

An Analysis of English Writing Errors of Freshmen Students' Essays: The Case of 'Aleksandër Moisiu' University

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One of the most important elements of English language is the writing skill. It is a competence which human beings are not born with; on the contrary, it is learnt with practice and experience. In this respect, the focus must be on the hard work of English instructors, who deal painstakingly with the four skills, emphasizing writing, by means of comments, advice, explanations etc. In Albanian Educational system, foreign languages are given a considerable space. In high school students study up to two foreign languages. In 'Aleksandër Moisiu' University, apart from the courses that are related to the students' profile of study, a specific importance is given to English Language as well, which helps to enhance their English Language competences. This leads us to believe that students' progress in English is satisfactory; however, this is not always the case with all the skills. Even though students are very good at listening and speaking, when it comes to writing, many of them have serious problems, which are noticed while analyzing their written work. In this respect, this study aims to explore and analyze students' errors through the procedure of error analysis. More specifically, a sample of 100 short essays of our freshmen students from different branches of study have been analyzed with this purpose in mind. This article analyses the types of errors and their frequency of occurrence in English language writing. Based on the research analysis, it was concluded that the mechanical errors, verb tense errors, preposition errors and to some degree article errors, resulted to be more problematic than the other categories. The importance of identifying and analyzing errors is to give English lecturers feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching techniques, information on what is to be reviewed and further notice on what parts of the syllabus need modification. Making errors is an essential part of learning and English teachers should view them from the perspective of improving their teaching approaches and techniques.

Keywords: error, error analysis, grammatical mistakes, language learning

Introduction

Writing is a problematic process in students' mother tongue, as well as in the foreign language. While writing in a foreign language, students encounter challenges and difficulties at all stages, especially in writing essays of various types. When students hand in essays, what is frequently noticed is that most of them keep translating word for word from Albanian to English, which leads to strange sentences that do not sound natural in English. The challenge for the English instructors is to find ways to activate the dormant knowledge of

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the writing skill in students and assist them to proficiency. This is found in Wachs (1993) who points out that teachers of writing classes in secondary state schools encounter students who have memorized a good amount of English vocabulary and grammar rules, but have seldom put that knowledge to practice. Contrary to what people believe, having a sound knowledge of grammar, spelling and punctuation rules is not sufficient to guarantee success (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2020). Creative thinking and correct inner organization are also important in expressing a message in the written form. In the context of foreign language teaching it is often the language itself which presents a barrier in this aspect since it makes English instructors focus mostly on mechanical aspects of writing, and skipping in this way the major aim which is to achieve successful communication by means of the written text. Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 303) point out that —The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these notions into legible text.

A better understanding of the L1 influence in the process of English writing would help teachers perceive earlier students' difficulties in learning English, which is supported even by Hidayat et al. (2020). It will also aid in the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies to help learners acquire English writing skills better. We should not remember to focus into the dynamics of writing, as it is a skill not only needed to pass international language exams, but also a skill that students should acquire and show in academic contexts.

The primary objective of this research is to help both teachers and students find the most effective means to deal with the problem of errors in the writing of English as a foreign language. More specifically, the objectives are presented in stages further on:

1. To analyze students' errors in the essays handed in as class or home assignment.
2. To classify them into various categories (such as: grammatical errors, articles, prepositions, spelling, punctuation etc.).
3. To discover the most problematic areas which require reinforcement.
4. To provide suggestions for students and teachers of English.

Classification of Errors

• Individual Errors

Individual errors are known as erratic cases. Individual errors are common to both native and second language learners. They are due to nervous reaction to personal physiological or psychological conditions.

General Errors

General errors are common to all learners irrespective of differences in source language structures. These errors are like language learning universals. According to James (1998), "Errors are evidence of the learner's strategy during their learning process of the target language. These are defined as global errors,

which inhibit understanding, and local ones, which do not interfere in communication.”

- ***Errors of Performance and Errors of Competence***

Corder (1971) classified errors into two types:

- a. Errors of Competence and
- b. Errors of Performance.

According to Corder (1971), L2 learners can recognize and correct errors of performance, but not errors of competence. This can be taken as a major factor differentiating both the types of errors mentioned above.

Van Els et al. (1984, p. 52) have approved the distinction between errors of competence and errors of performance pointed out by Corder (1971) in the following way: —Errors of competence are the result of the application of rules by the L2 learner which do not (yet) correspond to the L2 norm: errors of performance are the result of mistakes in language use and manifest themselves as repeats, false starts, corrections and slips of tongue. Van Els et al. (1984) however, modified Corder’s (1971) proposal. They have classified the error of competence as interlingual, morphosyntactic and lexical errors.

- ***Interference Errors***

A learner when faced with the need to communicate will have recourse to whatever linguistic knowledge he has at his command which will increase the likelihood of successful communication. If he lacks the requisite knowledge of the target language to achieve successful communication, then he will have recourse to Native language or any other language he knows to compensate this deficiency, beg, borrow or steal. The greater is the deficiency, typically at the beginning of a course, the greater is the amount of borrowing.

- ***Intralingual Errors***

Richards (1974, p. 7) discusses errors which do not derive from transfers from another language. These errors are intralingual errors. Interlingual errors, are caused by the interference of the learner’s mother tongue. Intralingual errors occur regardless of the learner’s language background. The origin of the intralingual or developmental errors is within the structures of the target language. In English, for example, these errors might be expected from anyone learning English as a second language. These are systematic errors and cannot be attributed to failure of memorizing a segment of language or lapse in performance owing to memory failure, fatigue, etc. In some learners they represent final grammatical competence. In other learners they represent an indication of transitional competence. The cause of these errors is very often in the strategy adopted to learn the second language. Richards (1974, p. 179) call such errors ‘developmental errors’.

- ***Systematic Errors***

According to Jain (1974) and Richards (1974), errors which seem to fall into definable patterns which show a consistent system which are internally principled and which are free from arbitrariness are systematic errors. The systematic errors are rule-governed in the sense that these follow the rules of

grammar that the learner has learnt. The other types of errors are those that are not consistent, are not rule patterned, are not internally principled and yet are not wholly arbitrary. These are the result of hypotheses of the learner which in his system has not for one reason or the other assumed the status of rules.

- ***Redundant Errors***

These errors, according to Corder (1971) are normal to the teaching and learning process and are caused by erroneous teaching and erroneous learning.

- ***Covertly Erroneous, Overtly Erroneous***

According to Corder (1971, p. 35) superficial formless is no guarantee of freedom from error. For this reason distinction has to be done between sentences overtly erroneous i.e., superficially erroneous and covertly erroneous i.e., apparently acceptable but so by chance, or inappropriate in one way or another.

Sources of Errors

1. Interlingual Errors

A number of linguistic and language teaching experts are of the view that the influence of mother tongue is perhaps the most powerful source of error in the use of second language. Terms like interference Weinrich (1953) interlingual errors Richards (1971) language transfer Selinker (1972) have been widely used to refer to this type of influence. Interlingual influence seems to manifest itself in different ways and may be held responsible for errors due to fossilization by which it is meant the linguistic item, rules, systems which speakers of a particular target language tend to keep in their interlanguage Selinker (1972). Non-existent category is another instance where the absence of an equivalent category in the native language of the learner results in errors. One aspect of this category as pointed out by McEldowney (1977) is the understanding of the message but not the code. The other extreme of this is the presence of more than one equivalent category with different implications leading to confusion between two codes and areas of overlap. The other causes are envisaged in translation, spoken form, code switching and redundancy reduction.

2. Intralingual Errors

The error source language transfer has already been described. Adding to this, Richards (1974, p. 75) identified the following sources of intra-lingual errors or developmental errors negative transfer within second language learning. They are:

- a. Over generalization
- b. Over simplification of the target language
- c. Ignorance of rule restriction
- d. Incomplete application of rules

- e. False concepts hypothesized.

a. Over generalization

On the basis of the experience of learning English the learner creates a deviant structure or forms a rule in place of other structure or rules. This is due to negative transfer e.g., having learnt the rule that many verbs in English inflect to the past tense form (greet-greeted), due to the lack of observation or convenient forgetting, the learner forgets the counter example that some verbs do not inflect in the above-mentioned manner (cut-cut) and forms a rule. All past tense forms of verbs add 'ed' to the present tense forms. This is what we call over generalization.

b. Over simplification of the target language

All languages have redundancy, which means they tend to make use of a greater number of signals than are strictly needed to carry a message. For example "These two boys came yesterday." There are three signals to indicate plurality – 'these', 'two', 'boys'; and two signals to indicate the past: 'came' and 'yesterday'. But even if a learner says — "This two boys come yesterday." though incorrect, conveys its meaning. The extra signals which the sentence carries produce the redundancy, which act as a check over a breakdown of communication, even if some signals are left out. But a language learner has a tendency to avoid redundancy and oversimplify the language. To throw extra signals as a learning burden is common. For example: "This is pencil." is a common utterance among English learners wherein the error may be due to over-simplifications, in some cases or due to mother tongue interference in other.

c. Ignorance of rule restriction

Closely related to the generalization of deviant structure is failure to observe the restriction of existing structures that is, the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply for example: "I asked him to do it." - a correct sentence "I made him to do it." - a wrong sentence. The learner encountering the infinitive form with 'to' with one type of verb, attempts by analogy to use the same preposition with similar verbs and hence the error.

d. Incomplete application of rule

Under this category, the presence of structures whose deviancy represents the degree of development of the rules required to produce acceptable utterances, is noted. The most common example is the learners' inefficiency in framing questions correctly. For example, instead of asking: "Did you come to my house yesterday?" there is a tendency to ask in this manner: "You came to my house yesterday?" in the tone of a question.

e. False concepts hypothesized

This category of developmental errors is derived from faulty comprehension of distinction in the target language. For example, the form ‘was’ may be interpreted as a marker of the past-tense and hence we have the faulty construction “One day it was happened.” Another example is the present progressive understood as a narrative tense; but the tense used for actions seen as a whole and for events that develop according to a plan or a sequence of events taking place at the present moment are brought out only in the simple present tense. Ignoring the second concept, the present progressive is being used nowadays in bringing out a sequence of actions, for example, “The lift is going on. Ram is getting out of it... He is leaving the building....” This is not the normal use in English. It is worth mentioning that some verbs which speak of sensory feelings like taste, smell, etc. do not take ‘ing’ to form progressive forms of verbs in sentences. They are often used wrongly with ‘ing’ to indicate feeling, example: “I am seeing something burning.” Thus the second language learning strategies employed by the learners are mostly responsible for the incidence of intralingual or developmental errors. Hence, it is more appropriate to classify and illustrate the causes of those errors in terms of the processes mentioned above. The spectrum of error sources can be widened by including ‘avoidance strategy’ which the learner resorts to under duress of pressure and indecision, —exposure to advertisement and sign boards and holophrase learning referred to by Jain (1974) and Hendri et al. (2018) may also be used as an aid in reducing the burden of learning by the students leading to errors. Apart from the other sources, it is also possible that errors are due to inherent difficulty of the second language itself. Yet another source is hypercorrection. Besides these intralingual sources, it is also possible that the teacher and the course material unintentionally contribute to promoting errors by faulty selection and sequencing (Al-Ghabra & Najim 2019).

Methodology

Research Questions

The aims of this study will be investigated through the following research questions:

1. What are the typical types of errors in English language writing of freshmen students in ‘Aleksandër Moisiu’ University, Durrës?
2. How frequent are these errors in their English language writing?

Research Method

Since this study is research on students’ errors in the skill of written communication (in English) and since the focus of the study is only the essays’ analysis and no other forms of written assignments, it was considered

reasonable to use the Error Analysis, being a quantitative method of research, which helps to study as fully as possible the problem in question. Error analysis is considered an important source of information. By means of error analyses, English instructors obtain valuable information on learners' errors which helps them considerably to correct learners' errors and also to improve the effectiveness of their language classes. Without this research method, the study of errors would have been misleading, but on the contrary, counting correct responses and wrong ones creates a clear idea of which items are acquired by the learner and which are not. As a specific division of Applied Linguistics, Error Analysis has two main functions. The first one describes the learner's actual knowledge of the learner in the foreign language. It also gives important clues about the connection between 'knowledge' on one hand and 'learning' the student has acquired on the other hand. Whereas the second function is to overcome the discrepancy between the knowledge of the student and the situation. In our case, the errors analysis method provides a more practical approach to answering the research questions raised and has a greater potential in application as the issue is examined thoroughly.

Sample and Population

The samples for this study include essays from students of the first year in Aleksandër Moisiu University. These essays were collected through a period of 1 month, more specifically 5 October 2019 - 5 November 2019. We extended this period to 1 month (not less) because not all the assignment given to students were in the format of the essay, some of them were letters (formal or informal), descriptions etc. Since our study was focused on essays, we could not include these other formats here. More specifically, we collected 100 short essays which belonged to students of four different classes. All the samples were chosen randomly in order to receive valid and authentic results.

Data Collection Procedures

All the necessary ethical procedures were followed to usefully collect the data. We contacted the English lecturers or instructors who taught in those four classes, explained the scope of the study to them and the purpose to enlighten English lecturers on the errors that need remedial work so that time is not wasted on teaching grammatical items or any other linguistic features which present little or no problems to the vast majority of the learners in relation to writing. Each essay was given a code and was analyzed like that, not including the name of the student, his/her gender and other confidential information.

Data Analysis and Error Classification

Data analysis has to do with trying to discover patterns or trends in data sets, whereas data interpretation has to do with trying to provide an explanation

for them. The techniques scientists use to analyze and interpret the data enable other scholars to both review the data and use it in future research (Carpi & Egger, 2009, p. 1). The 100 short essays were read and analyzed for errors. At first, we corrected the essays and dealt with the identification of errors. In the following stage, we classified the errors according to their features. Next, we quantified the frequency of each type of errors encountered there. The error identification was done consistently in each paper with the aim to find the differences or similarities of error types and their frequency. Each error was recorded only once even if it reoccurred, as it is sometimes the case. The analysis was conducted based on Ellis (1997, p. 20). As a result, the following error categories were selected for analysis:

1. Tenses (with the following subcategories):

- a. Present progressive instead of present simple
- b. Present simple instead of present perfect
- c. Past simple instead of present perfect
- d. Past simple instead of present simple
- e. Present simple instead of past perfect
- f. Present simple instead of past simple

2. Prepositions (with the following subcategories):

- a. Omission of preposition
- b. Unnecessary insertion of preposition
- c. Misuse of preposition

3. Articles (with the following subcategories):

- a. Omission of article 'the'
- b. Omission of article 'a /an'
- c. Misuse of articles

4. Omission of plural ending with 's'

5. Misuse of possessive 's'

6. Subject-verb agreement

7. Word-order

8. Mechanical errors (with the following subcategories):

- a. Spelling
- b. Punctuation

Data Analysis and Discussion

The data are presented in the level of categories and subcategories. The objective is to find out the type and frequency of errors made by freshmen students. More specifically, the following types of errors:

1. Typical types of errors in English language writing
2. Frequency of these errors in English language writing
3. Examples of errors found in the essays

Types of Errors Documented by Means of Error Analysis

After reading and correcting every single essay, each error found there is documented. The categories and the subcategories these errors belonged to, were designed and classified accordingly. The errors were counted and presented in percentage in tables or graphs. Since the error analysis used in our study was mainly based on grammatical errors, without considering other writing skills, such as creative expression, organization, coherence, and cohesion, the essay scoring included error counts for grammatical errors only. Table 1 presents the classification of error types.

Table 1. Categories and Subcategories of Errors

Example of the Error Identified	Definition of Error Category
Verb Tenses	
Not found	Tense: Present progressive instead of present simple
Not found	Tense: Present simple used instead of present perfect
It's just that we didn't actually planned anything special.	Tense: Past simple utilized instead of present perfect
After walking in there we felt so hungry, so we decided to took a rest.	Tense: Past simple form used instead of present simple
They come here in memory of the old times.	Tense: Present simple instead of past perfect
We sit in our places and the bus start the journey.	Tense: Present simple instead of past simple
Prepositions	
I went there with my cousins and arrived Λ about 10:00 am.	Omission of preposition
Visiting in other beaches of our city is the best thing because you can explore beauty of our country.	Unnecessary insertion of preposition
She is 11 years old and now goes at school.	Misuse of preposition
Articles	
We are staying in a campsite in the middle of Λ desert but we are not cold.	Omission of article 'the'
She has long and black eyelashes, Λ small nose and the skin is in the color of wheat.	Omission of article 'a/an'
I don't even remember when we met for a first time, but it was many years ago.	Misuse of articles

Omission of Plural Ending with 's'	
We have been walking for hour but it was exciting because we saw some penguins and some seals.	
Misuse of Possessive 's'	
Entela Λ friend told us to leave immediately.	
Subject-Verb Agreement	
All loves her and want to be her friends.	
Word-Order	
It is a small town with people friendly.	
Mechanical Errors	
The nature was fantastic, inspirening.	Spelling error
Finally Λ I must end now because I can't write anymore.	Punctuation error

The Frequency of Errors

After counting the errors in students' essays, we found a total of 523 errors. As you can see in table no. 2, the most common grammatical errors were as follows: Mechanical errors (39%), Tenses (20.8%), Preposition (18.5%) followed by Articles (9.7%). The result of the analysis points out that students' most problematic area is related to Mechanical errors which consist of two subcategories, namely spelling and punctuation, but the real problem was spelling with an extremely high number of words or phrases written incorrectly.

Table 2. The Frequency of Errors

Types of Errors	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Tenses	109	20.8%
Prepositions	97	18.5%
Articles	51	9.7%
Omission of plural ending with 's'	28	5.3%
Misuse of possessive 's'	8	1.5%
Subject-verb agreement	11	2.1%
Word-order	14	2.6%
Mechanical errors	205	39.1%

The Graph 1 is a summary of Table 2 and displays all the error types recorded from the students' essays and their differences.

Graph 1. The Frequency of Errors



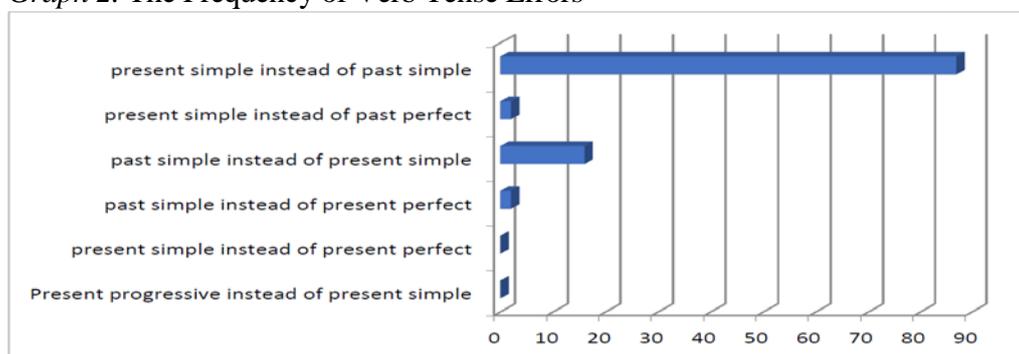
Tense Errors

In our study, the Tense Errors were analyzed by dividing them into six subcategories in order to understand better which tenses cause problem for the students. The tenses analyzed are as follows:

‘Present progressive instead of present simple’, ‘Present simple instead of present perfect’, ‘Past simple instead of present perfect’, ‘Past simple instead of present simple’, ‘Present simple instead of past perfect’ and ‘Present simple instead of past simple’.

Out of the six subcategories, for the first and the second one were not recorded any errors. For the subcategories ‘Past simple instead of present perfect’ and ‘Present simple instead of past perfect’ were recorded only two mistakes in each one. Whereas for the remaining two: ‘Past simple instead of present simple’ and ‘Present simple instead of past simple’ the situation was far more serious. The result of the analysis about tenses is displayed in Graph 2.

Graph 2. The Frequency of Verb Tense Errors



Examples of Present Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Past Simple Tense

Table 3. Examples of Present Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Past Simple Tense

	Present Tense utilized instead of Past Tense (P –Pr)	
	Error	Correction
(Pr –P)	I and my family visit Vlora for one day.	[visited]
(Pr –P)	We eat lunch in Jala in front of the sea, make a lot of photos and tasted that special place.	[ate], [made]
(Pr –P)	All over the way we talk about the place, laugh a lot and listen to music	[talked], [laughed], [listened]
(Pr –P)	I think he was bitten by a jellyfish.	[thought]

High error percentages in this subcategory indicate that the use of present simple in English language was a major learning difficulty for the freshmen students. The analysis shows that they are not clear when and how to use the tense and the form of the verb. It can only be justified by the incomprehensibility of the correct form and usage of the tense. In the 100 essays analyzed were found 87

errors related to this subcategory. Learners who make this type of error do not seem cautious about the essential function of the verb in the sentence and how carefully should the verb tense be chosen in order to convey the right meaning or the intended message. What becomes clear from the examples in Table 3 is that without doubt they are more focused on the content they want to express than on the appropriate language they should use to express the message. Examples:

“We start the journey at 5 in the morning and arrived at 10 p.m.” or

“He was so surprised that immediately came to hug me because he know that I had prepared everything.”

Examples of Past Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Present Simple Tense

Table 4. Examples of Past Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Present Simple Tense

	Past Tense utilized instead of Present Tense (P –Pr)	
	Error	Correction
(P –Pr)	First, I want to ask you about the content of this cream, especially if the cream had chemicals.	[has]
(P –Pr)	After walking in there we felt so hungry, so we decided to took a rest.	[take]
(P –Pr)	I looked around and I couldn't believed my eyes	[believe]
(P –Pr)	I and my family decided to travelled to my hometown.	[travel]
(P –Pr)	We ate lunch and went to relaxed.	[relax]

Based on the examples presented in Table 4, it seems that the students do not understand well the difference in usage between *Past tense* and *Present Simple*. Even though compared to the previous subcategory the cases are not so numerous, still it is something that needs to be covered again by the English teacher in order to find an appropriate strategy to clarify the usage. Other examples:

“We decided to organized a picnic in the mountain the other day.” [organize]

“She studied at ‘Scanderbeg’ gymnasium and now is in the second year.” [studies]

Preposition Errors

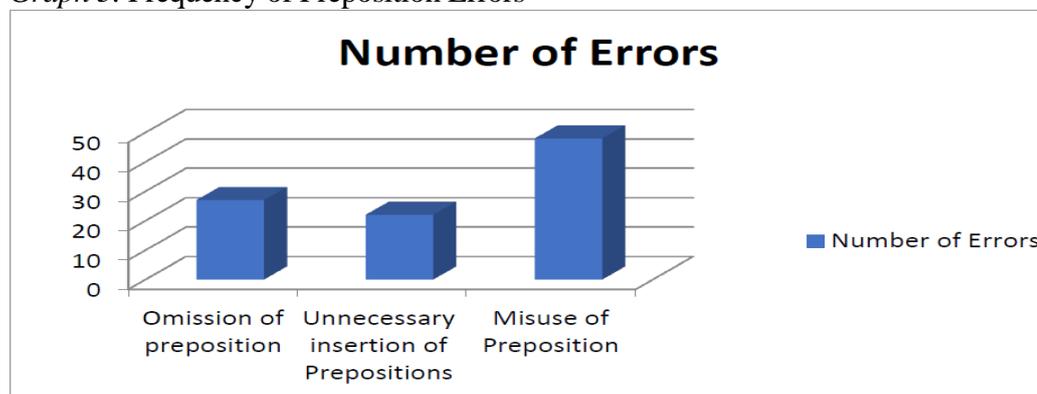
The correct use of preposition in English language may have a direct impact in the quality of information conveyed through writing. It is not uncommon to see that the use of English preposition in freshmen students reflects Albanian structures — that means that students make literal translations from Albanian to English. The differences between the Albanian and English system concerning prepositions are believed to constitute the problem of numerous Albanian students in learning and using correctly English prepositions. Many students feel overwhelmed by the fact that English has numerous prepositions denoting a great deal of relationships from which to choose from and therefore base their choice on their first language (L1) resulting frequently in wrong choices. A preposition is a type of a word or group of words often placed before nouns, pronouns or gerunds to link them grammatically to other words. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 414) indicate that “Prepositions may express meanings such as direction (for example from home), place (for example in the car), possession (for example the capital

city of Namibia) and time (for example after hours)”. The result of the analysis about preposition errors is displayed in Table 5 and Graph 3.

Table 5. Frequency of Preposition Errors

Type of preposition errors	Number of errors	Percentage
Omission of preposition	27	27.8%
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	22	22.6%
Misuse of preposition	48	49.4%

Graph 3. Frequency of Preposition Errors



Examples of Preposition Errors

Prepositions are used extensively among numerous languages. The same preposition can denote a completely different meaning when moving from one language to another. In order to understand the why of the frequency of this type of error, we can refer to García (1993) who points out that the great number of prepositions in English and their high degree of polysemy make it almost impossible the systematization of the task. This is noticed in various English language textbooks, where not always is emphasized the important fact that a certain preposition has more than one meaning depending on the context or the verb associated with. Fernández (1994, p. 52) remarks that students learn verbs without paying attention that they sometimes require a specific preposition to convey a certain meaning.

It can be assumed that if a learner makes a lot of errors concerning prepositions, it is direct evidence that he/she finds this part of speech quite problematic. However, it is also true that the absence of errors in this category does not necessarily mean that the learner has no difficulty with prepositions. Kleinmann (1977) highlights the fact that the learner might actually be avoiding prepositions whose usage is not clear to him/her. However, in the case of prepositions, this strategy does not necessarily apply. In the same line is even the study of Tiarina (2017). The great number of prepositions along with their respective functions in the sentence makes avoidance almost impossible. Consequently, a prevalence of preposition errors is an indicator of the difficulty of the learner in learning the foreign language. The more frequent the error, the more problematic that area of learning. Example:

“We went at the hospital and she stayed there for two days.” [to the hospital]

Following, in Table 6, you will find other examples of preposition errors divided in three subcategories.

Table 6. Examples of Preposition Errors

Preposition errors		
Type of error	Example of error	Correction
Omission of preposition	I have to listenΛ her and her imaginary love stories	[to]
Omission of preposition	The journey to Istanbul started Λ about 8.00 from Mother Theresa airport.	[at]
Omission of preposition	I was in a good mood and I figured Λ that I would easily finish my first patrol at 8.00 p.m.	[out]
Omission of preposition	That was the most important decision I had taken Λ my life.	[in]
Omission of preposition	I went there with my cousins and arrived Λ about 10:00 am.	[at]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	We arrived after two hours and decided to hang out together those holidays because my grandparents lived near of her house.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	Visiting in other beaches of our city is the best thing because you can explore beauty of our country.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	I am glad at it didn't happen something bad.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	We arrived after two hours and decided to hang out together those holidays because my grandparents lived near of her house.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	We hurried to back home.	[not needed]
Misuse of preposition	It was one on a lifetime thing to do	[in]
Misuse of preposition	The first day everything was okay, but in night we decided to tell scary story.	[at]
Misuse of preposition	It was a beautiful spring day when I and my friends decided to go in Bjeshkët e Namuna.	[to]
Misuse of preposition	At the end, I took the cat at my grandmother's house and I cared at her	[about]
Misuse of preposition	The party will be organized in my home	[at]

Article Errors

In spite of the general idea that article errors do not interfere in the readers' understanding, lack of knowledge about their usage might cause distraction while reading. According to Wulandari and Harida (2021), the problem learners have with articles might be of various natures. There are learners who do not understand the rules, others do not remember how to use them, and other learners might have cognition problems and so on. But we should not blame only the students. According to Celce-Mercia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p. 271) the article system results to be bothersome for teachers as well. Consequently, some of them do not prefer to spend time in class dealing with them. They would rather choose to work with other grammatical issues, considered more useful from the communication perspective.

The errors pertaining to the category of articles can also be attributed to the difficulty in the use of articles in English Ginting (2019). The students sometimes

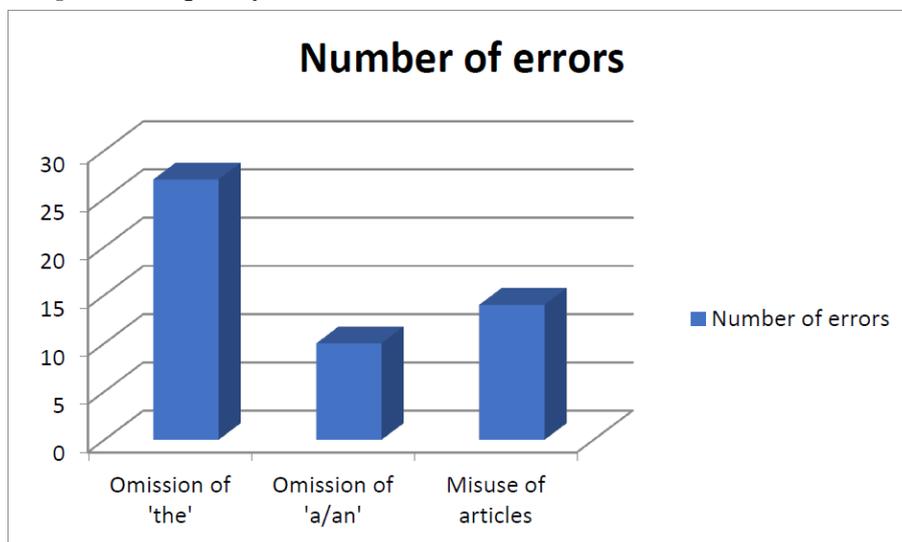
try hard to make a difference between proper and common nouns which leads mostly to guessing the article needed. Other times they are not able to distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns which sometimes results in the wrong usage of the article. On the other hand, the ‘omission’ of the article shows insufficient understanding of the article system by the students.

In Albanian language for instance the definite article ‘the’ is positioned after the noun, differently from English, where it is placed before the noun, and causing problems for the students. The result of analyzing 100 essays indicates that the most typical error in this category is the omission of ‘the’ which accounts for nearly 52% of all article errors, followed by the misuse of articles with 27.4% and the omission of ‘a/an’ with 14 errors, accounting for 19% of all article errors. The result of the analysis about article errors is displayed in Table 7 and Graph 4.

Table 7. Frequency of Article Errors

Type of article errors	Number of errors	Percentage
Omission of ‘the’	27	52.9%
Omission of ‘a/an’	10	19%
Misuse of articles	14	27.4%
Total	51	100%

Graph 4. Frequency of Article Errors



Examples of Article Errors

As we know, English language makes use of 3 articles: the definite article ‘the’ and the indefinite articles ‘a’ and ‘an’. Despite the fact that there are only three articles, Yule (2009) states that they account for nearly 10% of the word frequency in various texts. But the problem that students face is not related to which article to use, on the contrary, it is mostly related to whether they have to use an article or not. As a matter of fact, Al-husban (2017) believes that the better we understand the sources of article errors, the better English teachers can help students in this respect. The correct usage of the definite and indefinite articles above depends

primarily on the word that follows them. As a rule, the indefinite article ‘a’ is used in front of a word starting with a consonant, for example, ‘a school’ or a vowel with a consonant sound, for example ‘a uniform’ and ‘an’ is used in front of words starting with a vowel sound, for example ‘an orange’ and words starting with mute ‘h’, for example, ‘an hour’. The definite article ‘the’ is found in cases when a person or thing is already referred to. The sentences in Table 8 illustrate the wrong usage of articles as opposing to the rules described above.

Table 8. Examples of Article Errors

Article errors		
Type of error	Example of error	Correction
Omission of ‘the’	All the day we stayed in Λ cave exploring, eating and playing.	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	In the middle of the road, Λ storm started again.	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	It was Λ first day of my holidays there.	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	I hope things have been going well for you at Λ office	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	In our way to Dajti mountain, we started singing on Λ bus and laughing with Ana’s jokes.	[the]
Omission of ‘a/an’	She is Λ very cheerful woman, always smiling and always giving positivity.	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	That is Λ beautiful place to visit	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	It was Λ sunny day when we decided to visit Berat.	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	My mom is very happy because we are together after Λ long time.	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	It was such Λ marvelous place that we had a great time together	[a]
Misuse of articles	She is eighteen and she lives with her family in apartment in Tirana	[an]
Misuse of articles	The advert also mentions an high quality of the battery.	[the]
Misuse of articles	I don’t even remember when we met for a first time, but it was many years ago.	[the]
Misuse of articles	Anyway, as you know, I am working with the project.	[a]
Misuse of articles	It’s an big flat and designed so well	[a]

Omission of Plural Ending with ‘s’ and Other Plurality Problems

Another subcategory analyzed is the omission of plural ending with ‘s’. In our research, the percentage of errors pertaining to this category is not high (28 in total or 5.3%) compared to the other categories analyzed. Still, it is something that requires attention as the Albanian students are sometimes confused concerning the difference between regular and irregular plural nouns. Sometimes, they tend to keep the irregular plural as singular when actually it is plural. Examples:

“We have been walking for hour but it was exciting because we saw some penguins and some seals.” [hours]

“Everyone can visit museums, theatre and historical place that our country has to offer.” [theatres], [places]

Another tendency noticed is the addition of 's' to uncountable nouns as in the example:

"The wind was playing with our hairs." [hair]

"I love this place and its peoples." [people]

"We saw some leopards, some variety of deers and plenty of other wild animals." [deer]

An explanation for this phenomenon is that learners try to over-generalize the rule by adding (s) to all plurals. Errors of this type belong to over-generalization and simplification strategy from the students. Budiarta, Suputra, and Widiastara (2018) have noticed in their study that students tend to simplify things by sub-categorizing countable nouns as uncountable and vice versa. Other students tend to leave out the 's' of plurality from countable nouns, others often insert the 's' of plurality in singular countable nouns as well as uncountable ones. This view is supported by Littlewood (1994) cited from Fornkwa (2013, p. 56) who states that overgeneralization errors happen because students have either over-generalized a rule to cover an exceptional item within a given category, or because learners have over-generalized a rule to cover an item that is not within the category covered by the rule as in the case of 's' for plurality. In both cases, learners must therefore need to learn an exception to the general rule or construct a new category. Other examples of errors in plurality:

"She is a sportive person and doesn't like dress and tight clothes." [dresses]

"Anila doesn't like music but she loves animals, especially dog." [dogs].

"The next day, one of my friend was not home." [friends]

"Also, at the periphery of Tirana they can find natural garden and small forests." [gardens].

Misuse of Possessive 's'

In our study we also came across the phenomenon of the misuse of possessive 's'. As a matter of fact one of the sources of errors in this category is related to the option of using the possessive 'of' alongside with possessive 's'. Research shows that sometimes it is possible to find rules of possessive 'of /s' among native speakers of English and teach it to students, even though at times they are interchangeable. However, we should admit that such a flexible usage might lead to confusion among teachers and learners. This can be considered one of the causes found in the analyzed essays. Anyway, according to the error analysis, were found only 8 errors of this type, equivalent to 1.5% of all errors.

It shows that freshmen students have mastered quite well this grammar issue. Another explanation for this percentage is received if we have a look at the Albanian language. We would notice that in our mother tongue, the concept of possessive 's' is expressed through the genitive case articles which are 'i', 'e', 'të' 'së'. As we can see in Albanian we have four different forms whereas in English only two, namely possessive 'of /s'. This may account for the good grasp of the concept in question. Examples:

“Entela friend told us to leave immediately.” [Entela’s friend]

“We asked the owner to see the dogs’s puppies.” [dogs’ puppies]

“Another important element is Tiranias’ cuisine, which consists of many well-known traditional dishes.” [Tirana’s cuisine]

Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

Errors of subject-verb agreement constitute another type of error noticed during our error analysis. This is the case when the subject and the verb or verb phrase in a sentence should agree in number and person but they do not. Based on the analysis, it was found that this type of error is not very problematic.

Actually, the errors in this category were only 11, pertaining to 2.1% of all errors. In Albanian, the subject must agree with the verb that follows, in other words, if the subject is masculine, the verb should correspond to it and the same applies to the feminine, if the subject is in the singular, the verb that follows should correspond to that, the same applies to the plural. A possible explanation why those few learners have the tendency to add ‘s’ after plural, or skip ‘s’ after singular may be the result of overgeneralization of the rule. They overgeneralize the plural by adding the plural ‘s’ to the verb that follows and skip the ‘s’ in the verb if the subject is singular. This indicates clearly that students confuse the plural ‘s’ with the third person singular (-s) and tend to add ‘s’ to the verb if the subject is plural and omit -s if the subject is singular.

Examples of errors belonging to the category of subject-verb agreement are as follows: - Plural subject does not agree with singular verb:

“What are the advantages that makes IphoneX so preferred by people?” [make]

“I thought my English skills was good enough for the exam.” [were]

“We was all happy because it was different from other days.” [were]

Singular subject does not agree with plural verb:

“There are an unbelievable number of bars and restaurants who offering everything from Albanian food to Indian and Chinese.” [is]

“My sister decorate the tree very beautifully.” [decorates]

Word Order Errors

The acquisition of word-order is a very important aspect in foreign language learning and there are times when it can become quite problematic, especially in the case of differences between mother tongue and foreign language. Actually, English word order has frequently been described as fixed. The following elements in the sentence structure to be distinguished are: subject (S), verb (V), object (O), complement (C), and adverbial (A). English language follows a strict word order in order to express the grammatical relations in declarative sentences. Cases when this Subject-Verb-Object word-order is not respected include questions, sentences with infinitives, sentences with relative clauses, gerunds and participles. Research suggests that there is evidence of transfer in studies related to word order (Celce-

Murcia & Hilles, 1988; Putri, 2019; Farooq, Uzair-Ul-Hassan, & Wahid, 2020). The point is that learners do not master all the language units in the sentence equally well in the same time interval and this leads to positive or negative transfer. Referring to the analysis of 100 essays from the freshmen students, we notice that they constitute 2.6% of all errors, all in all 14 errors. Examples of errors belonging to this category of are as follows:

- “Most of the time we spent at the beach.” [We spent most of the time at the beach]
 “Tom has wanted to expand the activity, but without being you here it is impossible.”
 [you being here]
 “It is powerful enough to work or play computer games?” [Is it]
 “We are having a very good time here and I hope this summer holiday will finish
 never.” [will never finish]
 “Have you decided where will you go on holiday?” [you will]
 “It is a small town with people friendly.” [friendly people]

Mechanical Errors

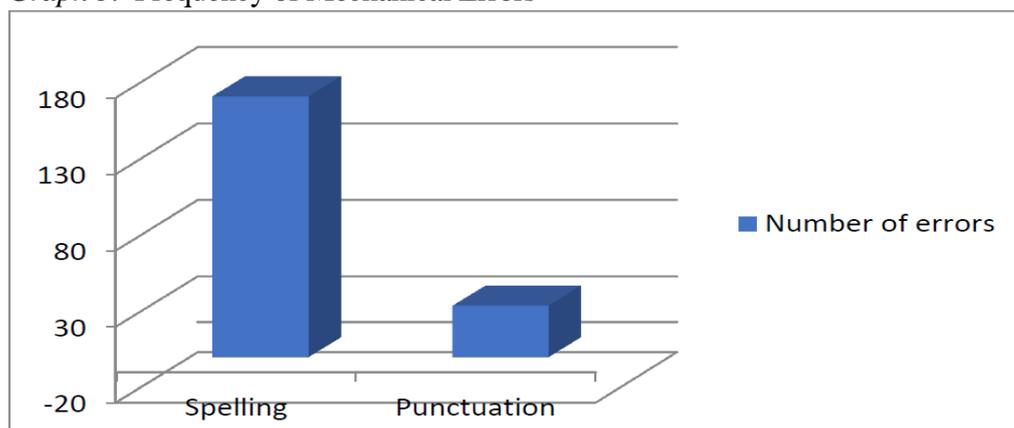
Mechanical errors are errors related to orthography (spelling and capitalization) and punctuation. As a matter of fact, according to Mantarli (2019) they rarely interfere with the comprehension of a piece of writing, but may convey a negative impression of the writer, especially in formal settings. Furthermore, research suggests that this type of error may lead to problems such as confusion while reading a certain text and incorrect interpretation of its meaning (Nuraini, 2019; Nguyen, Nguyen, & Phan, 2021). For this reason, when writing, students should pay attention, among other elements, even to the mechanics of writing; namely spelling, capitalization and punctuation. What they could focus is the right placement of punctuations, capitalizations, and spellings. If they fail to do that, the readers for sure might be confused and not catch the message of the writer.

According to Stilman (1997) while the reader tends to find the misspelling easily, when it comes to a misplace of punctuation it gets difficult for readers to discover the ideas in text. In our study we analyzed only spelling and punctuation. The result of the analysis about mechanical errors from 100 essays of freshmen students is displayed in Table 9 and Graph 5. As you can notice from Table 9, spelling errors surpass various times those of punctuation.

Table 9. Mechanical Errors

Type of mechanical errors	Number of errors
Spelling	171
Punctuation	34

Graph 5. Frequency of Mechanical Errors



Spelling Errors

Errors of spelling are listed the first amongst all other types of errors, either grammatical or lexical ones. It makes no difference if the writer is a native speaker of English or somebody who studies English as a foreign language (Leacock et al., 2002; cf. Liu, 2015, p. 1628). Learning English as a foreign language is very common in many parts of the world, which means that its learning is frequently affected by language transfer. As we know, transfers are of two types: positive and negative. According to Figueredo (2006), positive transfer happens when between the L1 and L2 exist common features, whereas negative transfer happens when specific knowledge in the L2 is required but has not been acquired by the learner, which leads to knowledge of spellings in the first language to be applied in the wrong way in the spellings of the second language. The spelling errors are divided in two types: typographic errors and cognitive errors. In the first category are included: letter insertions, letter omissions, letter substitutions and transpositions, whereas the second category stems from phonetic similarities such as writing *acedemy instead of academy (Yanyan, 2015). Examples of spelling errors found in the essays analyzed are:

“Our room has a huge balcony with agorgeus view of the lake.” [gorgeous]

“It was still hot and sunywhen we went for a walk. [sunny]

“The nature was fantastic, inspirening. [inspiring]

“I promise I will write again to tell you about everythink. [everything]

“As you might remember, here is a quite village with very good weather and fresh air. [quiet]

“I took a fork on the flor and threw it out of the window hoping that it would scare the fox. [floor]

Punctuation Errors

Punctuation includes the use of special marks added in order to separate phrases and sentences. Using punctuation correctly is very important since it helps the reader understand easily the meaning in writing without the need to look at the

expression of the individual who wrote the message. As we said previously, if the writers misuse punctuation, this will change the idea of the piece of writing. To support this view we can refer to Harmer (2007) who points out that the use of proper punctuation can define the quality of writing. According to Hasa, and Munandar (2018) misusing the commas, full stops, dash, quotation, etc. can make an ambiguity to the text. To write well means among other things to punctuate well. The functions of punctuation marks are to separate words and phrases within a sentence according to their meanings. Misused punctuation, for instance, a question mark (?) instead of a full stop (.) at the end of a sentence may convey a different meaning (Ruminar, 2018). Examples of punctuation errors noticed in the essay of freshmen students include the following:

- “As we were eating under the shadow of a beautiful tree Melisa decided to climb it.
[tree, Melisa]
- “Luckily we had taken other clothes.” [Luckily, we]
- “By the time we arrived I meet my cousin Tomi.” [arrived, I]
- “However tourists think that Shëngjin is an underdeveloped and noisy city.”
[However, tourists]
- “When we arrived at our destination we opened our backpacks. [destination, we]

As we may notice from the above examples of punctuation errors, in all the cases the errors we have to do with the omission of commas, not with other punctuation marks.

Discussion

Kampookaew (2020, p. 267) provides empirical evidence on the grammatical errors made by Thai EFL students in an EAP writing class. The most frequently errors found were errors at word level, including errors on nouns, articles, verbs, word classes, and prepositions, while mechanical errors and errors at sentence level occurred much less frequently whereas in our research the most problematic category were the mechanical errors.

Özkayran and Yılmaz (2020, p. 55) in their study write that the first three most frequent error types were prepositions, verb ‘to be’ and misspelling errors. In our study these errors come to the front but the difference is that the prepositions error are listed in the third place, verb tense errors in the second place whereas misspelling comes in the first one.

According to Alghazo and Alshraideh (2020, p. 7), the most frequent errors were related to the verb tense, articles, word order, noun ending, sentence structure and grammatical errors. Even in our study these errors were frequent. The verb tense was ranked the second after the mechanical ones. On the whole, writing in a foreign language is a difficult task and both the teachers and the students should be aware of the possible difficulties they can face. Teachers should be well prepared of effective instructional strategies in order for their students to succeed.

Conclusions

The main objectives of our study were: analyzing students' errors, classifying them into different categories, discovering what were the most problematic areas which needed reinforcement and providing suggestions for students and teachers of English. As a result of the analysis, in the essays of freshman students were found a number of various grammatical errors. In order to simplify the presentation of the results we classified them into categories and subcategories. More specifically, there were eight major categories (some of them with their subcategories) as follows: 1- verb tense (with its subcategories), 2- preposition (with its subcategories), 3- article (with its subcategories), 4- omission of plural ending with 's' and other plurality problems, 5- misuse of possessive 's', 6- subject-verb agreement, 7- word-order, 8- mechanical errors (with its subcategories). After analyzing the errors in the essays, it was found that the way freshmen students composed their essays indicated serious weaknesses in various components of English grammar. **The most problematic category is the one of mechanical errors, which accounts for 39% of all errors, corresponding to 205 errors.** In this category 2 main subcategories were included. The one which students find more difficult here is spelling where we noticed errors of miscellaneous types including letter substitutions, letter insertions, letter omissions, transpositions etc. This finding is also supported by research made in a number of countries. **In the second place are listed the verb tense errors. They account for 20.8% of errors, which correspond to 109 errors.** In this category 6 subcategories were included in order to see which tenses are most often confused. They are as follows: 1- present progressive instead of present simple, 2- present simple instead of present perfect, 3- past simple instead of present perfect, 4- past simple instead of present simple, 5- present simple instead of past perfect and 6- present simple instead of past simple. Out of the six subcategories, number 4 (with 16 errors) but especially number 6 (with 87 errors) were the ones where students had made a considerable number of errors. **In the third place is the category of preposition errors, which accounts for 18.5% of all errors and corresponds to 97 errors.** In this category are included 3 subcategories which are as follows: 1- omission of preposition, 2- unnecessary insertion of preposition and 3- misuse of preposition. From these three subcategories, the essay analysis indicates that students have more difficulties with number 3 (misuse of preposition – 48 errors). It means that the use of wrong prepositions is far more serious than their omission or unnecessary insertion. **In the fourth place, even though not in a high percentage are listed the article errors. They account for 9.7% of errors, which correspond to 51 errors in total.** In this category are included 3 subcategories (as in the other cases) which are as follows: 1- omission of 'the', 2- omission of 'a/an' and 3- misuse of articles. From these three subcategories, based on the analysis it is clear that students errors are more related to the omission of article 'the' (27 errors recorded) and to some degree to the misuse of articles (14 errors recorded). **Following, are listed the category of omission of plural ending with 's' and other plurality problems which accounts for 5.3% of errors (28 errors), the category of word-order which accounts for 2.6% of errors (14 errors), the category of subject-verb**

agreement which accounts for 2.1% of errors (11 errors) and last is ranked the category of misuse of possessive 's', which accounts for 1.5% of errors (8 errors).

Suggestions and Recommendations

In the field of English language learning, the tendency to view the errors negatively is frequently noticed. As a matter of fact, they are usually perceived as an indication of inadequacy in teaching as well as in learning. Nevertheless, nowadays it is generally accepted that making errors is an essential part of learning and English teachers should view them from the perspective of improving their teaching approaches, techniques, procedures etc. Errors give teachers feedback on the efficiency of their teaching methodologies and techniques that require further attention

Based on the results of this study, some suggestions related to the aspects that teachers should focus more in the classroom should be taken in consideration. First of all, English teachers and specialists whose responsibility involves the design of syllabi and choice of textbooks should be more careful in their work, by giving the writing skills the space and attention that it deserves. Textbooks should involve more free and controlled writing activities, in order to assist students in their writing.

Moreover, it would be a good idea for English teachers and instructors to vary their approaches in teaching with the aim to enable their students to write competently. In my opinion, writing errors could be minimized if teachers used modern techniques in teaching this skill. After all, it is evident that grammatical errors require more attention than the others.

Finally, it should be emphasized that research in the field of errors and mistakes is on-going, since teaching and learning are both complex processes. While the results of the analyses of 100 essays from freshmen students have provided an insight into the most typical types of errors made by them along with their frequency of occurrence, the findings can only be considered as suggestive.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study that make a great difference in the discussion of the results and also in the validity and reliability of our research questions. The first limitation was related to the amount of time available to conduct this study. If we had more extended time, we could find additional resources to help answer the research questions. We would also prepare a questionnaire about activities that teachers use in classroom and their direct effect in writing. However, it remains a future priority.

A second limitation is related to the survey sample. Due to the limited number of participants, we were not able to have a broader range of responses.

The study was intended for freshmen students at various universities in Albania. However, due to the pandemic situation it was restricted only to the

students of “Aleksandër Moisiu” University, which contributed to a generalized conclusion. It would be useful if it could involve more students, from different levels which would yield more specific data.

Another limitation is related to the instruments used in the study, which means that the study could have generated more reliable results with multiple data sources, as for example interviews with students and teachers of English, whose opinions are always valid for a better study. Using data from different sources would have enabled a better perspective to the issue addressed. Finally, as researchers we assume that another limitation can be attributed to the small number of detailed studies in the Albanian context pertaining to this topic. This has also led to difficulties in comparing the obtained results in the light of studies conducted in other countries.

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