

THE FREQUENCY OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL ERRORS IN THE WRITING SKILL OF UNDERGRADUATE ESL LEARNERS OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

To investigate the nature of the writing skill problems of undergraduate learners at local and global levels, one hundred and twenty ESL male learners randomly selected from Government Postgraduate College Samna Abad, Faisalabad were asked to complete three writing skill tasks. In the first task, based on fifth word deletion test in expository and narrative writing, the learners were asked to provide the missing cohesive ties and grammatical items. In the second task, the learners' topic-based discussion was rated by the language experts by focusing on four analytic scoring rubrics such as cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy. The third task was related to intra-sentential coherence assessment through a paragraph of jumbled sentences and the learners were asked to form it as a unified piece of discourse. The statistical outcomes of the repeated measures regarding local and global errors indicated that the learners' rate of error frequency in cohesion was (N= 648), in coherence it was (N= 816), in lexical range it was (N= 730) and in grammatical accuracy it was (N=784). The learners made 54% errors in cohesion, 68% errors in coherence, 61% errors in lexical range and 65% errors in grammatical accuracy. Thus Coherence and grammatical accuracy were found most problematic areas in the writing skill of ESL learners. The study suggests changes in the current pedagogical techniques, curriculum and syllabus designing.

Keywords: Local errors, global errors, Second language (SLA), coherence, cohesion, lexical and grammatical errors

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in second language writing requires mastery in various areas such as grammar, vocabulary, cohesion and coherence which are widely used rubrics to assess a piece of writing task. ESL learners often lack creative ability and commit errors in various writing skill tasks. This is specifically true in respect of L2 learners studying in public sector colleges of Pakistan. For instance, the study conducted by Hussain, Hanif, Asif, Reman (2013) in connection with the writing skill errors of Pakistani ESL undergraduate learners of public sector colleges indicated that the learners make various types of errors such as verb, word choice, subject omission, articles, passive voice etc. in their writing skill. The vital role played by errors in the context of second language learning and teaching cannot be disregarded because errors reflect the learner's journey towards amelioration. Second language learning has been very vast, interesting and fertile field for the researchers. There

has been a large amount of literature regarding the analysis of the learners' English language writing skill errors for the last few years.

In a recent study conducted by Hassan and Swalmeh (2013) in connection with the errors of thirty two ESL undergraduate male students studying at the university of Ha'il; the analysis of written essays of these learners showed that they committed ten frequent errors in the process of their writing: verb tense, word order, singular/plural form, subject-verb agreement, double negatives, spellings, capitalization, articles, sentence fragments and prepositions. Similarly, there are a number of empirical studies such as (Lee, 2002; McCulley, 1985; Neuner, 1987; Norment, 1994; Tierney & Mosenthal, 1983) that focused on the global errors (cohesion, coherence) of learners. These studies were conducted in the contexts other than Pakistan. There are very few studies that investigate the local errors (grammatical, lexical) and global errors (cohesion, coherence) of ESL learners studying in public sector colleges of Pakistan. The present study bridges this gap because it not only investigates local errors but also global errors of ESL learners. The concepts of cohesion and coherence as put forward by Halliday and Hassan in their seminal work *Cohesion in English* (1976) deal with the study of text and discourse. The application of the concept of cohesion has been done in numerous fields such as stylistics, discourse analysis, language teaching etc. In so far as language teaching is concerned, a number of researchers and scholars have investigated cohesion in language teaching (Hyland, 2005; Rost, 2005; Zhang & Liu, 2003; Zhang, Miao & Li, 2005). They used cohesion to refer to the relations of meaning that are found within a text. The division of cohesion into grammatical and lexical cohesion was first done by Halliday (1964) and subsequently Hasan (1968) provided detailed description of grammatical cohesion. According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), grammatical cohesion includes devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction whereas lexical cohesion includes reiteration, synonymy and collocation etc. The researcher has applied the theory of Halliday and Hassan on the writing skill of ESL learners in order to assess their global level errors (cohesion, coherence).

Most commonly used rubrics to assign a score to writing in performance-based assessments (PBAs) are analytic, holistic and primary traits rubrics (East & Young, 2007). But for the purpose of this study, the researcher has used analytic scoring technique because it can ameliorate (Xi & Mollaun, 2006) reliability among measures. In analytic scoring technique, each linguistic or discourse feature is assigned a separate score by the rater or expert; it provides sufficient diagnostic information of the underlying ability of the learners in a writing skill assessment task. The present study focuses on cohesion, coherence, lexical variety and grammatical accuracy as rating rubrics to analyze the writing skill of ESL undergraduate learners.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The prime object of the study is to find out the problem areas related to cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy in the writing skill of ESL undergraduate learners. The researcher's aim is also to explore which discourse or linguistic feature is more problematic to the learners in their writing skill. That is why, each discourse and linguistic feature under analysis was evaluated through repeated measures in three writing skill performance-based tasks.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is also crucial for the teachers, researchers, language policy makers, ELT Practitioners because it investigates the problems of ESL learners and the errors they produce in their English language writing process. By identifying the problem areas in English

language writing skill, not only teaching and learning processes may be improved at undergraduate level but also the learners can acquire great achievement when they enter universities for higher education where the medium of teaching is English and examination style greatly demands exact written expression.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the frequency of errors made by ESL undergraduate learners of Pakistan in their writing skill at local and global levels?
2. What are the implications of the study that can be helpful to overcome ESL learners' local and global errors?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study has been clued-up by (Christie, 2002, 2005; Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Hassan, 1985, 1996; Martin & Rose, 2003) in relationship with classroom discourse. According to Christie (2002), when we formulate a grammatical analysis, the object is the interpretation of meaning in the overall organization of the text that the clauses constitute. Halliday (1994) opines that ideational metafunctions refer to those grammatical aspects which represent the world and the experiences of it. The ideational metafunction comprises two metafunctions, the experiential and the logical. According to Christie (2002) the logical metafunction deals with establishing connectedness between the meanings of clauses. According to Halliday (1994) textual metafunction refers to those grammatical aspects which help in the organization of language and, in this, theme, information and cohesion are involved.

According to Eggins (2004) in a text, words are made meaningful because the text uses them within lexico- grammatical structures. Lexico-grammatical structures form the sequenced arrangement of words. Thus the central unit of lexico-grammatical structure is the clause. Halliday and Hassan (1976, 1985) regard that it is through texture that the line of distinction between text and non-text can be drawn; texture holds the clauses of text together to unite them; it establishes the relationship between cohesion and coherence. Eggins (2004) is of the view that numerous clauses construct a sentence and a number of related sentences to form a text. Halliday and Hassan (1976) regard text as a unit of meaning that has clauses. They further say that a text must have cohesion which tie together the bits of discourse; cohesion functions just like glue that sticks the elements of meaning together; it exists when the interpretation of some elements in the discourse have their dependency on that of another. Eggins (2004) is of the view, if there is no semantic tie between elements, the text cannot be unified internally. The intelligibility of the text depends on cohesion and coherence.

To Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) “theme” refers to what the message is about; it contains information that has already been mentioned in the text. Eggins (2004), Martin and Rose (2003) opine that theme functions as the subject of the clause. Competent writers take into consideration the various types of themes and the way they are related to the textual meaning. They further say that topical theme is usually the subject of the clause. Every clause may possess one topical theme and the rest of the constituents can be called rheme. According to Martin and Rose (2003) “hyper theme” is the topic sentence that gives us direction of what is to move toward; it prognosticates how the text would open up. Any new information gathered from the hyper-theme is called “hyper-new”; it takes the text to a new point. This is one of the major problems of ESL learners that they are not able to contextualize their topic in their

texts; it becomes difficult for the reader where the argument is going. Eggins (2004) is of the view that a text may hold “multiple themes”; they can be textual, topical or solo themes. There is high degree of nominalization in texts; the majority of topical themes are personal pronouns (I, We, You, He, She, It, They), classes of people (parents, infants), and circumstantial expressions (the last time, in UMT); every clause has a topical theme. ESL learners confront difficulties related to the grammatical and lexical cohesion and inter-sentential and intra-sentential logical link-up, lexical variation in their process of composing a text. This study focuses these areas of text to solve the problems of ESL undergraduate learners.

Empirical Evidence of Cohesion and Coherence

The dichotomy that is found between cohesion and coherence is vivid in the studies which reported incompatible results regarding these constructs and attempted to integrate them to account for writing quality. For instance, Tierney and Mosenthal (1983) made analysis of the correlation between the number of cohesive ties and coherence employed by ESL learners in their written expression. The participants were provided randomly with two different scenarios and subsequently they were asked to write two essays. The outlines of essays regarding each scenario were provided with the sole object to control the content and the structure of what and how these students write. After that, the essays were rated holistically by three teachers and later on ranked them on the basis of coherence. The outcomes attained from the statistical analysis were compared regarding coherence and the use of cohesive devices in the two scenarios with two different writing topics. The results showed no significant interaction effect in so far as the use of cohesive ties is concerned, though a significant interaction was acquired for coherence.

In another study conducted by Connor (1984), the disparity in the cohesive density was examined in the argumentative essays of two English native speaking writers and two advanced ESL writers. The participants wrote expository essays which were rated by two postgraduate students whose mother tongue was English. These students rated six essays for coherence and they reached 100% agreement in their ranking in connection with coherence. The essays were also examined regarding the percentage of the occurrences of cohesive devices. Connor came to the epilogue that the ESL texts were cohesive but not coherent; there was no difference in the essays written by the English native speaker student writers and ESL student writers regarding cohesive density. However these results stand in sharp contrast to Witte and Faigley’s (1981) findings which showed differences in the frequencies of grammatical cohesive devices but supported the conclusion of Tierney and Mosenthal (1983) that cohesive density did not discriminate levels of coherence in writing.

Neuner (1987) made analysis of twenty good and twenty poor essays that were composed by college freshman students. The expository mode essays were written after instruction and practice and they were selected randomly from a larger set of essays. These essays were rated by two readers holistically and three coders analyzed each essay with regard to cohesion. T-tests were applied to analyze the statistical disparity between good and poor essays with regard to the use of cohesive devices, cohesive distance and chain length. The outcomes showed that absence of correlation between the frequencies of cohesive ties and writing quality; no significant difference was seen in cohesive distance between good and poor essays. The salient features of good essays were: longer cohesive chains, greater lexical variety and effective word choice.

The significance of logical progression and coherence in written discourse is reflected in the recent empirical study conducted by Cotton and Wilson (2011) in which they summarized the text features that affected the decision making of IELTS examiners in their assessment of

cohesion and coherence in writing skill. The quantitative phase of this mixed method study indicated that fifty five examiners who were the participants of this study had 2-5 years' experience in the evaluation of IELTS tests. There were twenty two males, twenty eight females and five were unidentified in the survey data. These examiners marked twelve scripts to assess cohesion and coherence ability with regard to writing skill. The hypothesis held by the researchers was that the examiners would pay less attention to coherence and much attention to the explicit cohesive devices but the outcomes were contrary to the desired expectations of the researchers. Almost 72% of the examiners devoted their assessment keeping in view the rubrics regarding coherence: 23% focused on the general text features such as flow and overall clarity, 26% on logical progression and semantic connections between ideas, 23% on paragraph development specifically regarding introduction and conclusion and only 28% focused on the cohesion. This shows that the examiners focused more on coherence features in the evaluation of each text than the overt cohesive devices.

Lexical and Grammatical Difficulties

In the process of second language acquisition, vocabulary learning is the focal point, that is to say, vocabulary provides a clue about the various domains of language based on various aspects of vocabulary e.g. depth, size, productive and receptive level. It also clarifies the way it is taught and the factors that affect e.g. learning environment and background of education. An emerging issue with regard to vocabulary is to draw a line between productive and receptive vocabulary. According to Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000) there has always been a difficulty in measuring the productive vocabulary of L2 learners in an accurate way as compared to receptive vocabulary. The major reason behind is always the context dependent nature of productive vocabulary. The claim held by previous studies is that there is a gap between productive and receptive vocabulary. The level of receptive vocabulary is higher than the knowledge of productive vocabulary. This distinction was resolved by Read's (2000) conceptual difference for receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary. He suggests that we should look at receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge separately because the former refers to recognition and the latter to understanding and use.

In the previous studies, productive vocabulary was measured by conducting tests in which the participants were entrusted with the task of completing the given words. They were only provided first two or three letters as clues which is known as PVL productive level test (Laufer & Nation, 1999). Similarly there were other studies where the learners were required to write maximum possible responses to a given stimulus (Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000). The analysis of these responses was done with the help of making a list of words that were used frequently in first one thousand words or in second one thousand words. But if the responses consisted of more than two thousand words, less frequent words, the productive vocabulary was deemed to be larger (Akabarian, 2010; Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000; Morris & Cobb, 2004; Muncie, 2002; Milton, 2008, 2009; Read, 2000).

The learners' use of vocabulary in their compositional process can be measured in various ways. The most prevalent measures reported by Laufer and Nation (1999) in this regard are four. First of these is Lexical Originality which is measured by counting the unique words used by the individual writer. Second is the Lexical Density that refers to the percentage of lexical words (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) used in a text. But the drawback of this method is that it disregards syntactic structure and cohesive devices of composition. Third measure is the Lexical Sophistication in which the use of advanced level words is compared with the total number of words used in the composition. The shortcoming of this measure is that it only focuses on the advanced level words. Therefore, it is not a dependable measure in so far as the assessment of productive vocabulary is concerned. Fourth measure is the Lexical

Variation that refers to type/token ratio. In this measure, the use of greater number of different words is considered as a better composition. Though this method only focuses on the use of different words not on the quality of different words used in a composition (Laufer & Nation, 1999) yet this measure was appropriate for the present study because the raters of the essay not only kept in view the lexical variation but also the quality and contextual use of vocabulary in view while evaluating the essays of ESL learners.

A number of studies have clarified that the ESL learners having studied English for so many years face numerous difficulties in their writing skills. For instance, Johns (1997) observed that a large majority of non-native speaking undergraduate and graduate students after so many years of ESL training do not come up to the required competence regarding the conventions and features of academic prose. Many reasons have been put forward by the researchers why the academic writing of competent and trained ESL learners goes on exhibiting enormous problems and drawbacks. These shortcomings include: defective writing courses that do not prepare the students for academic writing tasks and the difference between the existing pedagogy and assessment system with regard to academic writing. Therefore, it should be taken into account that academic writing is different from personal and creative writing. In academic writing one should invariably pursue rules of grammatical accuracy. It is essential to make the written expression clear and lucid and the conventions of grammar play an important part to maintain clarity and avoid ambiguity in expression.

El- Sayed (1982) conducted an error analysis study in which he pointed out that the participants of his study committed 1140 errors in all, out of which 640 errors were related to verbs, 159 to the pronouns, 143 to the articles and rest of the errors were related to nouns, prepositions and adjectives. The research study conducted by Radwan (1988) investigated grammatical and lexical errors of the learners. The result indicated that the highest percentage of errors was found in the area of articles.

The research study conducted by Eun-Pyo (2002) on Korean medical students in connection with their writing skill was concerned with the sole purpose of analyzing the errors that intermediate to advanced learners committed. The participants of this study were 35 second year premedical students who wrote formal and informal letters; these letters were reviewed and the errors were taken out; the length of the writing of these students was also calculated to see if the errors and the writing length correlated with the scores of their official tests. The writing skill of these learners was evaluated by finding out the sentences that contained errors to identify the types and frequency of errors. This study has its relevance to the current study because it too evaluates the written excerpts to find out the frequency of local and global errors that ESL learners committed.

Lin (2002) examined the types of errors committed by Taiwanese students in their writing skill are relevant to this study. One hundred and sixty nine compositions written by 53 Taiwanese College students were studied by Kao (1999) in which 928 errors were identified. Among these errors, the greatest frequency occurred with regard to grammatical errors was 66%, semantic errors were 18% and the least frequency was found among lexical errors which was 16%. The outcomes of Lin's study (2002) in which he examined 26 essays of Taiwanese college students which showed that error frequency in sentence structure was (30.43%), wrong use of verb form (21.01%), wrong use of words and sentence fragments (15.94%). However, Chen (2000) analyzed that frequent occurring grammatical error in the compositions of these students is the misuse of English articles.

It is vivid from the aforementioned studies outcomes that the errors committed by ESL learners occur frequently in the structural or grammatical domain.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the type and frequency of errors found in cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy domains of Pakistani ESL undergraduate learners, the present study opts for quantitative analysis for three sets of data.

Research Design

The present study examines four important linguistic and discourse features namely cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy in the English language writing skill of ESL undergraduate learners. It uses a descriptive research design which enumerates an existing phenomenon; there is no manipulation of the subjects and the researcher makes a measurement of things as they are without the intervention of any experiment.

Population and Sample

The main object of this study is to find out the frequency of local and global level errors in the English language writing skill of ESL undergraduate learners. For the attainment of this purpose, one hundred and twenty undergraduate male students from arts and science both medical and non-medical groups enrolled in Government Post Graduate College Samna Abad, Faisalabad for the session 2012-2013 were selected following random sampling technique.

Research Instrument

The instruments used to collect data from the undergraduate ESL learners were three types of tests: fifth word deletion test, topic-based discussion test, paragraph writing test for coherence analysis. All the research instruments were pilot tested on a sample of 20 students and required changes were made.

Procedure

The data were collected in a congenial atmosphere by the researcher himself with the help of lecturers of the college in one day duration to avoid participants' mortality. The participants were not put under any specific time pressure during this process.

The gathered data from one hundred and twenty undergraduate ESL learners was read, analyzed and classified into various error categories. The tests taken by the learners regarding fifth word deletion and intra-sentential coherence were evaluated by the researcher himself because of their mathematical nature. However, for the analysis of the test regarding topic-based activity the researcher trained two raters who had majored in foreign language pedagogy and ESL domain. These raters were trained how to evaluate Cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy of the learners; they evaluated topic-based discussion test in collaboration with each other not separately. This was done to avoid the possible bias that might involve in the process of test evaluation.

The statistical procedure involved in the analysis of data was descriptive statistics which focused on the error frequency of the learners followed by the percentage of the secured marks regarding each scoring rubric. The data were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel and presented in tables and frequency bar graphs.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed following analytic scoring rubrics technique the focus of which was on various writing components such as cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy. Brown (1990) states that graphical presentation of the information is of great

significance in statistical studies which represent not only the gathered information but also the way learners perform in each discourse or grammatical category.

Table 1. Analyzed discourse and linguistic features cohesion and grammatical accuracy

Feature	Error Frequency	Total Marks	Obtained Marks
Cohesion	343	600	257
Grammatical Accuracy	449	600	151

Task 1: Error Frequency Recorded in Fifth Word Deletion Test

The table 1 given above presents the performance of 120 ESL learners in task 1 that was related to the cohesion and grammatical accuracy assessment through fifth word deletion test. The column 01 of the table 01 given above shows that analyzed discourse and linguistic features are cohesion and grammatical accuracy. The error frequency as shown in column 02 regarding cohesion domain is (N = 343) and the error frequency regarding grammatical accuracy is (N = 449). The column 03 accumulates the total marks of all the learners. The total marks for each scoring rubric were five. There were forty blanks in two paragraphs related to expository and narrative writing out of which twenty blanks were reserved for cohesive ties and twenty for grammatical items. One mark was awarded for four correct responses in both the paragraphs. The column 04 is related to the marks secured by all the learners in cohesion and grammatical accuracy. Whereas The percentage of the marks secured by all the learners in fifth word deletion test is given in figure 2:

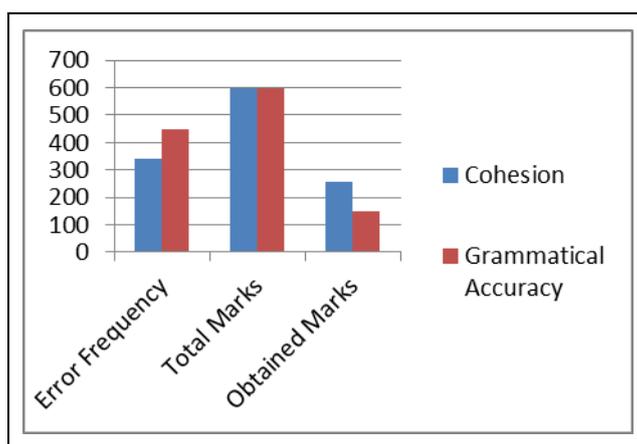


Figure 2. Percentage of the marks secured by all the learners in fifth word deletion test

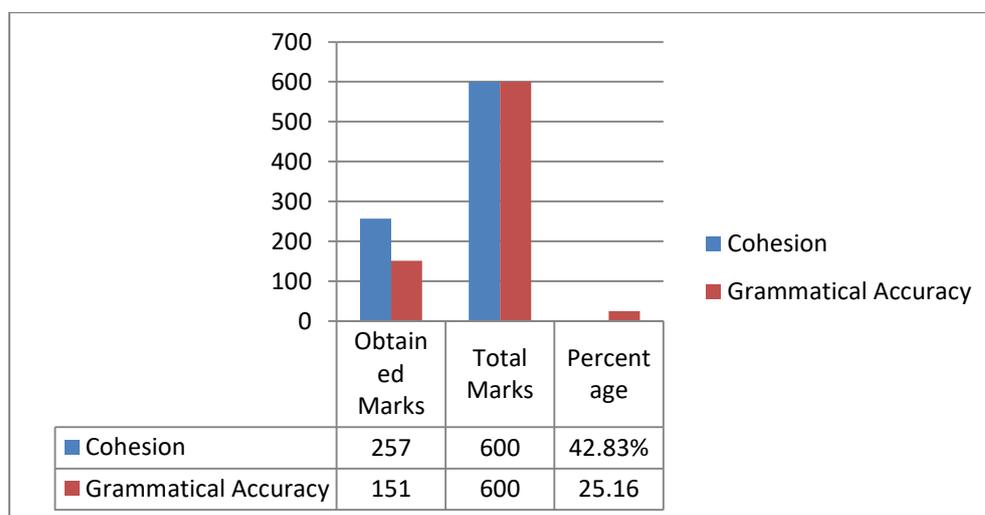


Table 2. Performance of ESL learners as evaluated by raters in essay writing activity

Feature	Error Frequency	Total Marks	Obtained Marks
Cohesion	305	600	295
Coherence	294	600	306
Grammatical Accuracy	335	600	265

Task 2: Error Frequency Recorded by the Raters in Topic-based Assessment Test

The table 2 given above presents the performance of ESL learners as evaluated by the raters in essay writing activity which was used as a tool to assess cohesion, coherence, and grammatical accuracy as analytic rating rubrics. The column 1 of the table 2 is related to the rating discourse and linguistic features, cohesion, coherence and grammatical accuracy. The column 02 shows that the frequency of errors in cohesion domain is (N=305), in coherence (N=294) and in grammatical accuracy (N=335). The column 3 accumulates the total marks of all the learners in each linguistic and discourse feature. The total marks for each rating rubric were five. The column 04 is related to the marks secured by all the learners in cohesion, coherence and grammatical accuracy. The information of table 2 has also been summarized in the figure 3:

Figure 3. Performance of ESL learners as evaluated by raters in essay writing activity

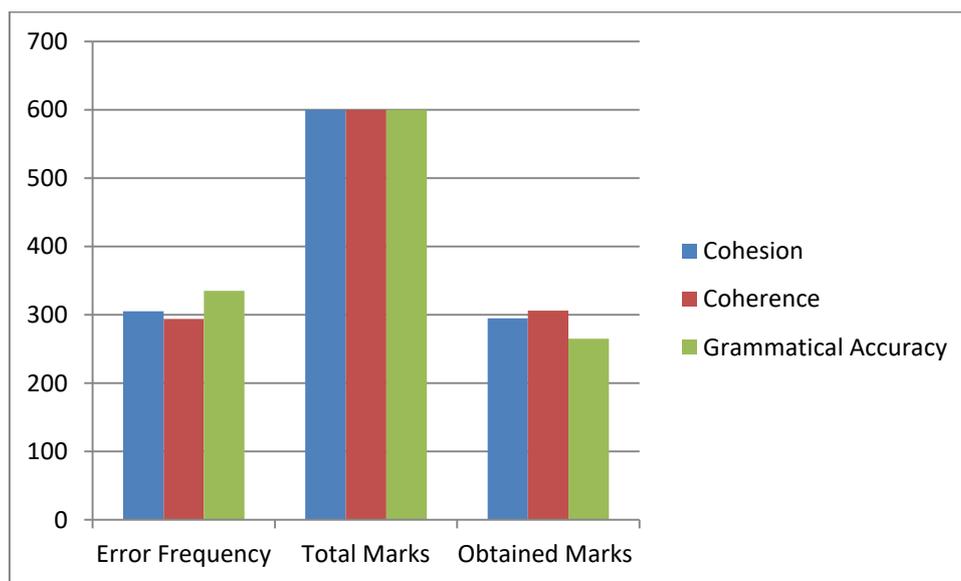


Table 3. Assessment of lexical range of the ESL learners as evaluated by the raters

Feature	Error Frequency	Total Marks	Obtained Marks
Lexical Variety	730	1200	470

Task 2: Error Frequency Recorded by the Raters in Lexical Range Assessment

The outcomes of the data discussed in the table 3 are actually sequel to the results of the data discussed in the table 2 given above. The column 01 of table 03 is related to the assessment of lexical range of the ESL learners as evaluated by the raters through topic-based assessment task. The lexical range is one of the rating rubrics as the rest already mentioned in the column

01 of the table 02. The error frequency occurred in lexical range as shown in the column 02 is (N=730) which shows that the learners' vocabulary lacks the lexical variety. The column 03 is related to the total marks. For each learner, the total marks regarding lexical range were ten. In the column 04, the marks secured by one hundred and twenty learners have been accumulated.

Figure 04. Error frequency of the learners in their lexical range

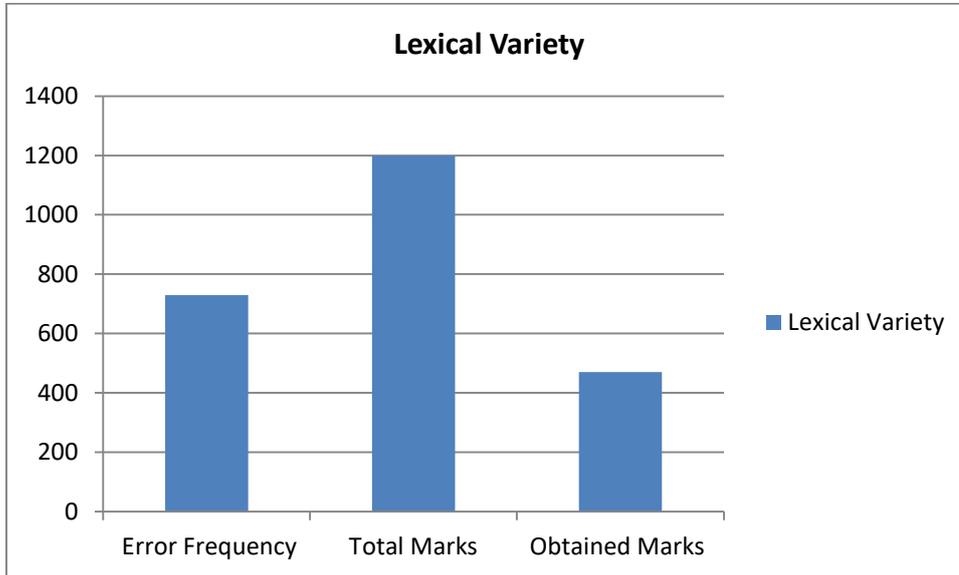


Figure 5. Percentage of the secured marks regarding each rubric as rated by the experts

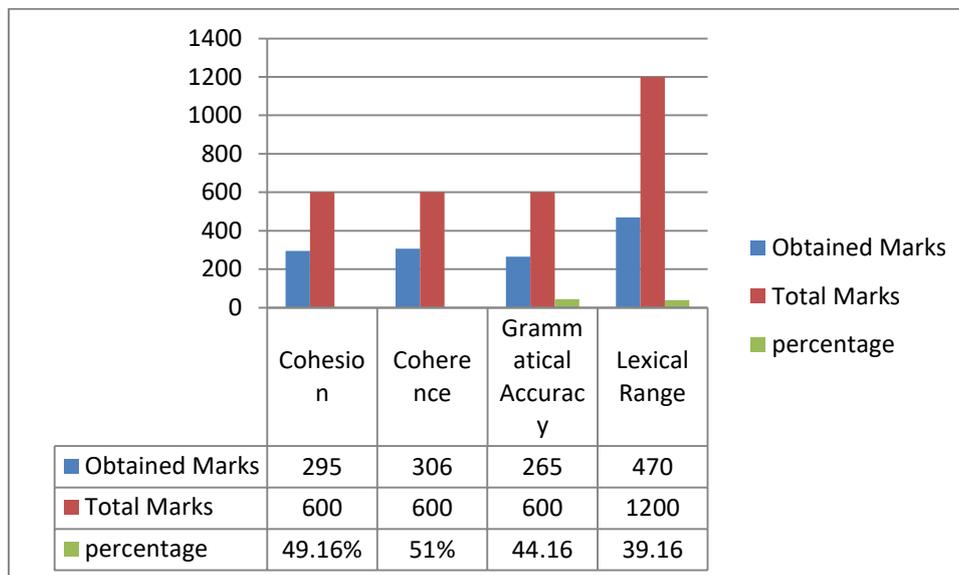


Table 4. Performance of ESL learners in intra-sentential coherence assessment test

Feature	Error Frequency	Total Marks	Obtained Marks
Int. Sentential Coherence	522	600	78

Task3: Error Frequency in Intra-sentential Coherence Assessment Test

The table 4 given above presents the performance of ESL undergraduate learners in intra-sentential coherence assessment test that refers to the logical progression in paragraph writing skill. The scores of coherence and coherence breaks have been used in the analysis of the test. The column 01 of the table 04 presents that the discourse feature under analysis is intra-sentential coherence. The error frequency of all the learners as given in the column 02 is (N=522). The column 03 accumulates the total marks of all the learners in intra-coherence assessment test. The total marks of intra-sentential coherence assessment test for each learner were five which were accumulated on the whole; these are six hundred in total. More than two hundred words paragraph given to the learners to form as a unified whole comprised ten shuffled sentences and one mark was awarded for two correct responses. The column 04 is related to the obtained marks of all the learners. The obtained marks of the learners in intra-sentential are the lowest if compared with other scoring rubrics. Figure 06 given below summarizes the information discussed in table 4:

Figure 6. Performance of ESL learners in intra-sentential coherence assessment test

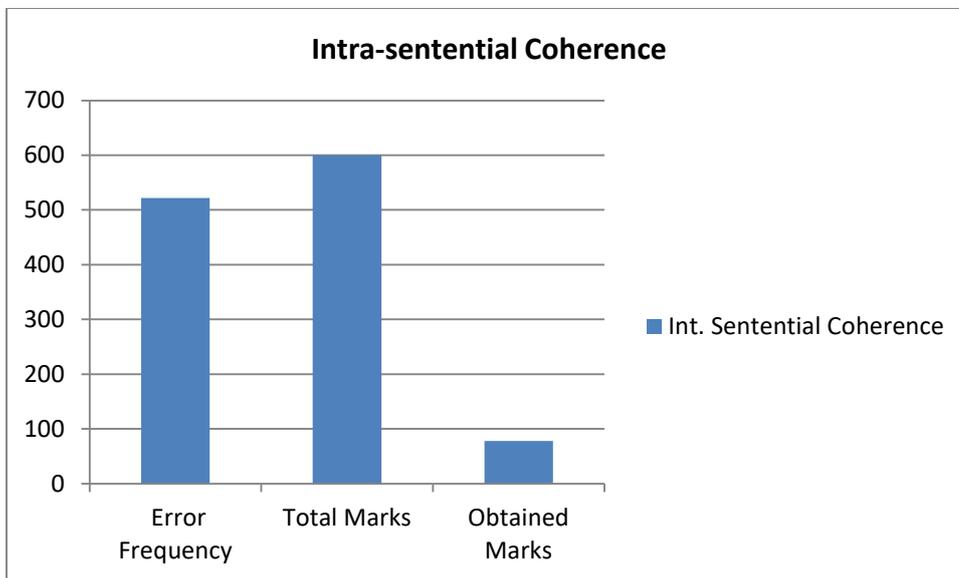


Figure 7. The obtained marks of the learners in intra- sentential coherence with %

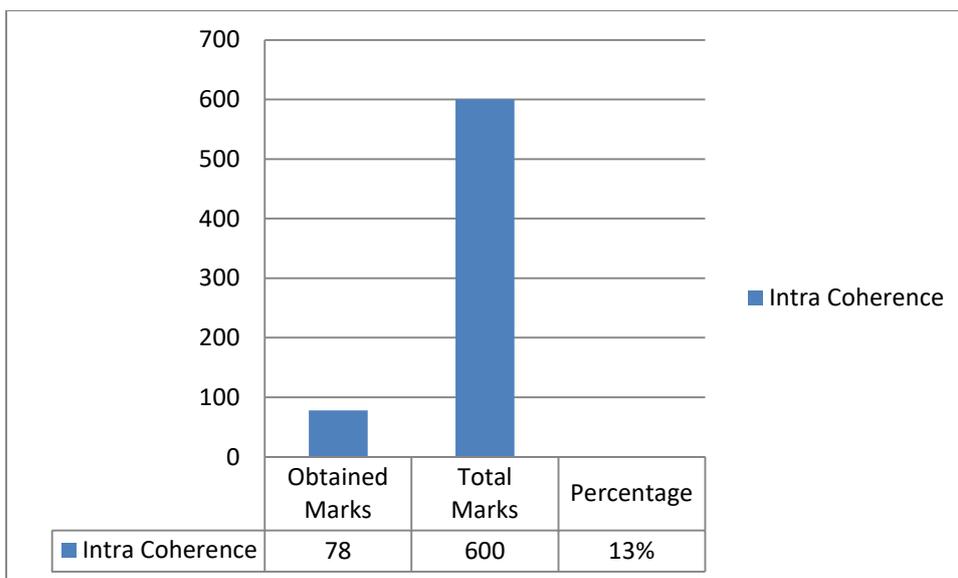


Table 5. Error frequencies of all tests related to various discourse and linguistic features

Feature	Error Frequency	Total Marks	Obtained Marks
Cohesion	648	1200	552
Coherence	816	1200	384
Lexical Range	730	1200	470
Grammatical Accuracy	784	1200	416

Summary of the Total Error Frequencies in Each Discourse and Linguistic Feature

In the table 05 given above the error frequencies of all the tests related to various discourse and linguistic features under analysis in three performance based tasks were gathered. All the discourse and linguistic features were evaluated twice in three writing skill tasks except lexical range. Cohesion was evaluated through fifth word deletion test and through essay writing; inter-sentential coherence was assessed in essay writing and intra-sentential coherence was assessed through jumbled sentences paragraph writing test; grammatical accuracy was evaluated first through fifth word deletion test and then through topic based assessment test. The lexical range was evaluated only once because it is through topic discussion in writing through which the lexical variety and the range of vocabulary of the learners can be judged appropriately. The Column 02 combines the error frequency of each discourse and linguistic feature in all the writing tasks and clarifies that the error frequency in cohesion is (N= 648), in coherence it is (N=816), in lexical range it is (N=730) and in grammatical accuracy it is (N=784). Figure 08 given below too summarizes the error frequency:

Figure 8. Summary of Error Frequency

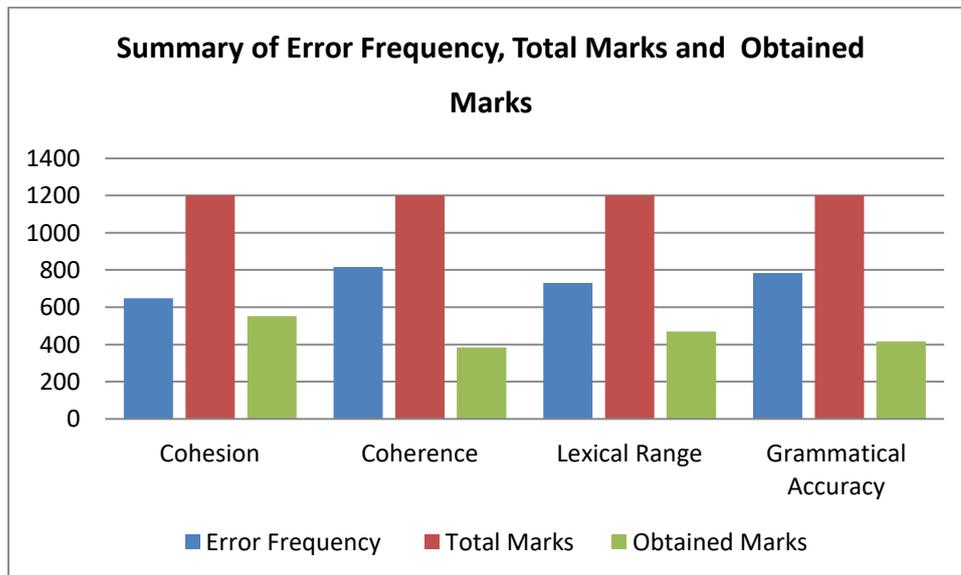
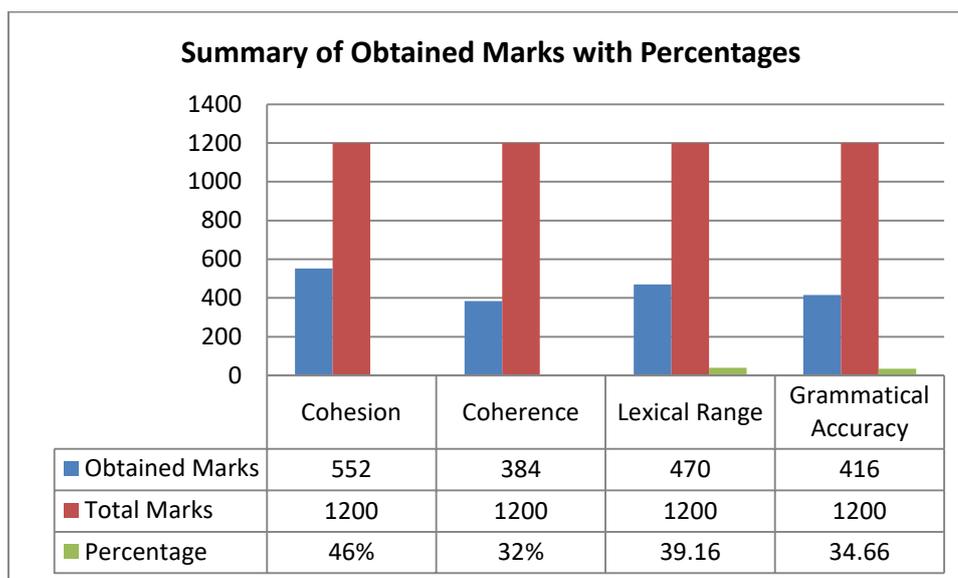


Figure 9. Summary the percentage of the marks secured in each linguistic and discourse feature by all the learners.



FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Coming to the findings, the statistical outcomes indicated that frequency of errors in cohesion is (N=648), in coherence (n = 816), in Lexical Range (N= 730) and in grammatical accuracy (n = 784). The learners secured 46% marks in cohesion, 32% marks in coherence, 39.16 % marks in lexical variety and 34.66 % marks in grammatical accuracy. This shows that the learners encountered more difficulties in coherence domain in their writing skill because the highest frequency of error occurrence and lowest percentage of obtained marks lies in it. The second highest error frequency rate and lowest percentage of obtained marks lies in grammatical accuracy. There is no greater difference between the error frequency of coherence and grammatical accuracy. The third highest error frequency rate and lowest percentage of secured marks is found in lexical range and the least error frequency and highest percentage of the marks obtained lies in cohesion domain.

Since this study is related to the falling standards of academic writing skill of ESL undergraduate learners, it was not possible to predetermine anything without making an investigation into it. In order to address the first research question, the researcher gathered data by using three performance based tests. The first research instrument was concerned with two-edged investigation: the learners' ability to use cohesive ties to make the text meaningful and coherent and their grammatical ability for the accuracy of the text. The learners were provided two paragraphs based on expository and narrative writing skill in which every fifth word was deleted and the learners were required to provide the missing cohesive ties and grammatical items. The missing cohesive ties were set by following the theory of Halliday and Hassan (1976, 1989) with regard to the categories of cohesion: reference, substitution, conjunction, ellipsis and lexical ties. It was noted by the researcher that the learners faced more problems regarding the grammatical accuracy of the text. Among the errors of accuracy, the majority were related to tense/verb and preposition domains. As to the cohesive ties, the learners stumbled more upon reference and conjunctions in their responses to the deleted cohesive ties.

The second instrument was related to the topic-based discussion in essay mode based on the assessment of cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy ability of learners

as rated by two language experts who were PhD. students and full time teachers; they were majored in the teaching of foreign language having a lot of experience of the assessment of students' proficiency tests. The rating of the experts was based on the analytic scoring rubric technique in which each of the aforementioned writing components was assigned a separate score. The rating rubrics set in the second research instrument were in accordance with the IELTS test rating criteria related to the writing skill assessment because IELTS is considered as a standard language proficiency assessment test. The performance of the learners as rated by the language experts shows that almost 61% errors were found in lexical variety, approximately 56% in grammatical accuracy, almost 51% in cohesive ties and 49% in intra – sentential coherence.

Analyzing grammatical accuracy, the raters pointed out that the learners committed more errors in tense/verb, preposition and articles than other areas of grammar. The rating of the experts in topic – based assessment test closely matches with the researcher's results of fifth word deletion test related to grammatical accuracy. The raters also pointed out the wrong use of verb forms and the use of various tenses in a single sentence which violated accuracy and consequently this affected the coherence of the text. The learners were also unable to differentiate between gerund and progressive tense. They used present tense instead of past tense and even they did not know how to use modal auxiliaries in accordance with their specific functions. As to the cohesive ties, the learners were found to have serious problems with 'referencing' and conjunctions; they were unable to use connectors to create connections between ideas because conjunctions create semantic unity and coherence in the text. It was also assessed by the raters that some of the learners did not create logical progression at inter-sentential level as no common thread was found running through the paragraphs. What they discussed in the preceding paragraph was not related to the following one.

In order to make an in- depth analysis of the coherence level difficulties of the learners, the researcher put it under investigation at inter- sentential and intra- sentential level. The learners committed 49% errors at inter- sentential level which was assessed by the raters in topic-based discussion test. If we compare the inter- sentential coherence (logical progression in between paragraphs) error frequency rate occurring in essay writing as discussed in column 02 of table 02 with intra- sentential coherence as discussed in column 02 of table 04, it shows that the learners encountered more difficulties in intra-sentential coherence because error frequency rate in the former is (N=294) and in the latter (N=522).

IMPLICATIONS

There are wider implications of this study as it exposes the problems that the ESL learners encounter in their compositional skill. It also focuses on the idea that there is need to bring changes in the current pedagogical practices, syllabus designing, examination style together with encouraging the learners and inculcating motivation in them so that they may be able to be creative. In order to bring amelioration in the writing skill of ESL learners, it is required to bring changes in the curriculum designed for undergraduate learners. The emphasis should be laid more on writing skill in the curriculum amongst other strategies and all the writing skill strategies to be taught should be planned to improve the learners' creativity. The change in the curriculum should be coupled with appropriate training of the teachers because the majority of lecturers and professors working in public sector colleges have literature background and they are not familiar with the theoretical aspects of second language learning; they should not only be aware of the psycho-cognitive issues of the learners in their learning of L2 but also the previous research studies conducted in the domain of writing skill errors so that they may be able to comprehend what can be the most problematic areas for the learners.

The study also implies that the learners need to be made conscious of how to create cohesive connections to organize their texts at inter- sentential and intra- sentential level as the findings of the study regarding coherence level errors testify that the learners have the least knowledge of how to produce a coherent text. According to Enkvist (1990) as ESL learners' prime focus is laid on the grammatical features of the text, it becomes difficult for them to make their writing coherent. Therefore it is important to teach the learners some substitute strategies to control coherence level difficulties because focusing on coherence can be helpful in shifting their attention from sentence-level grammatical focus to the features of discourse e.g. unity, logical progression, textual structuring which play a crucial role to create meaningful texts. There are a few strategies by which the learners can control the coherence of their texts while writing.

1. The learners should be taught that they can produce a coherent text by using the key words and pronouns to tie ideas together in a paragraph which is important to convey its sense and message and to show the major participants and their significance. This repetition lays emphasis on a few words which tie and connect several sentences together internally. But the repeated words must not be allowed to dominate because it makes the text monotonous and boring.
2. The teachers must make the students aware how to employ chains of sentences and clauses in order to relate the text to its focused area. They should also teach the learners how they can make use of expectancy relationships (the doer-action relationship) to create lexical cohesion. No doubt, this can be impeded by the learners' depletion of the required lexical range and grammatical knowledge. But it can be an effective tool if the learners are encouraged to read texts other than the ones set in their syllabus and explain what they have studied because this will enhance their lexical and grammatical knowledge.
3. The teachers must teach the learners how to be consistent with the verb/tenses within the paragraph. Beginning a discussion in the present tense cannot be followed by a past tense in the next sentence because this tense shifting in the description instantaneously affects the cohesion and confuses the intended time. Again this can be overcome by exposing the learners to various types of texts e.g. newspaper articles etc.
4. To form a coherent link between the sentences of a paragraph, one of the easiest ways is through co-ordination and subordination. This is important in so far as intra- sentential coherence is concerned because the supporting sentences are subordinate to the topic sentence. Subordination refers to the secondary ideas while co -ordination refers to how thoughts are equal. But for cautious subordination and co-ordination, the paragraph seems to be a list of simple sentences. So the teachers should assist the learners of how they can decide the hypertheme that is actually the topical sentence of each paragraph. The hypertheme unfolds the orientation to what comes next: it refers to the frame of reference. They should be aware that the hypernew (any new information gathered from hypertheme that supports it) must support the hypertheme. Thus the supporting proof required in hypernew is actually for the object of coherence. This supporting evidence comprises overt markers e.g. "first of all", "secondly", "finally" etc. It consists of reference chains that represent the major text participants. The reference chains include: homophoric, exophoric, cataphoric and endophoric references which are employed to connect clauses and ideas in order to produce a text that possesses cohesion and coherence (Martin & Rose, 2003).
5. Parallel structure technique is another way to achieve coherence in which two or more sentences of the same grammatical structure are created; it makes the sentences lucid and easier to read. Moreover, repeating such a pattern in a series of respective sentences gives the reader impression that the ideas are interconnected.

6. In addition, the teachers can use the technique of tree diagrams in their teaching in order to make the writing of learners coherent. This technique helps the learners analyze their texts on their own and definitely this improves their performance and grades. Using tree diagrams motivates and guides the learners to plan their writing and it becomes easy for them to write when all the ideas are projected in the diagram; it also helps to toggle around and edit the ideas if the learners discover in the process of their writing that they have more important ideas to be discussed.

As to the lexical variety, the findings of the study indicate that the ESL learners need direct instructions and sustained attention to enhance their vocabulary and its appropriate use. But the challenge faced by the teachers in public sector colleges regarding direct instructions to fulfill the lexical deficit of learners is the time limitation. Though the current exam pattern of Undergraduate learners seems to be appropriate with its focus on vocabulary building to some extent through memorizing the synonyms taken from the syllabus texts yet the learners need to learn how to use their word knowledge in an accurate way in accordance with the context in which they use them while writing. When a text or any topic is taught to the students, the academic vocabulary present within that text or topic must be taught to deal with it. Not only should the words be taught but also the linguistic patterns and processes should be taught which operate upon that text (Wilhelm, 2007, p.44).

Another challenge faced by the teachers with regard to the instructions of vocabulary is that they find it difficult and almost impossible to teach each word and its usage one by one. It means that the learners' vocabulary knowledge must be developed by using variety of ways: learners' memorization of words, direct instructions by creating a words sharing atmosphere in the class and by developing the habit of dictionary usage (Yopp & Yopp, 2007). Effective instruction may create motivation and a sense of accomplishment in the learners and clarify that vocabulary is an effective tool in making them proficient.

Another way to develop learners' vocabulary is through teaching word bases and affixes (prefixes & affixes). To Rasinski, Padak, Newton and Newton (2008) ninety percent English words that comprise more than one syllable are Latin-based and the rest are Greek-based; a single Latin root is capable of generating five to twenty English words. In so far as academic vocabulary is concerned, numerous words in science, literature and social studies are derived by using Latin and Greek roots. If the learners are familiarized with these Latin-Greek affixes along with their meanings, their knowledge of words, meanings and usages can be enhanced to a great extent.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The researcher, keeping in view the purpose of the study, analyzed the writing skill problems of ESL undergraduates of Government Post Graduate College Samna Abad, Faisalabad with its focus specifically on a few discourse and linguistic features such as cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy. The findings of the study indicated that inter-sentential and intra-sentential coherence and accuracy appeared to be more problematic to the learners in their writing skill than those of cohesion and lexical variety as the rate of error frequency was found to be greater in coherence and grammatical accuracy. But on the whole, the performance of the learners showed that they stumbled upon all the features under analysis.

The study gives a few pointers through which a line of action can be pursued to ameliorate the existing standard of the learners' writing skill. In the current conditions, the pace of changing the learners to improve their writing skill seems to be slow; it requires committed approach on the part of teachers, students and government in this regard. Bringing changes in

the curriculum to reserve more space to the writing skill components, the training of teachers and making them aware of the L2 learning processes, theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies in connection with second language writing, specific and idea-based feedback of teachers to the learners' writing and bringing changes in the pedagogical methods can assist to a great extent in making the learners competent and creative L2 writers

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Following the outcomes of the present study, the researcher proposes that there needs an exhaustive research in the field of L2 writing specifically it is ardently required in Pakistani context because this area has not captured as much attention of the researchers as the other language domains have done. Therefore, there is need to broaden the scope of research in second language writing and the focus should be laid both on the linguistic knowledge (grammatical, lexical, orthographic) of the learners and the discourse units (cohesive ties, local and global coherence).

The current study focused only on the undergraduate male students' compositional problems selected both from medical and non-medical groups from only Public Sector College with reference to cohesion, coherence, lexical range and grammatical accuracy. The upcoming studies can be conducted on female undergraduates or on both male and female at graduate level with a larger sample size taken from more than one institutions in order to assess whether gender differences affect the outcomes in the occurrence of local and global errors and if so what kind of effect they exert on the writing quality to achieve more generalizable results. Moreover it is also suggested for the forthcoming studies to investigate writing strategies of L2 learners in Pakistani context that they use in their first and second language such as translation activity.

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Students' Cohesion and Grammatical Accuracy Assessment

Respected Respondent! In the given passages every fifth word has been taken out. Supply the missing words to complete the sense of each paragraph and return the filled scale.

1. Many teenagers spend a ----- of time contemplating what ----- want to do when ----- finally graduate from----- college. Most of them take ----- time to decide this, ----- I am fortunate in ----- regard. When I was two ----- three years old, I ----- this. I had made up ----- mind to become a ----- veterinarian. Just like humans ----- -- need people to treat ----- with great respect and ----- they deserve and I ----- to be one of ----- people. Because of this, ----- am doing all I-----at Reavis to lay ----- - for my success in -----.

2. Next when I sat ----- to write, the words ----- not come to me. ----- notes and ideas were ----- ; the words were lost. ----- decided to do every ----- strategy I could find. ----- brainstormed, made idea maps ----- even wrote an outline. Eventually after a lot ----- stress, my ideas became ----- and the words fell ----- the page. I had ----- own interpretation of writing ----- essay and I had ----- arguments to support my ----- . Still I remember of ----- unsure of myself, wondering - ----- I was saying made -----, or if I was ----- the right track. With ----- uncertainty, I continued writing.

Students' Intra- sentential Coherence Assessment

Respected Respondent! In the given paragraph the sentences are not in the right sequence. Read the paragraph attentively and arrange the exact sequence by placing a number in the space given against each sentence.

The Student Centre

Moreover each person serves himself selecting just what he or she wants []. Many happy and young people talking and laughing with each other share their ideas []. Even the strangers say “Hi”! and offer to share their tables which shows their friendly behavior and regard they give to the unknown []. First, the food is excellent, well-prepared, tastes delicious; there are also many different kinds of food like hamburgers, tacos, pizza, chicken etc. []. For these reasons, it is nice to go to the student centre cafeteria once in a while to enjoy the eating, studying and talking with new people. []. Second, the environment in the student centre is healthy and positive and that is why everyone likes to be there even if no one knows him or her []. Eating in the student centre is a pleasant experience []. However the atmosphere is still calm and it is possible to study, discuss lectures with classmates and do homework there []. Finally, there are many friendly people in the student centre []. When that happens, an opportunity to practice English speaking and its learning often follow and perhaps this is one of the greatest benefits that one can have in the native environment [].