average grade in their English Language subject. There were 100 respondents, where 50 were of Albanian nationality and the other 50 were of Montenegrin nationality, as well as the native language of the participants was 50% Albanian and 50% Montenegrin. (Chart 1)

What is your native language:
100 responses

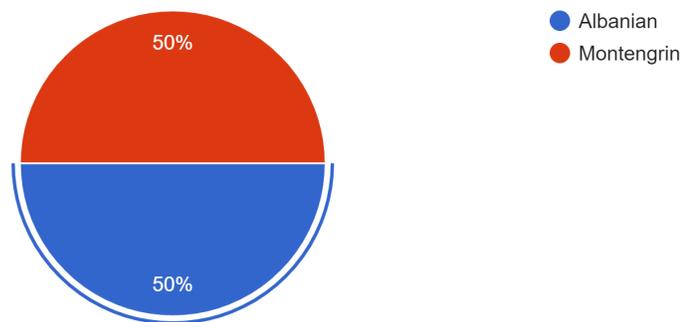


Chart 1. What is your native language?

Furthermore, this section provided insight on the respondents' age, where the majority of the respondents is of age 16 (31,7%), age 17 (23,8%), age 18 (20,8), age 15 and under (18,8) and 19 and above (5%). (Chart 2)

Please select your age:

101 responses

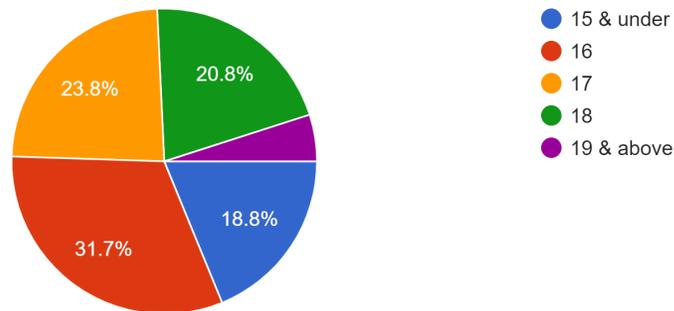


Chart 2. Please select your age

Based on the grading system 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), results show that the average grade is 3 (51% of the students), furthering with grade 2 (23,5% of the students), grade 4 (12,9 % of the students), and grade 5 (5,7% of the students). Which might denote that students' English is not proficient.

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements (by choosing the most suitable option for each statement):

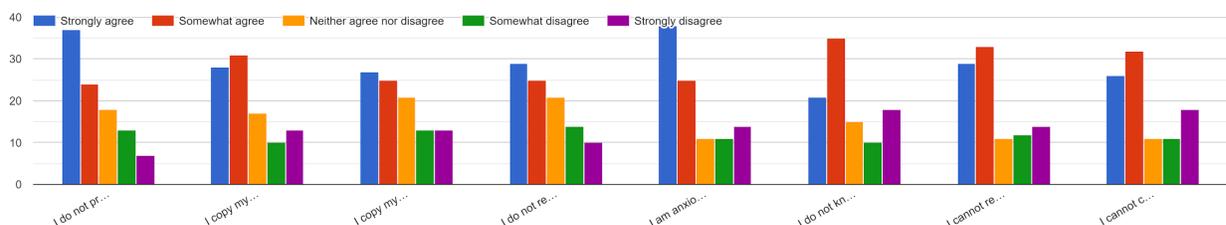


Chart 3. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements (by choosing the most suitable option for each statement)

The next section of the questionnaire focuses on the exposure that the participants have to the English Language, where findings from Chart 3, give important information on the students EFL writing, 47% of the students strongly agreed that they do not practice English writing,

meanwhile, 57% of the students somewhat agree that they copy their English homework from their classmates or the internet. Furthermore, 76% of the students strongly agree that they feel anxious when writing in English due to fear of making writing errors. Hence, 52% of the students responded that they somewhat agree to struggle with remembering how the words are spelled correctly and struggle with expressing their ideas and thoughts in English.

Do you have difficulties with English language Writing?
99 responses

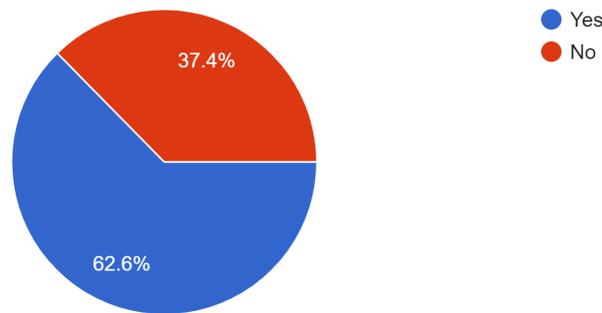


Chart 4. Do you have difficulties with English language writing

Additionally, 62% of the participants admitted to having difficulties with English as a foreign language (EFL) writing. Which denotes the lack of fluency in the English Language and lack of efficiency in English Language writing. Moreover, 41% of the respondents denoted that they do not know how to use correct punctuation marks in their English language writing, 40% of the respondents admitted to not knowing how to write the correct spelling of words in their English language writing and 37% says they do not know how to use correct punctuation marks in their English language writing. (Chart 5)

Please indicate what difficulties you might have with English language writing (by choosing the most suitable option):

62 responses

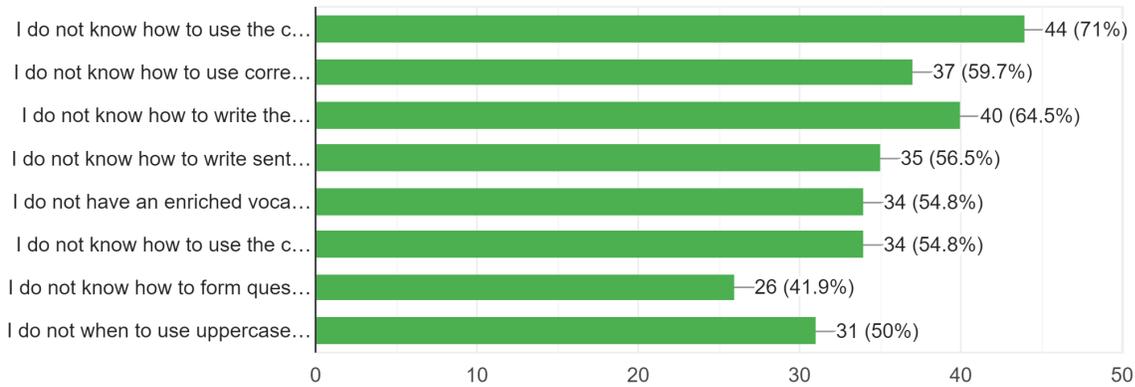


Chart 5. Please indicate what difficulties you might have with English language writing (by choosing the most suitable option):

Please select from the options given below how often you write in the English Language (by choosing the most suitable option for each statement):

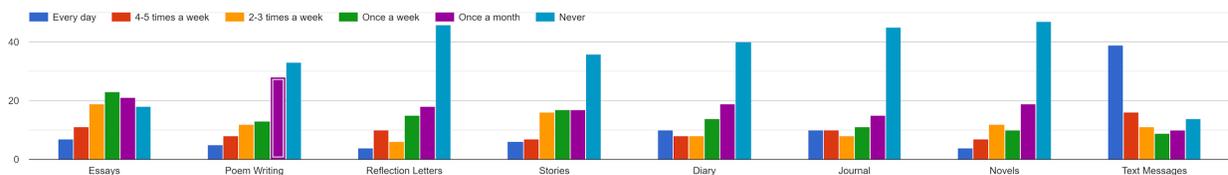


Chart 6. Please indicate how often you utilize the following resources at home (by choosing the most suitable option for each statement)

The findings of this survey indicate that EFL learners are not exposed to English Language writing, as the majority of the respondents admitted to never writing novels (71,8%), reflection

letters (67%), journals (60%), stories (35%), dairy (33%), poem writing (29,9%), essays (15,6%) and in contrary they responded to text messages (49%) in English every day.

Moreover, the participants indicate that they are less exposed to reading in the English language as 74% of the respondents admit to having never read English books, and 70% admit to having never used the dictionary.

In the last part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked what needs improvement in their English language writing and were asked to mention some of the mistakes they might make when writing in the English language. These questions consisted of answers such as “I make mistakes with upper case, lower case, and articles a lot” as well as “tenses and grammar”. Similarly, the majority of the participants responded that they need to improve their grammatical mistakes and practice English writing more often since they suggest they forget a lot of new words and struggle while memorizing English words. Spelling errors were another factor that needed improvement as they suggest they make a lot of spelling errors. Finally, the respondents suggested that they need to read more books in the English Language. In other words, they need to be more exposed to the English language, as due to this lack of exposure they struggle to express themselves in English.

3.4 Summary of the interview

The interview was conducted with one of the English teachers from "Džafer Nikočević" Upper High School. The interview was 30 minutes long and was conducted online through Google Meet. Based on her 10 years of experience as an English teacher she answered questions in regard to the student's writing errors and writing difficulties. When the English teacher was asked why she thinks EFL students commit written errors in English, she indicated that based on the errors the students make it seems to her that the student's native language influences their English writing, for example:

Student's mistake:	The correct way of spelling:
"I not play outside"	I did not play outside

The mistakes discussed by the interviewee, were mainly the same mistakes encountered in the essay collection, therefore, I will be mentioning some of the challenges that she faces when teaching English which highly influence the student's English writing and written errors. She suggested that EFL learners lack knowledge of appropriate vocabulary. She spoke about the fact that most students struggle to use the appropriate words and have difficulties with grammar. Writing is especially a challenging task for EFL students. According to her, the students tend to make mistakes in subject-verb agreement, pronouns, tenses, articles, prepositions, and sentence structures. Additionally, she mentioned that when students lack information or ideas about a topic and they tend to not do their homework or participate in-class activities, the students tend to get anxious when they encounter unfamiliar topics or words. Another challenge that the students tend to have with English writing she denoted is the demotivation that students have in regard to writing activities in the classroom or homework. She says "writing for students can be hard in their native language, hence, writing in English seems to be harder", she continues that the students confuse the writing assignments and seem confused about how to do it even when the assignment can be simple, so they become lazy to do the writing tasks, they find it hard to

write about themselves and their experiences, simply their demotivation does not allow the students to deliver their ideas through writing. She mentions a challenge that she faces when teaching English writing which is the lack of time and time limitations in the classroom, she says that most of the time the writing tasks assigned in the classroom become homework. When asked about the exposure that students have to English writing and reading, she says that students do not own dictionaries and even after urging them to bring them into the classroom, parents do not seem to pay attention to it either, and unfortunately, there is a limitation of dictionaries in the school and there are not enough available resources from which the students can learn from and be exposed to. The prohibition of phones and the lack of projectors and computers in the classroom results in having only textbooks as their material for learning English in the classroom. Another important matter discussed by her was that students' year level in Upper High School indicates that younger students commit more writing errors than the students from higher grade levels, where age and year level have an impact on their writing skills. Where students between the ages of 16 and 17 were more likely to commit errors in their writing.

In other words, as claimed by our interviewee, the EFL students commit errors due to lack of exposure to the English Language, limited time to teach English writing in the classroom, the influence of their first language, lack of available resources for teaching English at school, students' anxiety when encountering an unfamiliar word or topic and difficulties with expressing ideas. Moreover, according to the English Teacher from "Džafer Nikočević" Upper High School, common EFL writing mistakes are grammatical errors, spelling errors, and sentence structure.

5. Discussion

As this study was designed to assert the common EFL writing errors and after carefully deciphering the data collected for this study, it has been concluded that the common errors that students commit in their EFL writing are errors with spelling, homophones, capitalization, tense use, word order, use of direct and indirect objects, articles, singular and plural forms, punctuation, verb patterns, negative forms, linking words, omission of determiners, prepositions, repetition of words, pronouns, incomplete sentences, and word choice. It has been proven that the Internet influences and exposes students to the English language, as 46% of the students admit to using the internet to read in English and 23% of the students' text messages in English, however, the exposure they receive from the internet has proven to not be efficient nor effective enough to the student's English writing skills. Complementary to this, a lack of English Language resources at home and at school highly influences the EFL students' writing skills, as 74% of the respondents admit to having never read English books, and 70% admit to having never used the dictionary. Another important factor that appears to influence students' writing errors is the influence of their first language. Furthermore, 47% of the students strongly agreed that they do not practice English writing, meanwhile, 57% of the students somewhat agree that they copy their English homework from their classmates or the internet. Moreover, EFL students admit to having writing anxiety, as 76% of the students strongly agree that they feel anxious when writing in English due to fear of making errors. These insights on students' writing errors and their lack of exposure to EFL writing altogether with information regarding their difficulties with EFL writing are great assistance for teachers and students. The findings of this study could be a demonstration of how far learners have progressed in learning a language and how much more they still need to learn. The results of this study could induce teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and as well as allowing students to reflect on how they can improve their EFL writing. This study indicates that more research needs to be done on finding out which are the best strategies to improve EFL writing. In other words, as proven by the data analysis, EFL students commit errors due to lack of exposure to the English Language, limited time to teach English writing in the classroom, the influence of their first language, lack of available resources

for teaching English at school, students' anxiety when encountering an unfamiliar word or topic and difficulties with expressing ideas.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Albanian and Montenegrin students were found to be generally less exposed to EFL writing. Correspondingly, the written errors committed by English Foreign Language (EFL) learners in EFL writing are remarkably related to their writing exposure. Based on the analysis of the three instruments used to gather the data, the common errors committed by the Albanian and Montenegrin students of "Beco Bašić" High school and "Džafer Nikočević" High school are found in spelling, capitalization, tense use, word order, articles, singular and plural forms, punctuation, verb form, negative forms, determiners, prepositions, pronouns, incomplete sentences, and word choice. However, the errors detected in homophones, repetition of words, direct and indirect speech, and linking words are present but less frequent. Students' age appeared to have an impact on their EFL writing. Withal, students of age 16 and 17 were more prone to committing written errors. These findings underscore the importance of developing new teaching strategies, using adequate teaching approaches, and finding the best solutions for minimizing written difficulties and written errors.

7. Limitations

Due to the pandemic situation, most of the data was collected on an online platform which was a challenging method of reaching the respondents. Moreover, the number of participants was limited, since only 2 schools were explored. In other words, the number of students and schools can be increased in future research.

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