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Abstract

This study investigated writing errors committed by engineering students at An-Najah National University in Palestine and compared these errors based on school type. It analyzed errors in essays of 54 undergraduate students, 28 attended governmental schools, and 26 attended private schools. Errors were classified based on James's taxonomy. Results showed that both groups faced the same problems when writing in English, as the frequency of committed errors for both groups had the order of morphology, spelling, punctuation, formal, syntactic, semantic and ordering, except for formal errors being higher than punctuation for private school students. The study also concluded that no statistical significant differences were apparent in frequency of errors committed by the two groups. This indicates that private school students do not outperform their governmental school peers in school performance. Such results are necessary for parents and for the Ministry of Education as they oppose the general belief that performance of private school students is better.

Introduction

Teachers and educators of second/ foreign languages (L2) long to see students perfect the four language skills. Burns (2001) asserted the necessity for integrating all language skills for it to be learnt properly. However, Hyland (2003) believes that development in language skills requires improvement in writing. In recent years, researchers are becoming more interested in writing as it is necessary in academic and non-academic fields (Khuwaileh & Al-Shoumali, 2000). It "structures our relations with others" (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991, p.3), thus allows us to communicate our thoughts and beliefs (Lee & Van Patten, 2003). It is the tool learners use "to show what they have learnt" (Javid & Umer, 2014, p. 164). Unfortunately, writing is problematic, making it "difficult for some learners to produce a piece of writing which is interesting, clear, concise and effective" (Othman, 2007, cited in Dweikat & Aqel, 2017, p. 128).

With English becoming the international language of communication within various fields, learning the language has become a necessity. This applies mainly to those who work in fields of science and technology. Therefore, learning English can be considered "an academic requirement not only of English Departments ... but of other disciplines" (Chaleila & Garra-Alloush, 2019, p.120). Learners need it for writing a well-organized, error-free paragraph, proposal, report, or essay (Gebhardt & Rodrigues, 1989). For Schmitt and Celce-Murcia

(2002), the ability to produce an error-free piece of writing in L2 is a 'major achievement'.

Ellis (1997) asserted that learners of L2 will face challenges when writing. Students are expected to commit errors and make mistakes, especially when languages belong to different families. For example, Arabic is Semitic, while English is Indo-European, thus they will have different grammatical structures (Alhaysony, 2012) and "different ways of organizing its texts [*sic*]" (Alfaqiri, 2018, p.26). Therefore, and according to Ferris (2002) errors and mistakes are 'to be expected', however; they are necessary in the learning process and need not be neglected.

Scholars have contended that such errors are important for teachers, learners and researchers (Corder, 1967; K. Hyland & F. Hyland, 2006; Erdogan, 2005; Dulay & Burt, 1974; Richards, 1970; Gass & Selinker, 1994). For teachers, errors are 'indicators' of how language is acquired, how students' progress (Corder, 1967; Candling, 2001) and their learning strategies (Richards, 1974). They are 'red flags' that provide evidence of the learners' knowledge of L2 (Selinker, 1972). As for learners, knowing their errors becomes a necessity to "recognize and fix" them (Raimes, 1991, p.55), and "be accurate in academic and scientific writing when targeting professional audiences" (K. Hyland & F. Hyland, 2006, as cited in Momenzade et al., 2018, p. 1193).

As an English language teacher, teaching university students in Palestine, I am totally aware of the dilemma students face when writing in English despite learning it from grades 1 to 12. Such a dilemma was recognized by Mourtaga (2004) who discussed writing errors committed by the Islamic University of Gaza students stating that "language proficiency and their writing skills, in particular remain low " (p.2). Moreover, Hammad (2013) asserted the unsatisfactory level of writing and writing strategies among Palestinian university level students. Dweikat and Aqel (2017) also reached the same conclusion with students at Al-Quds Open University, stating that "a large number of students fail to master the basics of the English writing skill even after years of formal education" (p.128). Thus, there is a need to tackle such weakness in Palestine and understand causes and suggest remedies.

With this urge, I carried out this twofold study to analyze and investigate writing errors committed by An-Najah National University students based on James' error analysis taxonomy (1998), and to compare errors based on attended school type (governmental and private) to investigate if there are any significant differences in written performance between students of the two schools. Research that compares English writing academic performance of university students based on school type in Palestine is lacking and the need for such a study is asserted by Khalil (2005) and Hammad (2013) who assure having little empirical research on the writing of students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Palestine, especially at universities.

Theoretical Background

Writing in a Second Language

L2 writing, which Imaniar (2018) describes as 'onerous', is the most difficult of the language skills to acquire (Corder, 1974). EFL learners "face a lot of problems in English language in general and in particular in writing"

(Khansir, 2013, p. 363) since writing requires cognitive skills (Nunan, 1989; Singer & Bashir, 2004), sufficient knowledge of grammatical rules, lexical items and logical connections (Al-Khasawneh, 2014; Aldeibani, 2018). Research has indicated various reasons contributing to the difficulty of L2 writing, including interlingual and intralingual causes (Selinker, 1972; Penny, 2001; Boss, 2005); limited knowledge of L2 grammar and vocabulary (Silva, 1993; Olson, 1999); lack of practice (Zafar, 2016); teachers and instruction methods (Khansir, 2008; AL-Khasawneh, 2014); and student attitudes towards writing (Erkan & Saban, 2011).

Mistake vs. Error

When writing in L2, a student may commit an error or make a mistake. Norrish (1983) states that mistakes "maybe caused by lack of attention, fatigue or carelessness" (p.8), and can be self-corrected (Murad & Khalil, 2015). Whereas Richards (2002) considers the use of a linguistic item in a way a native speaker considers faulty as an 'error'. Such structures become systematic and repeated without the learner recognizing (Murad & Khalil, 2015). According to Ellis (1997) errors represent a *'gap'* in the learner's knowledge, while mistakes are occasional lapses, which need be eliminated.

Error Analysis Approach

Research on L2 acquisition has gone through a long period of advancement and today a growing consensus seems to be emerging on considering errors as 'indicators' on how learners acquire the language (Corder, 1967; Dulay & Burt, 1974; James, 1998) and a beneficial feedback for teachers on the effectiveness of their teaching techniques (Xie, & Jiang, 2007; Khansir, 2013). This advancement has led to the adoption of the Error Analysis approach (EA); a branch of Applied Linguistics which emerged in the 1960s. "It is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on errors committed by learners" (AbiSamra, 2003), which according to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2008) is a tool that helps in eradicating first language (L1) interference. With EA, the teacher can understand why students are committing certain errors and "can plan appropriate remedial lessons" (Lott, 1983, p. 256). Johansson (1975) considered EA as the best tool for explaining errors made by learners of other languages.

Lott (1983) added that there are "obvious advantages for teachers conducting their own error analysis research" (p. 256) as it has both diagnostic and prognostic purposes. It helps in pin-pointing the problem and suggesting plans to solve it. EA "provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner" (Al-Khasawneh, 2014, p. 125). When carrying out an error analysis for writing, there are different approaches to follow such as the classifications of Corder (1967), Dulay et al. (1982), James (1998) and Chanquoy (2001). In this study, James's classification of errors into grammatical, syntactic, lexical, semantic and substance errors has been adopted.

Previous Literature

Global Studies on Writing Error Analysis

Kwok (1998) stated that EA is significant for all aspects of the learning process, therefore; we find a bulk of

research adopting it in analyzing written samples of L2 learners at different levels of education. Sermsook et al. (2017) analyzed sentence errors of 26 Thai 2nd year University English major students. 17 types of errors were committed at two different levels. The sentential level, with punctuation the highest, and the word level, with articles the highest. Fareed et al. (2016) analysed 1217 errors in 30 written compositions of Pakistani undergraduates. The highest were grammatical, followed by syntax, with an abundance of spelling and punctuation errors. Ab Manan et al. (2017) studied samples from MARA University students in Malaysia. Transfer of rules, redundancy, reduction, and overgeneralization were errors committed due to mother tongue interference.

Likewise, Atmaca (2016) studied final examination writing samples of 32 elementary level students at Gazi University, Turkey. Errors fell into ten categories with prepositions and verbs first ranking (23.33% and 17.03% respectively), while gerunds and possessives the least. Momenzade et al. (2018) conducted a study to investigate errors of 42 Iranian graduate year medicine students at Shiraz University before and after taking a writing course. They used the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay et al. (1982) and concluded that omissions were the most frequent errors. The same strategy was adopted by Imaniar (2018) for analyzing 12 compositions of 9th grade Indonesian students. Omissions and misformations accounted for the most frequent errors which the researcher considered to be a result of both intralingual and interlingual factors.

In another study, Mungungu (2010) analyzed 360 examination scripts from 12th graders from different secondary schools in Namibia. Following James's (1998) Taxonomy of EA, spelling showed to be the most frequent, followed by tenses, then prepositions and finally articles. As for Vethamaiccam and Ganapathy (2017), errors committed by 37 Form One students at a private Chinese school were investigated along with interviews with students and teachers. Errors of mechanics were the most frequent, accounting for 27%, followed by tenses (22%), and word choice (19%). The least were prepositions and subject-verb agreement errors.

Writing Error Analysis Studies in the Arab World

A number of studies have been carried out on Arab learners of English employing EA, mainly in Saudi Arabia and Jordan. AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) included error types and frequencies in their analysis of 80 compositions of Preparatory Year Deanship students at Prince Sattam University in Saudi Arabia. Students committed errors in grammar (42.15%), punctuation (16.4%), followed by spelling (18.81%) then capitalization (10.19%). They also studied errors based on gender differences proving that there are statistically significant differences in grammar in favor of males, but none in non-grammatical errors. In his 2013 study, Sawalmeh examined 32 essays of male Preparatory Year Programme students at Hail University. Verb tense accounted for 16.5% of errors, articles (12.4%), then sentence fragments and spelling (11.7% and 11.6% respectively). Article errors were the focus of Alhaysony's analysis (2012) of written samples of 100 female first year students of the English Department at Hail University. Surface Structure Taxonomy was employed in analyzing errors which included omissions, additions and substitutions. Similarly, Al-Qadi (2017) analyzed article errors of 50 male students at King Saud University. Addition errors ranked highest, substitution followed and then omissions. 90 paragraphs from semester final exam papers of Computer Science, Engineering and Medicine students at King

Khalid University were examined by Nuruzzaman et al. (2018). The students mostly committed grammatical errors. They committed mechanism errors, lexical errors and semantic errors too. In 2016, Sharma studied paragraphs of 120 students from four different colleges at Jazan University. The researcher used two of Chanquoy's (2001) classification of errors— spelling and grammar. Spelling accounted for the highest of all (25.22%), followed by subject-verb agreement (23.8%), and verb tense and form (19.98%). In another study by Aldeibani (2018), a linguistic analysis of errors was conducted on scripts of male EFL majors in Sharorah-Najran University. Errors included misuse of possessives and pronouns, subject-verb disagreement, auxiliary omission/ misuse, misuse of tenses, sentence disorder, preposition and punctuation errors, word choice, spelling errors, and article errors. The study does not include frequencies, but suggests possible causes of the errors. Finally, Alqhtani (2018) investigated syntactic errors committed by 15 secondary school females in Al-Quway'iyah. The most frequent errors were of syntax (86.66%), then punctuation, articles and spelling (80% each). Native language and lack of knowledge were the main causes of errors.

In Jordan, Al-Khasawneh (2014) analyzed 26 written paragraphs of university students of different academic majors at Ajloun. Based on Chanquoy's (2001) classification, articles were the predominant errors, followed by prepositions. Additionally, Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali (2010) collected written samples in both Arabic and English from 150 Jordanian university students studying scientific subjects. Their study indicated lack of cohesion and coherence, and tense to be the most serious error. In 2016, the focus of Ngangbam was syntactic errors of 60 freshmen students specializing in a Teacher Training Programme at Mutah University. Spelling outnumbered errors (9.65%), followed by punctuation (5.77%), and fragments (5.42%). Al-Jamal (2017) examined 57 essays by EFL postgraduates at Instruction and Curricula departments at Jordanian public universities. The study concluded that structure errors outnumbered others, followed by articles, and then punctuation. Finally, grammatical and lexical errors committed by 350 10th grade students from different schools in Ajloun were analysed by Zawahreh (2012). Subject- verb agreement, prepositions, omission of main verb, tense use and wrong use of lexical items were the most predominant errors at the different levels of analysis.

Moving to other Arab countries, Hourani (2008) chose to analyze 115 essays of 3rd year male secondary students from the Eastern Coast of UAE, along with interviews with supervisors and questionnaires for teachers and students. The error with the highest frequency was subject-verb agreement (25%), then verb tense and form (22%), then prepositions (15%). An additional study by Zahra (2015) analysed written errors committed by 74 secondary school students in which fragments accounted for the highest errors, followed by spelling, punctuation, and then grammar. As for Oman, Mahmoud (2013) was concerned with the spelling. Errors of 30 English major university students were studied, indicating that 26% of spelling errors were interlingual, however; 74% of errors were intralingual. Atashian and Al-Bahri (2018) carried out a study of grammatical errors of 90 students at Nizwa University. Tenses were the most frequent errors, followed by adverbs, then pronouns. Moreover, students were interviewed to discuss their perceptions on errors they commit. To them, the reasons included differences between Arabic and English languages, lack of practice and methods of teaching. Articles were again the concern of Crompton (2011) who analyzed essays of 95 first and second year students at the American University at Sharjah. The study indicated errors with generic references as the predominant in the

written samples.

In Lebanon, Abi Samra (2003) studied 10 samples of 9th grade students taught by American and Canadian teachers. The most frequent errors were due to intralingual factors. As for Diab (1996), the analysis aimed to show mother tongue interference in the writing of 73 essays of sophomores at the American University of Beirut. They included errors in grammar, lexicon, semantics and syntax. The researcher concluded that more errors were made when English and Arabic are similar. Students of the same university were the participants in Scott and Tucker's study (1974) who analysed written and oral samples from a low-intermediate intensive English course. Students committed errors when using verbs, prepositions, articles, relative clauses, and nouns. As for Palestine, Dweikat and Aqel (2017) studied the most frequent errors in written samples of 245 sophomore EFL students of the Methods of Teaching English Department at Al-Quds Open University. The most frequent errors were in spelling (39.60%) and were due to L1 and L2. Errors of wrong word, tense, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, pronouns, and singular/plural confusion were mainly due to intralingual factors. Tenses were the focus of Al-Farra's study (2018) which analyzed writings of 31 female English major students at Al-Aqsa University, Gaza. It concluded that present perfect was the most problematic tense with a 34.27% of all tenses. Al-Aqsa University was also the scope of Hammad's study (2014), in which 60, 4th year English major sub skills were evaluated. Hammad concluded that students' greatest problem lies in the skill of language use followed by vocabulary, mechanics and organization. In another study, Mahmoud (2015) investigated common spelling mistakes of 241 UNRWA school students in the cities of Nablus and Jenin. Frequent letters, dropping letters, putting letters before others, dropping letter "e", and unpronounced letters all formed the main errors. Borraaka (2011) analyzed the compositions of 219, 12th grade students at Jericho governmental schools. The study concluded that syntactic errors had the highest frequency, followed by semantic errors. With focus on error analysis and causes of errors, none of the previous studies compare the performance of governmental and private school students when writing in EFL.

Studies on Governmental and Private School Student Performance

Comparing student performance of governmental and private schools divides researchers and educators to two groups. The first group are proponents of the idea that private school students perform better in different subjects. "[I]t seems to be commonly believed that public school graduates are handicapped academically in comparison with private school products" (Davis and Frederiksen, 1954, p.1). Research has been carried out in support of this belief. Babalola (2018) compared the performance of 15700 students in English language in Nigeria, and concluded that private school students were better than their public school counterparts. Adeyemi (2014) also compared the performance of 240 primary public and private school students in English, mathematics and social science in Nigeria. The study assured that there is a statistically significant difference in the performance, with private school students showing higher results. The same fields were analyzed by Ahmed et al. (2017) with a sample of 240 Pakistani public and private high school students. They used a questionnaire and the *Pupils' Achievement Test* (PAT). 70.1% of private school students scored above average, while 25.2% scored above average at public schools. Shabbir et al. (2014) compared performance, achievement and effectiveness of the two types of schools in Pakistan with a close-ended questionnaire distributed among

teachers, headmasters, parents and students from 60 public schools and 45 private. School achievement, mathematics, general sciences, English and Urdu were compared. Private schools outperformed in the first three, except for Urdu Language, the better performance was for public schools as it is the language of instruction. As for India, Rasool (2019) compared student performance at 240 public and private schools, showing a significant statistical difference in favor of private schools. Additionally, private school students at the Philippines showed higher achievement and motivation in the study of Bernardo et al. (2014) with a sample of 1,694 high schools students. Private school students of EFL also showed better speaking performance when Khoshsima and Toroujeni (2017) conducted their study on 220 school students.

However, some research does not agree with the common perception and has been able to show that there is no preference for private schools over governmental/public schools. For many, certain factors as social background, and school environment cause the performance disparity, and need be controlled to reach accurate results on student performance. They believe "it is time for a critical reexamination of common assumptions regarding the effectiveness of public and private schools (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005, p.699). For instance, Witte (1992) analyzed research based on the *High School and Beyond* study. He argued that any statistically significant differences in achievement between schools, after modeling achievement, are trivial in size and highly uncertain. Moreover, Kim (2012) reported no evidence on private school achievement in English and Korean being better than public schools once controlling variables as competition and student sorting. Olneck (1981) rejected the reports of Coleman et al. (1982), which considered private schools more effective. He considered their conclusions 'unconvincing', and argued that they do not use all strategies that reduce biases. Somers et al. (2004) stated that "after the effects of student background have been taken into account, the achievement differences decline markedly" (p.64) between student achievement of both schools in language and mathematics, in 10 Latin American countries based on UNESCO data.

Chudgar and Quin (2011) used the *Indian Human Development Survey* of 2005 on school children aged 8-11. The regression results of their study showed the necessity for taking certain covariates into consideration when comparing achievement outcomes of public and private schools. Once variables are matched, no significant difference can be seen. Insufficient evidence was found in their study to claim that private schools outperform public schools. As for Sassenrath et al. (1984), they studied reading and mathematics achievement of two groups of 49 high school students. One group included students who had attended private schools earlier, but shifted to public. They controlled variables as gender, age, ethnicity...etc., and concluded that financial reasons are what control the choice of schools, without claiming private schools' higher achievement. Kamwedo (2010) examined achievement based on school type with particular reference to gender in Malawi. The study concluded that boys and girls in public schools do better than in private schools.

In another study, Davis and Frederiksen (1954) compared the regressions of average grades in Liberal Arts at Princeton on ability measures for public and private school graduates at freshman and sophomore years. They found that public school graduates made a higher academic average at the two years. Peterson and Llaudet (2006) used information from the 2003 national sample of public and private school students collected as part of the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP) to compare student performance in mathematics and

reading at four different types of schools. They believe the *National Center for Education Statistics* (NCES) study of 2006, which claims that private school students do better than public ones, has some 'oddities' (p. 3). For instance, it relies on administrative data rather than data collected from students. They do not conclude from their findings that private schools are more effective in raising student test-score performance.

Finger and Schlessler (1963) carried out their analyses on a sample of 313 Colgate University students (216 attended public schools and 97 private). Once aptitude and motivational factors are matched, GPA results for both groups become more alike. Similarly, Yakubu et al. (2019) analyzed biology achievement of 361 students in Nigeria. They stated that "[t]he type of school ... did not make any difference in the determination of students' academic achievement" (p.159).

Lubienski and Lubienski are strong supporters of private schools not being advantageous. In (2006), they used data from the 2003 *National Assessment of Educational Progress* in mathematics at private, charter and public schools. They concluded that demographic differences as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race...etc. accounted for private and charter school higher achievement. Once controlled, no private or charter school means were higher than public school means. The same idea is present in their 2008 and 2005 studies. Their views were supported by Harry (2016) when analyzing mathematics and English performance in 106 schools in Trinidad.

In the study by Deraney and Abdelsalam (2012), the performance of 178 female Saudi university students was analyzed at years of admission and graduation. They concluded that once English language skills were learnt at university, public school students were able to bridge the gap and even outperform their private school peers. Al-Duwaila (2012) compared student academic performance in mathematics at 20 schools in Kuwait. The study revealed some statistical differences between the two schools in favor of private schools, but these were due to differences in "teaching methods, mathematics curriculum and educational and scholastic environmental components" (p.203).

Based on the previous literature, it can be noticed that most research on writing errors in Arab countries is recent. This indicates that teachers and researchers are becoming more aware of the necessity to understand student writing problems and suggest solutions. However, research on Palestine and mainly university students is scarce. This assures the need for this study, so as to understand the situation of writing among EFL learners in the country and raise the level of students' writing abilities. Moreover, research comparing performance of public and private schools in the Arab world is also limited. Somers et al. (2004) stated that "[w]hile much ink has been spilled over the U.S. case, there is less empirical evidence from low- and middle- income countries" (p.49). Likewise, Jimenez and Lockheed (1995) reported that till recently, evidence is restricted to developed countries.

I was unable to find any literature comparing the writing performance of university students based on the type of school they attended in Palestine. This also adds to the necessity for conducting this study which aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are the most frequent writing errors committed by EFL engineering students who attended public schools?

2. What are the most frequent writing errors committed by EFL engineering students who attended private schools?
3. Do students who attended private schools outperform students who attended governmental schools when writing in English as a foreign language at university level?

Methods

Participants

The participants of the study were 3rd-5th year engineering students at An-Najah National University in Palestine. They were 54 in total, 28 attended governmental schools, and 26 attended private schools, and study EFL. The reason for choosing engineering students is that the majority of their specialization courses are taught in English and they are obliged to write a graduation project and give a presentation in English for graduation. Therefore, mastering written English is a necessity for them.

Moreover, the researcher has been teaching *English 102* course to engineering students for five years. She has a clear idea on the problems of writing students are facing and understands the urge for identifying such problems. The participants were chosen based on their marks in *English 102* course (all got a B (80 or higher)) to avoid having students with great weakness in English. Moreover, all the participants studied the *English102* course with the researcher so as "to control the effect that various teaching instructions could have on the students' writing performance" (Momenzade et al., 2018, p1193).

Instruments and Procedures

54 essays were collected from participants and used as instruments of the study. Participants were given an hour to write 300-word essays on one of three topics: 1) *Human activities and their negative impact on the environment*, 2) *Social media can have both negative and positive effects on our lives*, or 3) *A day you will never forget*. The researcher proctored them throughout the hour and collected the papers.

The essays were corrected by the researcher who has 13-year experience in teaching English (7 years teaching school students and 6 teaching university students). Following Corder's steps (1974) for an error analysis, samples were collected, and then divided into two groups based on school type and corrected word by word. Errors were then categorized following James' taxonomy (1998) into substance errors (spelling and punctuation); lexical errors (formal and semantic); and grammatical errors (morphological, syntactic and ordering). Errors of each category were calculated and analyzed using (SPSS-17). Means, frequencies, standard deviations, paired t-test, two independent sample t-test, one way ANOVA test and post hoc test were also used in the analysis phase.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study. The analysis of written errors answers the first and second research questions.

Table 1. Writing Errors committed by Governmental and Private School Students

Error category	Error type	Number of errors		Differences
		Governmental Schools	Private Schools	
1. Substance errors				
a. Spelling		148	109	39
	Lower case instead of upper case	10	11	
	Small letter after full stops or beginning of a sentence.	38	23	
	Wrong spelling	79	64	
	Wrong use of capital letters	21	11	
b. Punctuation		105	87	18
	Omission of punctuation marks	62	52	
	Addition of punctuation marks	3	8	
	Misuse of punctuation marks	40	27	
2. Lexical errors				
a. Formal errors		88	94	*6
	Misselections	21	25	
	Misformations	5	0	
	Distortions	62	69	
	Omissions	27	20	
	Over inclusions	7	15	
	Misselections	22	27	
	Misorderings	7	6	
	Blends	2	1	
b. Semantic errors		54	30	24
	Confusions	36	10	
	Collocations	18	20	
3. Grammatical errors				
a. Morphological errors		363	171	192
	Inflections	52	35	
	Omissions	38	18	

	Insertions	10	16	
	Substitutions	6	2	
Derivations		15	14	
Prepositions		78	43	
	Omissions	9	5	
	Insertions	23	16	
	Substitutions	46	22	
Articles		63	45	
	Omissions	30	18	
	Insertions	33	26	
	Substitutions	0	1	
Copula be		26	10	
	Omissions	16	6	
	Insertions	10	4	
	Substitutions	0	0	
Auxiliaries		5	5	
	Omissions	1	1	
	Insertions	1	2	
	Substitutions	3	2	
Personal pronouns		19	18	
	Omissions	8	0	
	Insertions	8	9	
	Substitutions	3	9	
Demonstrative determiners		5	1	
b. syntactic errors		65	63	2
Irregular verbs		5	1	
Concord (agreement)		35	37	
	Omission of 3 rd person singular	25	6	
	Insertion of 3 rd person singular	2	10	
	Substitutions	8	21	
Tenses		25	25	
c. Ordering		5	8	*3
Total		828	562	

*Differences in favor of governmental schools

Table 1 shows the different types of writing errors participants committed based on the categories of James's taxonomy (1998), along with the number of errors and their percentages. In general, it is clear that private

school students committed fewer errors than governmental school students, except for formal and ordering errors. However, the percentages and ranking of errors within each category are almost the same between both groups. Governmental school student errors ranked as follows: morphology, spelling, punctuation, formal, syntactic, semantic and ordering. The ranking for private school students was the same except for formal errors being higher than punctuation. This indicates that both groups actually face the same problems when writing in English, regardless of the type of school they attended.

Grammatical errors are the most common type of errors for both groups. Governmental school students committed 433 grammatical errors out of 828 errors (52.29%), and private school students committed 242 grammatical errors out of 562 listed errors (43.06%). This is in line with the findings of Nuruzzaman et al. (2018), AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019), Al-Khasawneh (2014), Fareed et al. (2016), Sawalmeh (2013), Atmaca (2016), Hourani (2008), and Al-Jamal (2017). In her study, Lamia (2016) asked English teachers about their students' most common writing errors; the answer was 83% for grammar. "[T]he grammatical structure of Arabic is different from that of Indo-European languages such as English" (Alhaysony, 2012, p.57) and this may be a reason for grammatical errors being abundant.

The highest grammatical error for both groups was morphology (inflections, derivations, prepositions, articles, copula be, personal pronouns, demonstrative determiners and auxiliaries). For both groups, articles and prepositions were the highest ranking, while auxiliaries and demonstratives were lowest. Such results are consistent with Bader (1988), Al-Khasawneh (2014), Sawalmeh (2013), Alhaysony (2012), Atmaca (2016), Al-Jamal (2017) and Sermsook et al. (2017). However, these results are not consistent with Sharma (2016) where articles and prepositions were among the lowest ranking errors. This can be the result of Sharma's participants writing paragraphs of only 5-7 lines.

"[I]n English both definiteness and indefiniteness are represented by articles which are ~~the~~" and ~~a/an~~" respectively. In Arabic, on the other hand, only definiteness is represented by an article which is [ال], whereas there is no any article to indicate indefiniteness" (Mahmood & Tawfeeq, p. 281, 2006). For this reason, and due to mother language interference, which is defined by Lado (1964) as the negative influence of a learner's mother language, students of both groups committed errors as "I was lonely student", and "Nowadays, the technology and social media are very important". However, there were cases of article omissions where Arabic requires an article. For example, "and share it with public" or "I will mention some of effects". In Arabic, the words 'public' and 'effects' in these sentences require the definite article. This indicates that not all errors are due to L1 interference and may be a lack of understanding of the English article system, or overgeneralization of the rules of English.

Prepositions also posed a problem for both study groups, as Arabic has 20 prepositions (Hasan, 1961), while English 150 (Essberger, 2012). This is similar to Al-Khasawneh (2014), Atmaca (2016) and Lamia (2016). Scott and Tucker (1974) assured that one to one correspondence between Arabic and English prepositions is seldom, therefore errors do occur. Thus L1 can be the cause behind errors as "between us" as Arabic does not have two different prepositions for 'among' and 'between'; it only has one "بين". Students also wrote "manipulate with your

mind" and "will affect on our life", as Arabic uses preposition here. However, some errors occurred and are not the result of L1 as "it is against to you", "you can connect anybody", and "faced many of situations".

As for syntactic errors (irregular verbs, subject-verb agreement, and tenses), again both groups had the same ranking with subject-verb agreement the highest, followed by tenses and then irregular verbs. This is in line with Nuruzzaman et al. (2018), Sharma (2016), Diab (1996), Hourani (2008). Structures as "it pollute the air", "it help us", and "that news are" are common as Arabic does not have the third person singular.

As for tenses, Atashian and Al-Bahri (2018), and Mohammed and Abdalhussein (2015) concluded that they formed major errors. This may be due to "the complexity of English tenses comparing to Arabic ones" (Lamia, 2016, p.87). Dweikat and Aqel (2017) believe tense errors to be due to English itself, as Arabic does not have all tenses found in English, as a result learners get confused which tense to use, thus error as "after that, my cousin come and take me", "...is the first day I have arrived at Dubai" and "it is more beautiful than what I've thought" are committed.

Word order does not seem to cause any problem for participants. They seem to have mastered the English word order well enough despite it being different from Arabic. The limited cases of errors committed were mainly confusing question structure with sentence structure, or embedded question structure. For example "We were all thrilled to know what is he hiding behind that smile", "I don't know from where should I start", and "we all know what is social media". Scott and Tucker (1974) considered such structures as "complex and are probably late acquisitions" (p. 91).

The second ranking category for both groups of participants was substance errors, mainly spelling. Studies by Sharma (2016), Dweikat and Aqel (2017), Ngangbam (2016), Mungungu (2010), and Qaddumi and Walweel (2018) all concluded that spelling was the most dominant error. Spelling errors were lower and upper case errors as "turkey", and "red sea". Others were related to silent letters, as "environment, invit, minite, busness, exusted, michropon"; mixing sounds which can have near pronunciations "shoke, noice, fasebook, yusers, minibulate, public, numpers, benefit, crusial", and double letter errors as "aggrement, ellectronic, procceded, polute, skyscrapper, felings, godd". L1 is the cause of errors in "numpers" and "shoke" as the /p/ and /ʃ/ do not exist in Arabic (Al-Busaidi and Al-Saqqaf, 2015). However, some errors are due to English being a phonetic language and not orthographic because of the mismatch in the English alphabet (Al-Khatib, 2017). Henderson (1981) indicates no one-to-one correspondence between the written word and its pronunciation in English, and so errors occur.

The only difference in error frequency between both groups was in punctuation and formal errors. Governmental school students committed more punctuation errors while private school students committed more formal errors. However, the two groups still seemed to have committed the same punctuation errors and to have the same ranking. Errors of omissions were the highest for both groups, followed by misuse and then additions. The analysis of the errors showed that the most problematic among punctuation marks were the comma and the full stop. This is what Sermsook et al.(2017) concluded, considering this due to different uses of

punctuation marks between two languages. However, the results of the study do not go in line with the study of Sermsook et al. (2017), ALTameemy and Daradkeh (2019), Ngangbam (2016) in which punctuation outnumbered other errors. This may be attributed to the fact that their samples were first and second year university students who had not yet studied English courses at their universities. The sample of this study included third to fifth year students who have passed three English courses at the university.

Formal errors included misselections, misformations and distortions. Again, both groups had the same order of frequency; distortions, misselections and then misformations. Distortions according to James (1998) are intralingual errors resulting in a non-existing structure in the target language due to the misapplication of a processing operation. These can be omissions as "plying", and "knowlege"; overinclusions as "shaiking" and "possitive"; misselections as "ysers" and "hiven"; and misorderings as "creul", and "vedio". Misselections are words which are "lexically unacceptable... violating sense-relations" (James, 1998, p.271), as "their" for "there", "dangerous" for "dangers", "heat" for "hate", and "see" for "sea". Finally, misformations result in words which do not exist in the target language, as "talled" for "told", "smill" for "smile", "giddiness" for "goodness". Such errors are barely present in the writing samples of the participants.

The last error type which does not seem to cause much difficulty to the participants is semantic. This includes confusion errors as using a wrong synonym "participate" for "share", "short" for "low", "prize" for "reward; and collocation errors as "one of the problems it makes" instead of "causes", "to make Omerah" instead of "perform", "who drive a boat" instead of "row/pilot", "break our privacy" instead of "invade". The table shows that confusion errors were higher than collocation errors for governmental school students, while for private school students the case was the opposite. In the studies of Murad and Khalil (2015), Dweikat and Aqel (2017), and Qaddumi and Walweel (2018) semantic errors were the second most dominant and they attributed this to literal translation from Arabic as a method used by learners while writing. However, in the recent study, semantics was ranked second to last.

To find out if any statistical significant differences are present, one way ANOVA and LCD post hoc tests were carried out (see Table 2).

Table 2. One Way ANOVA of Prevalence of Errors among Students based on 'Error Type' Variable

Prevalence of errors	Source of variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total	Between Groups	84393.857	6	14065.643	5.006	*0.026
	Within Groups	19667.000	7	2809.571		
	Total	104060.857	13			

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The one way ANOVA test in Table 2 shows that there are significant statistical differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the prevalence of errors among the two groups attributed to the variable of error type. The significant value was (0.026) which is less than (0.05). In order to understand the differences, LSD post hoc was used and the

following table shows the results (see Table 3).

Table 3. LSD Post Hoc for Prevalence of Errors among Students based on 'Error Type' Variable

Level	Spelling	Punctuation	Formal	Semantic	Syntactic	Ordering
Morphological	188.5	171.0	176.0	225.0	203.0	260.5

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3 shows that the main differences between the two groups is in morphological errors and the other types of errors in favor of morphological ones. This was discussed earlier in the study. However, to show if such results are significant based on school type, the following tests were carried out (see Table 4).

Table 4. Independent Two Sample Test Results of Prevalence of Errors among Students based on 'School Type' Variable

Errors	School	N	Mean	S. D	T	Sig.*
	Governmental	7	118.2857	116.66721	0.783	99400
	Private	7	80.2857	53.75783		

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In Table 4, an independent samples t-test was performed. The results show no statistical significant differences at ($\alpha=0.05$) level in the prevalence of errors attributed to the variable of school type as the significant value was (0.499) which is more than (0.05). Table 5 shows that there are no statistical significant differences at ($\alpha=0.05$) level between students of governmental schools and those of private schools. The significant level is (0.200), which is more than (0.05).

Table 5. Paired t-test Result of Errors among Students of Governmental Schools and Private Schools

Governmental schools (28) students	Mean	118.2857
	S.D	116.66721
Private schools (26) students	Mean	80.2857
	S.D	53.75783
t		1.441
Sig.*		0.200

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

This table answers the third study question, which was "Do students who attended private schools outperform students who attended governmental schools when writing in English as a foreign language at university level?". These findings are in line with the study of Deraney and Abdelsalam (2012), Finger and Sclesser's (1963), Kamwedo (2010), Somers et al. (2001), Davis and Frederiksen (1954) and Lubienski and Luienski (2006). The results of these studies came after controlling certain demographic variables, however, the recent study concluded no statistical significant differences with no variable control. If certain variables are to be controlled, the level between the performance of the two groups might be even higher than (0.200).

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to identify the main areas of weakness of undergraduate Palestinian students who come from different school backgrounds, and see whether private school students do actually outperform governmental school students. The study revealed that types of writing errors committed by EFL university students are almost identical regardless of school type. Generally, the analysis showed that students who attended governmental schools and those who attended private schools committed errors in the same order of frequency (except for formal and punctuation errors), with morphological errors being the highest, followed by spelling, punctuation and formal errors, then syntactic, semantic and finally ordering errors. This indicates that the learners of EFL find difficulties in using the same structures of English regardless of school type. Some errors may be the result of L1 interference, while others are due to L2 itself.

The study sought to add to the literature on the governmental and private school effectiveness debate, and to be the starting point of such research in Palestine. Its results support research which opposes the common belief that private school students outperform governmental schools. The results of the study indicated no statistically significant differences between the two groups based on school type, without controlling any demographics. Such results can be beneficial for parents who are willing to spend huge amounts of money on private education to see their children excel at English. Additionally, this study is a call for policy makers and the Ministry of Education to support governmental schools in an attempt to encourage parents to register their children at such schools. This can be achieved through bettering school environment and reducing numbers of students in classes, since these are some factors which give private schools an advantage over governmental ones.

Based on the study results, it is clear that writing in English is challenging for Palestinian university students despite studying English for 12 years at schools and taking English courses at universities. This study assures the need to add more focus on teaching writing at all levels of education. School students and university students, excluding English majors, do not study specialized writing courses, thus they do not get practical writing experience. Moreover, the analysis of errors is a necessity to understand the language learning process (Corder, 1967; Candling, 2001). The results of this study help teachers and educators understand the main areas of weakness, and suggest remedies to overcome them.

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