

Significance of Learners' Errors and the Role of Feedback to Improve the Writing Skill of Elementary Level Students

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Whenever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out the common errors that elementary level students usually commit in their written work, how the second language teachers address them and how feedback can help our learners. This paper deals exclusively with the written form of the target language. To achieve this objective, I relied on two means- sample writings of the students and a questionnaire for teachers. The sample writings were administered in order to find out the errors and the questionnaire aimed to find out teachers' attitudes towards errors and the techniques they used to provide feedback. This study tries to find out effective solutions of the questions and I believe the findings will help other teachers to fulfill their purposes regarding writing class.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The errors which students make while learning and the way teachers deal with them play a significant role in language classrooms. The issues related to error correction and giving feedback such as the reasons for making errors, how the rate of making errors can be reduced and the effective ways of giving feedback are crucial factors in educational pedagogy. From the last few decades the researchers have taken into consideration these important issues. In the past, the errors made by the students were frequently corrected because the focus of classroom instruction was mainly on accuracy. The role of giving feedback and error correction has changed significantly in recent years. Linguist such as Corder (1967) contributed a lot in this area of language teaching. He has changed the beliefs towards errors and for his contribution; error analysis gets its place as a scientific method in linguistics. Ellis (1994) states, "It was not until the 1970s that EA became a recognized part of applied linguistics, a development that owed much to the work of Corder" (cited in Karra, 2006: 1). In the 1960s the behaviorists saw errors as something to be prevented as far as possible through systematic modeling and wanted to eliminate errors through drilling. They observed learners' errors and tried to find out which were the common errors and which were not. Teachers were expected to teach their students to communicate accurately without making errors. However, over the years due to the change in teaching methodology, there came a positive change toward second language error. Corder showed how information about errors could be helpful to the teachers, researchers, and students and errors are now seen as reflections of a learner's stage of "inter language" development. It is also an indicator of natural progress of learning the second language. It has been found that while acquiring the first language; children produce numerous errors, which are accepted as a natural and necessary part of a child's language development. Second language learning is more or less similar to first language learning in its trial and error nature. So, errors need to be studied with great importance.

It is also important to know when and how to correct students. Giving feedback and correcting errors not only let learners know how well they have performed but also help to increase motivation and build a supportive classroom environment.

Again, there is a possibility or “danger” of over-correcting students, which may lead to loss of motivation. It may also interrupt the flow of the class or the activities if every single mistake is corrected. However, most students do want to have some of their mistakes corrected as it gives them a basis for improvement. Therefore, a lot of researches were done in this area, which resulted in some disagreements among teachers and educators about when and how to correct mistakes.

In Bangladesh, English is gradually gaining the status of second language due to the international demand of this language. As a result in Bangladeshi Educational System, the emphasis is given on developing the English language skills from grade I. Every school in Bangladesh teaches English as a major subject. English medium schools in Bangladesh not only give emphasis on English language as a major subject but also use English language as the mode of instruction. Elementary level is the best time to learn a new language. At this level children learn on a trial and error basis. Teachers play a big role in the development of a child’s English language skill because teachers at this stage are more careful and conscious in correcting the errors of the students.

The aim of this study is to highlight the major errors that the students of elementary level usually make and how the teachers deal with those. For this study the students of grade III were chosen from two different English Medium schools. I also collected teachers’ opinions regarding error correction and feedback through a questionnaire. I have decided to focus on this level because in our context, elementary level is the crucial time for a child. At this level they are taught how to write in a second language. In elementary level, there is also an enormous scope for the teachers to give feedback.

This paper deals exclusively with the written form of the target language. I have chosen this topic because fluency in the written language for a non-native speaker is considered

by many to be the most difficult of the four basic skills- listening, reading, writing and speaking. Errors in syntax, lexical choice and orthography become significant when they interfere with getting the message across. This paper also tries to find a link between the theories and classroom performance of the students.

The paper seeks to find out the answers to the following questions:

- What are the common errors that elementary level students usually commit in their written work?
- How do the second language teachers address them and how can feedback help our learners?

I hope my small research will help me to understand various aspects of learners' errors, the role of correction and feedback. As a teacher it will also help me to develop. I believe the findings will help other teachers as well.

In the next chapter, I would like to focus on some existing views on learners' error, error analysis and the role of feedback, which I believe will help me to explain the nature of errors committed by Bangladeshi learners and how Bangladeshi teachers give feedback.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter I would like to give an account of error analysis and feedback. The aim of this review is to locate my present study within a broader theoretical framework.

2.1 A brief history of Error analysis

The behaviouristic viewpoints about learner's errors flourished in educational pedagogy in 1960s. The behaviourists believed that 'foreign language learning is basically a process of mechanical habit formation' (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). They thought that learners 'learn by responding to external stimuli and receiving proper reinforcement'. Errors were considered something trivial and to be avoided. The behaviorists' believed that the errors should be corrected immediately and properly after they were made; otherwise the error would become a habit and a 'wrong behavioral pattern' would fix in learner's mind. Errors were also considered as wrong responses to the stimuli and therefore, learners were not encouraged to initiate interaction because this may lead to mistakes.

The thoughts of the behaviourists had a great influence in the language classroom. Teachers concentrated on pattern practice, drilling and memorization. By implementing the techniques like mimicry and memorization of target forms, they tried to infuse those forms into learners' mind. Errors were regarded as something learner should avoid and making an error was considered to be serious offence in language learning processes. The behaviourist' viewpoint faced criticisms when the practical results fell short of expectations. However, we notice a change towards errors in 70s and 80s. In 1970s and early 80s, a large number of papers on error analysis were published throughout the world which tried to define error and focused on the significance of error analysis in second language learning.

Error Analysis (EA) is the method of analyzing learners' language errors in order to understand the process and the sequence of acquisition of English as a second or foreign language. According to Corder (1967), 'error analysis is the technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting and explaining the unacceptable or incorrect

forms produced by a learner of a foreign language by using any kind of principles and procedures provided by linguistics.' (cited in Sinha, 1997).

2.2 Significance of Error analysis

Corder (1967) was the first to advocate the importance of errors in the language learning process. He suggested that by classifying the errors that learners made, researchers could learn a great deal about the second language acquisition process by inferring the strategies that second language learners were using. For learners themselves, errors are 'indispensable', since making errors can be regarded as a device the learners use in order to learn (Selinker 1992:150).

Selinker (1992) pointed out two highly significant contributions that Corder made in the field of second language acquisition; which are: (a) the errors of a learner, whether adult or child, are not random, but are in fact systematic, and (b) the errors are not 'negative' or 'interfering' in any way with learning a target language on the contrary these errors are considered as positive factors. Researchers are interested in errors because errors are believed to contain valuable information on the strategies people use to acquire a language (Richards, 1974; Taylor, 1975; Dulay & Burt 1974).

Corder (1967) in his article "The significance of learners' errors" states that errors show the learners' needs. He says that it is the learner who determines what the input is. The teacher can present a linguistic form to a learner, which is not necessarily the input, but simply what is available to be learned (cited in Richard, 1974:23). Keeping this point in mind, learners' needs should be considered when teachers or linguists plan their syllabuses. Before Corder's work, syllabuses were based on theories and not so much on learners' needs. Mager (1962) points out that the learners' built-in syllabus is more efficient than the teacher's syllabus (cited in Richard, 1994: 24). Corder (1967) adds that if such a "built-in syllabus" exists, then learners' errors would confirm its existence and would be systematic.

Furthermore, Corder (*ibid*) also showed to whom information about errors would be helpful and how. He believes that errors are significant for the teacher, researchers and the learners because-

- to the teacher: they show a student's progress
- to the researcher: they show how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner uses.
- to the learner: they show how the learners can learn from these errors (cited in Richard, 1974:25).

Various studies concentrated on these three different areas mentioned above. In other words, research was conducted not only in order to understand errors but also in order to use what is learned from error analysis and apply it to improve language competence. Through these types of studies, researchers recognized the importance of errors in language classroom and started to examine them in order to achieve a better understanding of language development processes.

2.3 Mistakes and Errors

Generally, the word "error" and "mistake" are considered to be synonymous but Corder (1967) pointed out these two terms as "systematic" and "non-systematic" errors. He said that within the confines of the classroom, and under the pressure of having to produce accurately in the L2, students may be nervous, anxious, upset, or excited, causing them to stumble, even with familiar structures. Corder considered such 'performance slips' as 'mistakes' and stated that 'they are not noteworthy to the process of language learning'. He used the term "errors" for the 'systematic ones', which occurred in second language learning (cited in Richards, 1974:24-25).

Ur (2002) also made a difference between these terms. Errors according to Ur (*ibid*) are consistent and based on "mis-learned" generalizations. On the other hand, mistakes are 'occasional, inconsistent slips'. Language teachers perceive that both mistake and error are done spontaneously by the students. Again, Brown (1994) thought that a mistake refers to a performance error, which is made by language learners while producing a known structure incorrectly. He also referred to it as an "unsystematic guess". He believed that mistakes can be self corrected by native or non-native speakers but errors

cannot be done so. It is because the mistakes do not occur from “insufficiency or incompetence”, whereas, errors occur for incompetence in the language.

Mistakes do not mean insufficiency or incompetence. Miller (1966) also considered the “mistakes” as “errors of performance” and the “errors of competence” are regarded as ‘systematic and persistent.’(Cited in Sinha,1997). Corder stated that errors represent learner’s ‘transitional norms’ and that is why errors need a careful attention. (cited in Sinha,1997).

2.4 Different types of errors and reasons for committing errors:

While discussing about the significance of the error, Corder (1974) distinguished three types of errors. These are-

- **Pre-systematic error:** pre-systematic errors randomly occur when the learners do not know a particular rule of a target language.
- **Systematic errors:** systematic errors occur when the learner knows the incorrect rules of the target language and also apply it.
- **Post-systematic error:** these errors occur when the learner knows the correct rules of target language but uses it inconsistently. Corder refers this type of errors as ‘mistake’.

Dulay and Burt (1974) proposed the following categories of ‘goofs’. They are-

- **Interference-like goofs:** goofs that reflect native language structure and are not found in L1 acquisition data of the target language. These type of goofs occur as a result of ‘the use of elements from one language while speaking another’.
- **L1 developmental goofs:** those that do not reflect native language structure but are found in L1 acquisition data of the target language
- **Ambiguous goofs:** those that can be categorized as either interference-like goofs or L1 developmental goofs
- **Unique goofs:** those that do not reflect L1 structure and are also not found in L1 acquisition data of the target language (cited in Richards, 1974:115).

Researchers attempt to find out the reasons behind making errors and mistakes. Sinha (1997) in her study found that errors occurred because of learner's stress, indecision, lapse of memory, fatigue etc. She also noticed that errors occurred because of teaching method, learning strategies, psychological factors and sociolinguistic situation.

Richards and Sampson (1974) pointed out seven factors which influence the learner's use of language. These factors are- 'language transfer, intralingual interference; the effects of the sociolinguistic situation; the modality of exposure to the target language; and the modality of production; the age of the learners; the instability of the learner's linguistic system; the effects of the inherent difficulty of the particular items being learned.' (cited in Sinha 1997). Richards (1971) stated that other than the interlanguage errors, intralingual and developmental errors reflect the learner's competence at a particular stage. According to him the characteristics of intralingual errors are-

- Faulty generalization
- Incomplete application of rules
- Failure to learn conditions under which rules apply

The characteristics of developmental errors are-

- Over-generalization: learners create a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language.
- Ignorance of the rule restrictions: failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures.
- Incomplete application of rules: the occurrence of structures whose deviancy represents the degree of development of the rules required to produce acceptable utterances.
- False concepts hypothesized: faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language (cited in Richards, 1974: 173-174)

Corder (1967) claims that many errors occur because of learners' uses of structures from his native language. He also suggests that 'the learner's possession of his native language

is facilitative and in this case errors are not to be regarded as signs of inhibition, but simply as evidence of his strategies of learning.’(cited in Richards, 1974: 27)

Sinha (1997) in her research found out that Bangladeshi students make errors for the following reasons:

1. Interference from Bengali
2. Transfer of L1 knowledge (Bengali)
3. Incomplete application of rules
4. Ignorance of rule restrictions
5. Overgeneralization
6. Inadequate teaching techniques
7. Lack of enough exposure to English

(Sinha,1997)

At this point of our discussion, we will focus our attention to some theories related to error analysis:-

2.5 Influence of L1 on SLA: Interlanguage

Larry Selinker proposed the Interlanguage Hypothesis in 1972. An assumption underlying the Interlanguage Hypothesis is that interlanguage is a linguistic system in its own right. It has an intermediate status between the native and target language. Interlanguage is neither the system of the native language nor the system of the target language, but instead falls between the two.

Interlanguage theory elevates that “the status of error from undesirability to that of a guide to the inner workings of the learning process”. Selinker (1972) states that it is ‘a system based upon the best attempt of learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them’. He also mentions that interlingual identifications by

second language learners is what unites the three linguistic system- NL (native language), TL (target language) and IL (interlanguage) psychologically. (cited in Richard, 1974:48)

By a gradual process of trial and error and hypothesis testing, learners slowly gain the knowledge of the system used by native speakers of the language. According to Selinker (1972), learners also have a 'latent psychological structure- an already formulated arrangement in the brain, which is activated whenever an adult attempts to produce meanings, which may have, in a second language which he is learning.' To him, interlanguage rules are claimed to be shaped by five distinct processes: L1 transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning, strategies of L2 communication, and overgeneralization of the target language patterns and all these processes exist in latent psychological structure. (cited in Richard, 1974:48)

Interlanguage errors refer to the errors caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue. These errors are evidence of their underlying linguistic system. Interference errors are regarded as "inhibitory" but Corder (1967) points out that they can be facilitative and provide information about one's learning strategies. Hagege (1999) states that interference between L1 and L2 is observed in children as well as in adults. He observed that in adults it is more obvious and increases continuously. When a person gets older and the structures of his first language get stronger then it imposes on any other language the adult wishes to learn. In contrast, if a child gets sufficient exposure, interference features can be easily eliminated.

There have been numerous studies for L1 transfer. Such studies include Thanh Ha Nguyen's (1995) case study where he tried to determine the role of L1 transfer in the acquisition of linguistic feature of L2 as a function of age, time of exposure to L2 and place and purpose of learning the second language. Another study by Lakkis and Malak (2000) also concentrated on both positive and negative transfer in order to help teachers to identify where transfer should be encouraged or avoided.

2.6 Contrastive Analysis

American linguist Robert Lado developed theories about errors in 1950s. He conducted a study where he compared two languages systematically. This study is known as contrastive analysis. At that time researchers believed that learning would be effective if we point out what are the similarities and differences between the native language and target language. Fries (1945: 9) said, "The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner."

Lado (1957) claimed that "those elements that are similar to native language will be simple for the learner, and those elements that are different will be difficult" (cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). According to him, 'individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and **culture to the foreign language and culture - both productively (when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture) and receptively (when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives)**' (Lado 1957, in Richard, 1974:97). This conviction that 'linguistic differences could be used to predict learning difficulty' produced the notion of the contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH): "Where two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur; where they were different, negative transfer, or interference, would result." (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991: 53)

Two versions of CAH

Scholars have identified two versions of CAH – a strong and a weak version. According to the strong version, interference plays an important role in second language learning situation and interference from the native language is considered as an obstacle. This version claims that if there are differences between the native language and target language then it will be difficult for the learners to acquire the language. The difficulties between two languages can be identified by contrastive analysis. Lado (1957) pointed out the importance of contrastive analysis in language teaching material design. He

considered CAH as a reliable source in the preparation of teaching materials, course planning and the improvement of classroom techniques.

CAH faced a challenge when it was noticed that a number of errors do not appear due to native language interference. Many studies have been conducted to illustrate this and it is seen that the percentage of interference error may vary due to several reasons. A survey of 8 experimental studies shows that the percentage of errors related to L1 interference could vary from 3% to 50% (cited in Ellis, 1985:29).

In these studies, researchers not only talked about interference but also about developmental errors and overgeneralization. Ellis (1985) pointed out that some errors attributed to language transfer could be developmental errors. Taylor's (1975) study also confirms the weakness of an interlingual transfer-based theory of errors. In his study he pointed out overgeneralization and transfer learning strategies by elementary and intermediate students of English as a Second Language (ESL). Taylor's study indicates that elementary students' reliance on the transfer strategy was significantly higher than that of intermediate students. On the other hand, intermediate students' dependence on overgeneralization was significantly higher than that of elementary students.

The second version of CAH is the weak version which has been advocated by Wardhaugh in 1970s. He points out the necessity of comparison between two language systems to predict some learning difficulties. He also claims that without an empirical checking with actual data of learners' errors, these predictions cannot be useful for the learners.

This version has later been developed into Error Analysis (EA). While CA follows a deductive approach, EA adopts an inductive one. EA deals with the real data from the learners' performance and also with real evidence from such phenomena as faulty translation, learning difficulties and residual foreign accent which makes EA more descriptive than CA and therefore, more acceptable.

2.7 Writing skill and learners' error

Error analysis also plays an important role to improve learners' writing skill which is considered as one of the most important skills in our language classroom. Researchers conducted many studies to know the possible ways to improve writing skills through error analysis. Such studies include Kroll and Schafer's "Error-Analysis and the Teaching of Composition", where the authors demonstrate how error analysis can be used to improve writing skills (Kroll, Barry and Schafer, 1978). They analyzed possible sources of error in non-native-English writers, and attempted to provide a process approach to writing where the error analysis can help to achieve better writing skills.

In an EFL writing class, the students mostly practice free hand writing in English. The aim of a writing class is to help learners to express their thoughts clearly and effectively in writing. In the writing classes, the language teachers design the activities in a way so that the students can achieve their goal. In our country most common activities in the writing classes include- paragraph or essay writing, answering comprehension questions, use of vocabulary to make sentences, dialogue writing, letter writing etc. In our language classes, the language teachers' focus on the end results of writing, i.e. the letter, essay, story and so on. They are concerned to see whether the end product is 'readable, grammatically correct and obeys discourse conventions relating to main points, supporting details and so on' (Nunan, 1989: 36).

In Bangladesh, the students are introduced with paragraph writing in elementary level. As this is their first stage of learning a second language, they often make mistakes. Sinha (1997) said that, "Error frequently occurred when the students were asked to write paragraphs and dialogues or when they attempt to answer comprehension questions." Students also need a clear concept of the subject area and they need to have the ability to express their ideas, while writing paragraphs. As Tribble (1996: 83) mentions, "Learners who wish to write in new academic setting have to gain a mastery of the concepts and content of their subject area as well as developing an ability to express them effectively and appropriately in a foreign language."

Academic writings are usually very precise, formal and objective. It is important to present information clearly and accurately in academic writing. Among different forms of writing activities, paragraph writing is very common in our language classes. Students start writing paragraph in elementary level.

When learners make errors, teachers try to help them by giving feedback which is an integral part of teaching. That is why many researches were also done on this area of language teaching. At this point of our discussion, we will look at the role of feedback in second language learning environment. We will discuss the importance of feedback and the strategies used by the teachers in giving feedback on students' written works.

2.8 Importance of feedback

'Feedback is information that is given to the learners about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving performance'. It is also an 'indispensable tool for improving the teaching and learning of writing, by providing information to students on the performance of their written work' (Ur, 1996; cited in Khan, 2002).

Learning and teaching process are not one way transmission of knowledge rather it is viewed as a dynamic process and feedback is one of them. Gipps (1995) says that 'feedback is a crucial feature of teaching and learning processes and it is one element in a repertoire of connected strategies to support learning.' (cited in Naeini, 2008). Naeini (*ibid*) points out that feedback is the indication of consciousness-raising. Long and Robinson (1998) also emphasized on consciousness-raising activities. They explained that 'flagging' target items such as highlighting, underlining, and rule-giving can be some examples of consciousness-raising activities and in this way a teacher can direct the learner's attention which can help him to improve.

According to Harmer (1998), feedback not only raises consciousness of the learners it also helps them to clarify their understanding of the meaning and construction of the language. Therefore, teachers should be concerned with how to correct students' works

because one way of correction may be appropriate for one student but may not be appropriate for another. Allwright and Bailey (1991) note that teachers often correct a learner's utterance simply because it was not what they had expected to hear, which are referred as "error of classroom discourse". Sometimes students can correct themselves if the error is just a slip. Again, students sometimes need help from the teacher. Harmer (1998) mentions that sometimes teachers can ask one student to correct the error of another student. If the other students help out to solve the error, the student who made the mistake may not feel humiliated. Sometimes students also prefer a gentle correction from the teacher. Harmer (*ibid*) suggests that it is important to praise students for their success and to correct them for their failure. In this way teacher's positive attitude can dramatically change student's performance irrespective of their level and types of errors.

Teachers' positive attitude towards errors and the way of giving feedback are the two **means of helping learners to improve their performance**. Allwright and Bailey (1991) point out that by giving feedback the teachers try to help students move ahead in their inter language development. But, "Mistimed" error treatment may fail to help and it can even be harmful if the correction is aimed at structures, which are beyond the learner's stage in interlanguage development (Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart, 1994).

Moreover, Gower, Phillips and Walters report that the correction and giving feedback depends on the aim of activities. If the focus is on accuracy, the teacher's control and correction will be tight and if the focus is on more fluency then the teacher's direct control and correction will be less (Gower, Phillips and Walters, 1995).

Richards and Lockhart (1994) propose two types of feedback- feedback on content and feedback on form. Feedback on content includes vocabulary errors, errors of grammar or pronunciation. On the other hand, Hendrickson (1978) points out that feedback on form should consider -

- Whether learners errors should be corrected
- Which kinds of learners errors should be corrected
- How learners errors should be corrected

(cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1994)

Learners and teachers have different preferences concerning error correction and giving feedback. Nunan (1988) reports, 'adult learners in Australia viewed error correction as very important, whereas their teachers did not value it as highly.' Similar findings have been found elsewhere (Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart, 1994). Whatever the view point is but the purpose of error correction is to improve learners' accuracy and language acquisition.

2.9 Feedback on written work:

It is also very important to know for teachers when and how to correct errors. While correcting errors learners are usually provided with ample opportunities to self-correct, and engage in peer correction. Omaggio (1986) suggests following steps for error correction.

(a) Self-correction with the teacher's help: Self-correction allows the student to come up with his or her own response. Self-correction with the teacher's help is an excellent way to address errors.

(b) Peer-correction: It is especially important because it takes some of the focus off of the teacher, and it has been shown to be effective. Also, the teacher can encourage the students to provide corrective feedback. If no one corrects the error, then the teacher can provide the correction.

(c) Teacher correction: The last and least effective way to address errors is for the teacher to provide the corrections. This type of correction allows the teacher to supply the correct answer but Omaggio (*ibid*) warns that this technique may not be effective, especially if the teacher does not reassess the student's comprehension.

According to Corder (1967), when a learner has made an error, the most efficient way to teach him the correct form is not by simply giving it to him, but by letting him discover it and test different hypotheses. He also suggests that the learner should find the correct linguistic form by searching for it. (cited in Richard, 1974:25)

In the case of giving feedback on a written work, teachers usually mark the mistakes. They simply underline, indicate, specify the kind of error and correct the errors in the text. They also give comments or grades on the written work. According to Gulcat and

Ozagac (2004), there should be a consistency in written comments. Comments should be clear and direct and also familiarize to the students. Comments which address some strategies for improving the writing skill are more useful for the students.

Another technique that teachers frequently use while giving feedback on a written work is coding (see Appendix-A). Harmer (2001) mentions coding as an effective technique of giving feedback. Mainly the symbols for the coding system are used to show the errors in word order, spelling and verb tense. It reduces teacher's writing on the paper and is also easy for the teachers to show where and what type of error they made. To Harmer (2001) coding makes the correction much neater and it is easier for the students to understand than the comments made by the teachers. Teacher should introduce the symbols to the students so that they understand the meanings of those symbols and also know what is expected from them when a certain symbol is used. It is found that for elementary level learners, coding is a fruitful technique as it is a kind of direct feedback. It is easier for them to identify where and what kind of errors have been made rather than to understand the comments given by the teacher.

Techniques which are used by the teachers often depend on the type of errors they are correcting. Techniques use to correct grammatical error and errors on content are usually different and have different focus to correct the learners' errors. In a study by Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986), four kinds of grammar corrections used on the surface errors of the learners were compared to see if they had an influence on the students' writings over time. These were:

- (a) explicit correction, where errors were pointed out and correct forms offered;
- (b) marking mistakes with a yellow pen, without explanation;
- (c) a tally was kept in the margin of the number of errors per lines, and students were told to examine the line and find and correct the mistakes;
- (d) the use of a correction code which showed both the location and kind of errors. (cited in Gray, 2000)

Criteria for giving feedback on content play a vital role in teaching writing because writing requires a formal organization that is strictly followed. Wada (1997) suggests some of the criteria of teacher's feedback for paragraph writing:

1. Criteria for clearness:

- existence of the proper topic sentence
- existence of proper examples and reasons to explain the writer's point

2. Criteria for coherence:

- proper logical development
- proper usage of transitions; such as "therefore," "because," or "as a result" in order to indicate the causation
- proper usage of paragraph development skills which include listing, time-order, cause-effect and compare-comparison
- integration of the sentence subjects

3. Criteria for academic style:

- impersonal style
- passive sentences
- average length of the sentences
- proper choice of words

4. Criteria for correctness:

- accuracy of spelling
- accuracy of grammar and
- accuracy of punctuation

A teacher not only focuses on the techniques but also plays multiple roles while giving feedback. The effectiveness of feedback partially depends on how teacher give feedback to the students. Leki (1990:59) points out that 'the role of the writing teacher is schizophrenic, split into three incompatible personas: teacher as real reader (i.e., audience), teacher as coach, and teacher as evaluator'. A teacher needs to have a positive attitude towards student's writing while giving feedback. Usually teachers point out the errors of a written work which may discourage the students. Students may not try to use

complex structures or new vocabulary. Sometimes helping students to organize the ideas and proofreading of drafts help to minimize the amount of errors.

Gulcat and Ozagac (2004) state that teachers need to keep in mind that elementary level students are struggling with both linguistic and writing conventions. So it will be futile for the teachers to correct each and every mistake, as it is unmanageable for the students. Teachers need to give them time to achieve some fluency on writing. However, feedback sessions can be a beneficial experience for the student if the teacher shows the strong points as well.

Certainly, research on error correction techniques and giving feedback has not been stopped. There is a significant need for classroom research, in particular. In short, errors are usual in the language classroom, but they should be addressed in a rational and consistent manner. By developing criteria, and employing some of the aforementioned techniques, language teachers can discover what kinds of corrective techniques best suit for their students.

In the next chapter I shall explain the nature of the study which was adopted to examine the errors of the elementary level students and also the role of feedback. The other part of this chapter will describe the participants, the setting of this study and the research tools which were used to collect the data.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the nature of this research as well as to define the reasons for selecting the methods. It also deals with the research design and covers the reasons for selecting the sources for data.

3.1. Nature of research:

3.1.1 Primary descriptive research:

Brown (1988, in Nunan, 1997: 8) categorized researches into two types– primary and secondary research. This research falls under the primary research because it is derived from the primary sources of information. According to him (*ibid*), in primary research **first hand data or primary sources of information are used to explore the original information. In this research students' sample writings were the primary data for identification of errors.**

The present study is an empirical research. The elementary level students were the target group of this survey. The study was done through the analysis of both the sample writings of the students and the questionnaire for the teachers. The survey was conducted in order to ascertain the L2 errors in paragraph writing committed by the elementary level students.

Traditionally there are two types of research methods- qualitative and quantitative method. According to Nunan, 'quantitative research is obtrusive and controlled, objective, generalisable, outcome oriented and assumes the existence of 'facts' which are somehow external to and independent of the observer or researcher. Qualitative research, on the other hand, assumes that all knowledge is relative, that there is a subjective element to all knowledge and research, and that holistic, ungeneralisable studies are justifiable.' (Nunan,1997:3).

Grotjahn (1987) argues that the qualitative and quantitative distinction is an oversimplification and it is necessary to take into consideration the method of data collection (whether the data have been collected experimentally or non-experimentally); the type of data yielded by the investigation (qualitative or quantitative) and the type of analysis conducted on the data (whether statistical or interpretive) (Grotjahn, 1987, cited in Nunan, 1997:4).

Considering all these points, this research can be considered as a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.2. Research Design:

3.2.1. Participants and setting:

The participants of this study were the students of elementary level ranging in the age group of 7-9 years. Fifty students of grade III of two schools were chosen as the participants of this study. The study was conducted in their creative writing class because it focused on writing paragraph. The writing class aimed at developing elementary students' basic writing skill. In these classes they were encouraged to write freely. The students had knowledge of writing ten to twelve sentences on a given topic which were taught in grade I and grade II. In class III they were given lessons on the standard format of paragraph writing.

This study was conducted in two English medium schools where the medium of instruction was English. Most of the teachers of these schools had experience in teaching in different English medium schools. A number of teachers had training for teaching profession but not particularly for elementary level. In order to develop the teacher's efficiency, one of these schools developed an in service training program. All the teachers of the school had to go through this in-service training program. The program was named 'Illume' which means 'enlightenment'. It was called so because the aim of the program was to make teachers reflective and enlightened. The training program focused on the various aspects of teaching and learning situations in Early Childhood Education, such as teaching methods, different types of tasks, materials, evaluation, handling error correction and feedback.

3.2.2 Research tools:

Questionnaire:

A questionnaire was used to get the responses from twenty teachers who were teaching in different English medium schools. The questionnaire was used as a tool to find out teachers opinions about errors and error correction. According to Jo McDonough & Steven McDough (1997:171), questionnaire is a very common and popular tool for collecting data among educational researchers in general and ELT research in particular. They also point out that the questionnaire affords a good deal of precision and clarity as the knowledge needed is controlled by the questions. For this reason I selected questionnaire as my research tool.

According to Nunan, 'Questionnaire items can be relatively closed or open ended. A closed question is one in which the range of possible responses is determined by the researcher. An open item is one in which the subject can decide what to say and how to say it.' (Nunan, 1997:143). Nunan also pointed out that 'questionnaires can consist entirely of closed questions, entirely of open questions or a mixture of closed and open questions.' (Nunan, *ibid*:143)

In this study the questionnaire contained fourteen questions among them twelve were closed (multiple choice, Yes/No) and other two were open ended. The aims of these questions were to find out participants' opinions, their attitude, their beliefs and some suggestions towards error correction and giving feedback.

Before using the questionnaire I piloted it among two participants to find out whether there was any ambiguity or confusion in any of the questions. After piloting the questionnaire, I contacted with some of the English medium schools. I gave a brief introduction of the research and asked for the teachers' permission before distributing the questionnaires to them. Thankfully, all the teachers were willing to help. They gave their opinions in the questionnaire which were also analyzed to have an in-depth understanding on what types of errors are made by the elementary students, what the teacher's think about those errors and how they deal with those errors.

Sample writing:

Students' written works are considered as an important and indispensable subject of ELT research. To gain more reliability and validity for the study, a researcher needs to spend a large amount of time and effort to collect samples from students. In order to collect the samples two schools of Dhaka city were chosen. Data were collected from writing classes of these schools. The focus of these classes was on paragraph writing. The teacher explained the format of a paragraph to the students which was appropriate for elementary level class. A sample paragraph was also shown to the students as an example. Then the students were asked to write a paragraph on 'A place I'd like to visit'. They were given twenty minutes. The write-ups of 20 students were collected at the end of the class. Similar procedure was also used to collect more samples of the students' writings from another school. The students were given the same topic and the same time limit to make the research more reliable and valid. The total write-ups of fifty students were collected and then analyzed to identify the common errors committed by learners.

In the next chapter, the data which was obtained from the questionnaire and the sample writings of the students will be analyzed. The focus of the analysis will be on the common errors committed by the learners and the role of feedback. I believed that the analysis will help me to find out the answers of my research questions.

Chapter Four: Result and Discussion

In the previous chapter I discussed the nature of the study and the sources of data collection. In this chapter I will focus on the data analysis. The data is obtained from the questionnaire and the samples of the students' writings. The analysis is done in three sections. In the first section focusing on the questionnaire, I shall discuss the common grammatical errors and errors related to paragraph structure. In the second section, focusing on the paragraphs written by the learners, I shall discuss the errors in paragraph structure and grammar. In the third section I shall examine the role of feedback.

4.1. Analysis of errors:

Background of the teachers

A questionnaire (see Appendix- B) was used to get the responses from twenty teachers who were teaching in different English medium schools. The aim of the first section of the questionnaire was to get the background information about the teachers, (e.g. age, teaching experience and training). It was found that according to age, the teachers could be divided into three groups:

- (a) Group 1: 20-30 years,
- (b) Group 2: 31-40 years and
- (c) Group 3: 41-50 years.

Among twenty teachers, 65% belonged to the first group, 30% were in second group and 25% were in the third group. It was also noticed that 60% of the teachers had 3-5 years teaching experience in elementary level, 25% had 5-7 years teaching experience and 15% had 8-10 years teaching experience. It was also observed that 65% of the teachers had no training for teaching and only 35% teachers were trained for the profession.

Common types of grammatical errors in students' written works

The questionnaire included five questions regarding learners' errors. Teachers were asked to identify the major types of grammatical errors committed by the learners. The following graph shows the teachers' responses.

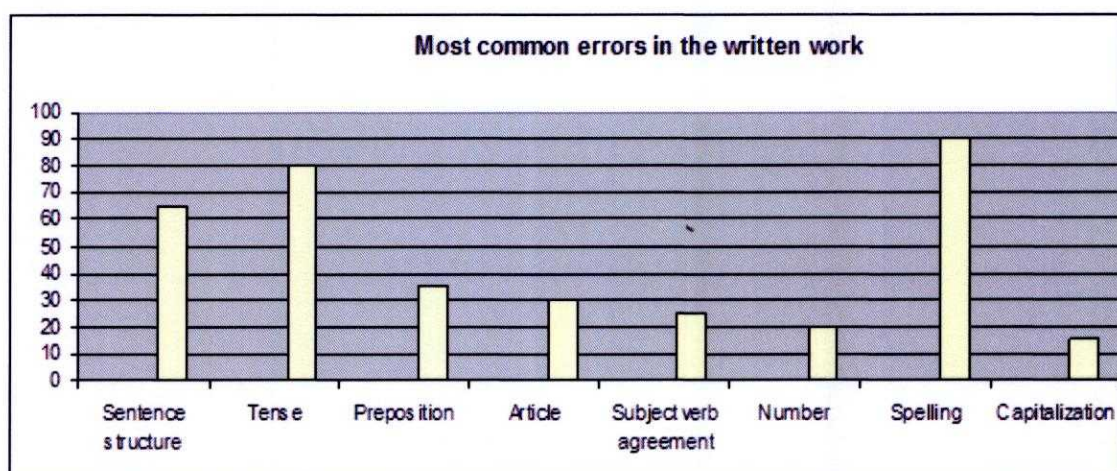


Figure-1: Most common types of grammatical errors in written works

From the graph we noticed that the teachers identified spelling and tense as the most frequently committed errors. The table below precisely illustrates the most common types of grammatical errors in students' written work as identified by the teachers.

Table: 1
Common types of grammatical errors

Options	Most common types of errors	Teacher's response (20 participants)	Percentage
1	Sentence structure	13	65%
2	Tense	16	80%
3	Preposition	7	35%
4	Article	6	30%
5	Subject verb agreement	5	25%
6	Number	4	20%
7	Spelling	18	90%
8	Capitalization	3	15%

The results summarized in table 1, demonstrate that students of grade III have difficulties in sentence structure, tense and in spelling. The students also faced problems in other grammatical areas like- number, article, preposition, subject verb agreement and capitalization.

Errors in paragraph writing

The teachers were asked to point out the common errors in paragraph writing. Eight options were given and they were allowed to choose more than one option. Some of the options were on the structure of a paragraph like- topic sentence, concluding sentence and developers. The other options were- linking words, repetition of sentence, incomplete sentence, absurd sentence and use of irrelevant words.

The graph below shows the percentage of each option chosen by the teachers.

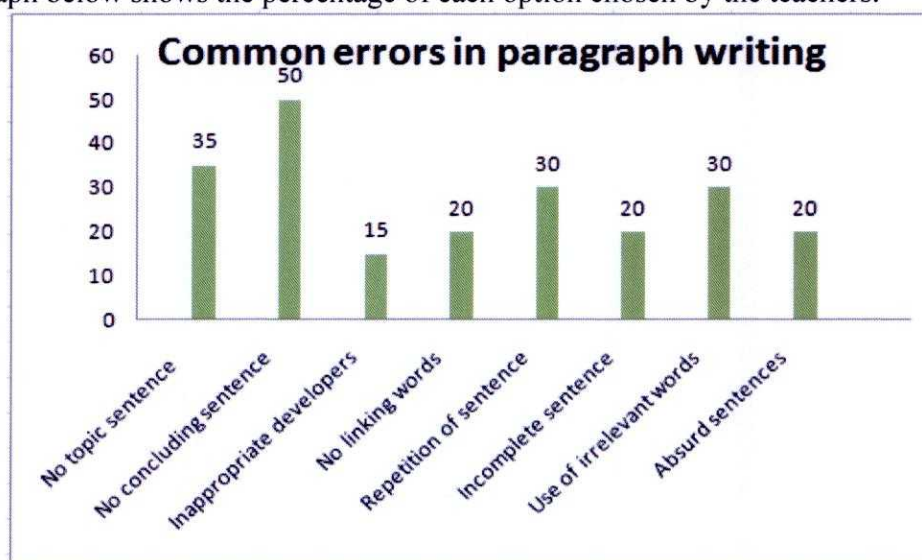


Figure 2: Common errors in paragraph writing

The table below shows the percentage of each category according to the teachers' response.

Table: 2
Common types of errors in paragraph writing

Options	Common errors in paragraph writing	Teacher's response	Percentage (%)
1	No topic sentence	7	35
2	No concluding sentence	10	50
3	Inappropriate developers	3	15
4	No linking words	4	20
5	Repetition of sentence	6	30
6	Incomplete sentence	4	20
7	Use of irrelevant words	6	30
8	Absurd sentences	4	20

Figure: 2 and Table: 2 indicate the common errors in paragraph writing. According to 35% teachers students do not use any topic sentence while writing paragraph, 50% pointed out that students fail to provide appropriate concluding sentence and 15% stated that students also have problems with developers. Besides making these errors students also have difficulties in sentence structure. Among the teachers 20% pointed out that their writings lack linkers, 30% teachers mentioned that students repeat the same sentence, 20% stated that the students write incomplete sentences, 30% mentioned that students use irrelevant words and 20% teachers pointed out that students use absurd sentences which have no meaning.

Sources of errors

The teachers were asked whether they try to find out the reasons behind the learners' errors. Majority of the teachers (80%) mentioned that it is very important to find out the reasons why learners committed all these errors.

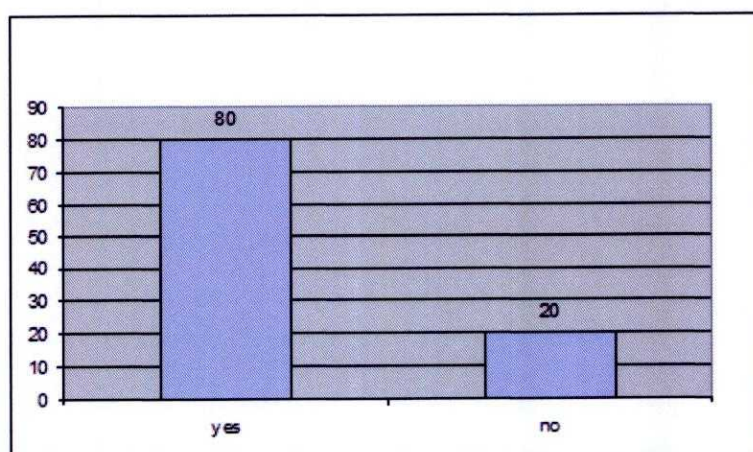


Figure 3: Reasons for committing errors

When the teachers were asked about the sources of errors, they identified the following reasons:

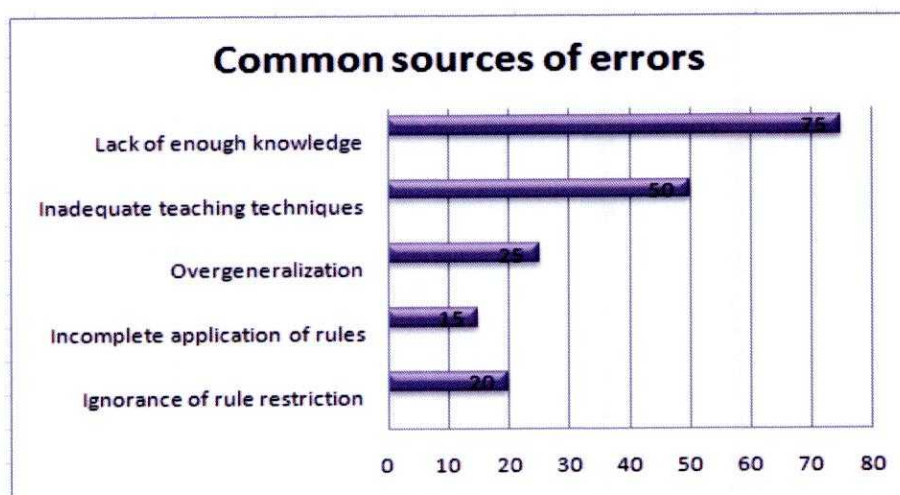


Figure 4: Common sources of errors

Majority of the teachers (75%) stated that a major reason for committing error is lack of enough knowledge in the second language. Among all the participants, 50% teachers selected 'inadequate teaching techniques' as a significant source of error. Overgeneralization also gets importance as 25% teachers selected overgeneralization as a reason for making error. 20% teachers mentioned that ignorance of grammar rules is an important source of error and 15% teachers selected 'incomplete application of rules' as a common source of error.

The teachers were asked about the role of interference of learner's first language for committing error. 40% teachers stated that first language does not interfere in second language acquisition whereas 60% teachers identified first language interference as a significant reason for committing error.

Table: 3
Role of L1 for committing error

Options	Teacher's response (20 participants)	Percentage
Yes	12	60%
No	8	40%

4.2. Analysis of errors from sample writing:

In order to find out the common errors, learners' sample writings were also collected. This section focuses on those writings and tries to give an analysis of the errors found there. After analyzing the paragraphs written by the learners, it was found that the following errors were frequently committed by the students. The table below shows the examples of these errors.

Table: 4 Error chart

Types of error		Examples	Source of errors
Interference error		a) I all the rides liked. b) Lalbagh <i>Kella</i> is a very popular place.	a) Direct translation from Bangla to English. b) Used Bangla word 'Kella' instead of 'Fort'; lack of enough exposure of TL.
Overgeneralization		a) She would <i>likes</i> to go to Sundarban. b) Bandarbhan is <i>more good</i> than Sundarban.	a) Third person singular number takes s or es; wrong application of rules b) Used 'more' as a marker of comparison.
Errors by analogy		a) We <i>spoke</i> together to decide where to go.	a) Used wrong word; rule restriction error.
Syntactic errors	Fragment	a) The monkeys were very naughty. Making faces to people.	a) The second sentence has no subject.
	Comma splice	b) There are many places, I want to go Malaysia.	b) Comma is used instead of coordinating conjunction to separate two sentences.
	Run-on	c) We reached there we were tired.	c) No end punctuation between two sentences.
Lexical error		a) My <i>older</i> brother wanted to go to Nandon. b) We went there last <i>weak</i> .	a) Wrong use of word. b) Similarity between the sounds
Spelling errors	Addition	a) It was a <i>beautifull</i> place.	a) Adding a letter
	Deletion	b) I went there with my <i>cosin</i> .	b) Deleting a letter because of wrong pronunciation.

	Transposition	c) Our <i>taechers</i> were also with us.	c) Transposing a letter with the letter next to it.
	Substitution	d) It is <i>ciuated</i> at Mirpur.	d) Substituting a letter that has a similar sound
	Homonym	e) We did not <i>no</i> that the place was very interesting.	e) Confusing a word with another word that sounds alike.

At this point of the paper I would like to explain why these errors might have been committed.

Interference error

The students committed some errors which can be considered as interference errors. It was found that these types of the errors were made when the students directly translate a sentence from L1 to target language or when the students use a wrong word because they do not have enough exposure of TL.

For example: i) I all the rides liked.

ii) Lalbagh *Kella* is a very popular place.

Here, from the first example we can see that the student committed error because he translated directly from Bengali to English following the Bengali form of sentence structure. The structure of Bengali sentences usually is S-O-V (Subject-object-verb); whereas in English, the sentence structure is S-V-O (subject-verb-object). In example (i) the subject is 'I', object is 'all the rides' and the verb is 'liked'. In this example, the sentence structure S-O-V has been used. Again, in example (ii) we can see that the student used a Bengali word 'kella' instead of 'fort'. This example shows that the student did not know the right English word for 'kella' because of lack of exposure of the TL.

Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization is another reason for committing errors. For example:

- i) She would *likes* to go to Sundarban.
- ii) Bandarban is *more good* than Sundarban.

From example (i), we can see that the student added an extra 's' as there is a rule that third person singular number takes 's' or 'es'. The student over generalized this concept and used the same rule over here and made an error.

In example (ii) we can see that the student used 'more good' to compare between two places. To compare between two things some of the words take the word 'more'; like- more beautiful, more intelligent. Here the learner generalized the concept and used 'more' before the word 'good' instead of using 'better'. So, we can see that here in example (i) and (ii) the students overgeneralized the concepts of one rule and applied it to another place where it was not appropriate.

Errors by analogy

Error by analogy is another type of error. Sometimes learners used a word in a sentence which was not appropriate in that context.

For example: We *spoke* together to decide where to go.

In this context the word 'spoke' is not the right word. The learner used the word 'spoke' instead of 'discussed' which created a deviant structure.

Syntactic errors

Syntactic error is another type of common error of the elementary students. Three types of syntactic errors were found from the sample scripts. The three types of syntactic errors are discussed below with examples.

Fragment: The monkeys were very naughty. Making faces to people.

Comma splice: There are many places I want to go Malaysia.

Run-on: We reached there we were tired.

From the above examples we can see that in fragmented sentence there is no subject. The second example is for comma splice where there are two sentences but there is no coordinating conjunction. Third example shows the run-on error as there is no end punctuation.

The study was conducted among 50 students. The table below shows the percentage of these three categories of syntactic errors among the students.

Table: 5 Different types of syntactic errors

Syntactic errors	Number of students	Percentage%
Fragment	43	86%
Comma splice	21	42%
Run-on	17	34%

From the above table we can see that fragment sentences are the most common types of syntactic error among the students. In this study 86% students wrote fragmented sentences; 42% students incorrectly punctuated their sentences and 34% students used run-on sentences while writing their paragraphs.

Lexical error

Lexical errors play very important role in composition assessment because these errors can create communication gap and misunderstanding. Sometimes teachers have to rely on their own intuition to evaluate writings. From the written paragraphs it was found that the

students had problem in their choice of appropriate words. The students sometimes used wrong words or inappropriate words. For example-

i) My *older* brother wanted to go to Nandon.

ii) We went there last *weak*.

From the above examples we can see that the students used the word 'older' instead of 'elder' and 'weak' instead of 'week'. These kinds of errors occur because the students may not have enough vocabulary of the target language. Sometimes they are also confused as there is a similarity between the sounds of two words. Again, some students used the words which were not correct in form. Some examples of wrong form of words- 'I like Magpie Robin because it is our *nationaly* bird', 'the speed of the rolar coaster is *gradually increase*.' 'It has become main *attract* for tourists.'

Interference of mother tongue is another reason for committing lexical errors. Some examples of interference error that had been made by the students are- 'I went to a *mela* in last Friday', 'Lalbagh *kella* is a very popular place'. The students used the Bengali words 'mela' and 'kella' instead of 'fair' and 'fort' because they did not have enough knowledge in target language.

Spelling error

Spelling error is another type of error that the students make frequently. Five types of spelling errors were identified from the data. The examples of these errors are given below:

Addition: It was a *beautifull* place.

Deletion: I went there with my *cosin*

Transposition: Our *taechers* were also with us.

Substitution: It is *cituated* at Mirpur

Homonym: We did not *no* that the place was very interesting

Sometimes students add extra letters or delete letters while writing a spelling of a particular word. Sometimes wrong pronunciation is responsible for committing these types of errors. Transposing type of error occur when the learner interchanges a letter with the letter next to it. Here in the example, the word 'teacher' was misspelled as the learner exchanged the places of the letters 'e' and 'a'. Students sometimes commit error in spelling when they substitute a letter that has similar sound. In the example the student substituted the letter 's' with 'c' while writing the word 'situated'. Homonym is another type of common error made by the elementary level students. In this type of error, students confuse a word with another word that sounds alike; e.g. 'know' with 'no'. The following table illustrates the number of spelling error made by the students.

Table: 6 Spelling errors

Types of spelling errors	Number of errors	Number of students
Addition	7	6
Deletion	20	14
Substitution	34	30
Transposition	12	11
Homonym	4	4

From the above table, we can see that among the 50 students, substitution errors were made by 30 students. The table reveals that students made substitution error most. Total number of substitution error was 34. The second highest was deletion and then transposition, addition and homonyms respectively.

Grammatical errors

Grammatical errors are not only prominent among error types; they are also frequent in the written work of elementary level students. The following error chart illustrates different kinds of errors made by 50 students and the frequency of the error occurrence.

Table: 7 Number of grammatical errors in sample writings

Sample	Sentence structure	Preposition(p), Article(A) and Number(N)	Tense	Subject verb agreement	Wrong capitalization	Total no. of errors
1	1	P- 2, A-1, N-1	4	1	0	10
2	1	P-1	2	0	0	4
3	2	P-2, A-1, N-1	3	1	1	11
4	3	P-1, N-1	2	1	0	8
5	0	P-2	2	2	0	6
6	2	P-2, A-1	2	0	0	7
7	2	P-3	3	1	0	9
8	1	P-1, A-1	3	1	0	7
9	2	P-1, A-1, N-1	3	1	0	9
10	1	P-2, A-1, N-1	2	0	0	7
11	0	P-1, N-1	3	0	0	5
12	1	P-1, A-2	2	0	0	6
13	1	P-2	3	1	0	7
14	3	A-1, N-1	2	0	0	7
15	1	P-2	2	2	0	7
16	2	P-2, N-1	3	1	0	9
17	3	N-1	3	0	0	7
18	4	P-2, A-1	5	1	1	14
19	1	A-1	2	0	0	4
20	2	P-2, N-1	2	0	0	7
21	2	P-2, A-1, N-1	3	2	0	11
22	1	P-2, A-1	2	0	0	6
23	3	P-2	3	0	0	8
24	4	P-1, A-1	3	1	1	11
25	3	P-2, A-1	2	1	0	9

26	2	P-2	2	0	0	6
27	1	P-1, A-1	2	0	0	5
28	2	N-1	1	0	0	4
29	3	A-2, N-1	2	0	0	8
30	4	P-2	3	1	1	11
31	5	P-1, N-1	3	2	1	13
32	3	A-1	2	1	0	7
33	2	P-1	3	1	0	7
34	1	P-2	2	0	0	5
35	4	P-1, A-1	2	0	0	8
36	3	N-2	2	0	0	7
37	2	P-2, N-1	1	0	0	6
38	1	P-1, A-1	2	0	0	5
39	3	A-1	2	0	0	6
40	4	P-1	3	2	0	10
41	3	P-2	2	2	0	9
42	4	P-1, A-1	2	1	0	9
43	2	P-2, A-1	3	0	0	8
44	1	P-1, N-1	3	0	0	6
45	2	P-1	2	0	0	5
46	2	A-1	3	0	0	6
47	2	P-1, N-1	1	0	0	5
48	2	P-2	3	0	0	7
49	3	A-1	3	0	1	8
50	1	P-2	2	0	0	5
Total	110	109	122	27	6	374

From this table we can see that total number of grammatical errors is 374. Among these errors total number of structural errors was 110, 109 errors were related to wrong use of preposition, article and number, 122 errors related to tense, 27 errors related to subject

verb agreement and 6 errors related to wrong capitalization. The sample writings showed that most of the students had problems in the use of tense, prepositions and sentence structure. Some of the examples of these errors are given below:

Errors in sentence structure-

We did go and visited that place.

So, I feel enjoy to visit this place.

Errors in preposition, article and number -

It is situated at Bogra.

It is very interesting place

There are many interesting *place* in Bangladesh.

Error in tense -

During the last winter vacation we go to Sundarban.

I am very interest to see this place.

I go to Fantasy Kingdom on last Friday.

Errors in subject verb agreement-

The animals is kept in cages.

National museum have many ancient things.

Errors in wrong capitalization-

I want to visit dubai.

My friend nisha wanted to go with me.

The table below gives the percentage of the grammar errors committed by the students.

Table: 8 Percentage of grammatical errors

	Percentage (%)
Sentence structure	29.41
Preposition, article and number	29.14
Tense	32.62
Subject verb agreement	7.21
Wrong capitalization	1.6

The following bar graph shows these grammatical errors:-

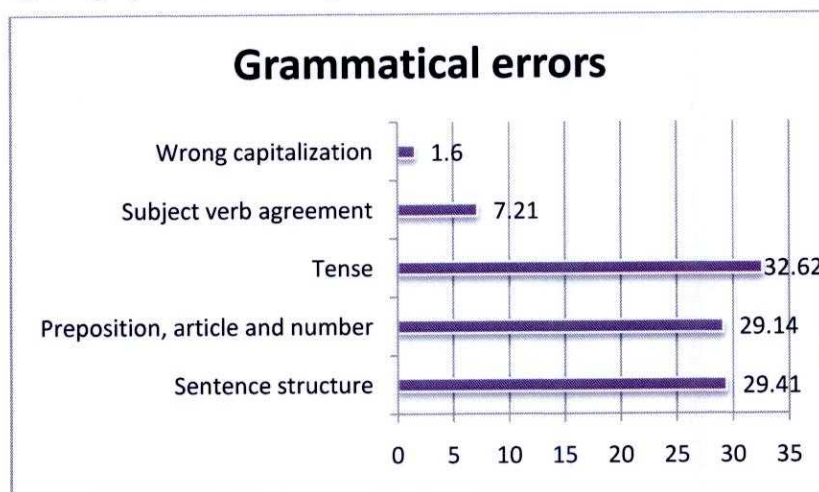


Figure: 5 Grammatical errors

Structure of a paragraph

As students advance, to improve their writing skills they need in-depth support. They need to learn how to organize their thoughts while writing. The structure of a paragraph helps students to organize their thoughts and communicate their ideas clearly in writing. So when students write paragraphs, the organization of the paragraph becomes very important. Students must learn the unity among sentences. In a paragraph there should be connections among the topic sentence, supporting details and concluding sentence.

In my study the students were given a lesson on how to write paragraph. The structure of the paragraph was discussed in a class and a sample paragraph was given to the students by the teachers. Then the students were asked to write a paragraph on a given topic. An analysis of the students' paragraphs showed that they made a number of errors related to the structure of paragraph writing. Now we are going to focus our attention on those errors.

Table: 9 Errors in the structure of the paragraph

Parts of a paragraph	Number of students (who committed errors)
Topic sentence	12
Supporting sentences	21
Conclusion	16

Topic sentence is the most important part of a paragraph and usually comes at the beginning of the paragraph. While writing a paragraph a topic sentence introduces the main idea of the paragraph and what a student is going to discuss in the paragraph. From the above table we can see that while writing the paragraphs, 12 students among the 50 failed to write the topic sentence properly. After topic sentence, supporting sentences are important because supporting sentences explain the main idea or topic sentence. Among 50 students, 21 students failed to develop supporting details. It was found that some of the students tried to explain their thoughts but they failed to generate their thoughts accurately.

After supporting details, concluding sentences are needed to complete a paragraph. As conclusion is the ending part of the paragraph and it summarizes the main idea of a paragraph, it plays a very important role in paragraph writing. From the above table, it was found that 16 students could not develop the concluding part or develop appropriate conclusions. Some of the students' paragraphs were too short. It was noticed that most of the students tried to follow the structure of the paragraph but many of them failed.

An analysis of the students' paragraphs showed that lack of coherence, lack of developers, lack of linking words, repetition of sentences were common in their writings. On the basis of students' performance it was found that 78% students had lack of coherence in their supporting sentences, 85% students failed to use linking words in their paragraphs. Besides these, 64% students had repetition of sentences, 30% students used irrelevant words, 34% students did not complete their sentences and 10% students used absurd sentences in their paragraphs.

Table: 10 Errors related to paragraph structure identified in sample paragraphs

Types of errors	Percentage (%)
Lack of coherence	78
Lack of linking words	85
Repetition of sentence	64
Incomplete sentence	34
Irrelevant words	30
Absurd sentences	10

4.3 Analysis of teachers' feedback from questionnaire:

Now we will focus our attention to the role of feedback. The questionnaire had nine questions asking teachers to give their opinions on feedback. The questions were set to find out how the teachers give feedback to learners, which strategies do they follow and how do they deal with errors in different situations. The next section gives an analysis of those questions.

Types of feedback and teachers' preferences on feedback

The teachers were asked whether frequent correction should be done or not. This was a Yes-No question and the responses of the teachers varied.

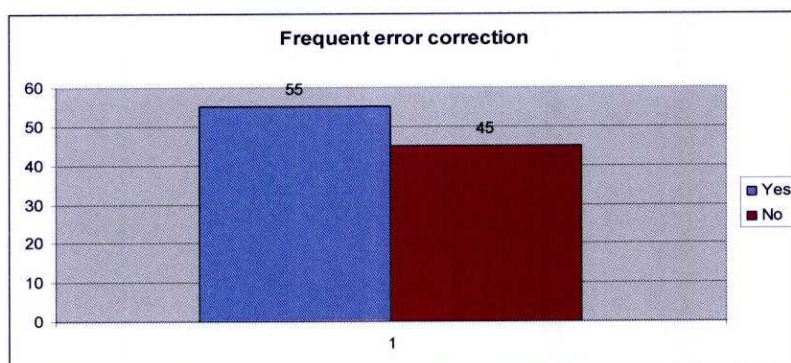


Figure: 6 Frequent error correction

The graph shows that (55%) teachers believed a student should get immediate feedback on error during a lesson or activity. It does not matter whether that specific error is related to that lesson or activity. On the other hand, the teachers who gave negative responses believed that feedback on error should not be given frequently and it should be done on the basis of the current lesson or activity.

Teachers were also asked how do they usually give feedback to the learners. Three options were given to them. The findings are presented in the table below:

Table: 11
Types of feedback given to the learners

Options	Participant's response (20)
Oral feedback	1
Written feedback	3
Both oral and written feedback	16

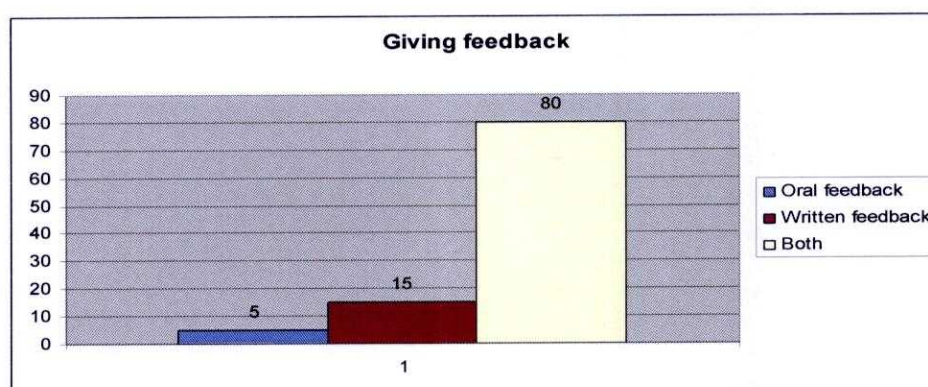


Figure: 7 Types of feedback

From the graph it becomes clear that 80% teachers chose the third option. They agreed that they usually give oral feedback as well as written feedback. It may vary on the type of error made by the students. 5% teachers mentioned that they usually give feedback orally and 15% of the teachers pointed out that they give written feedback to the learners.

In the next question, teachers were asked about the effect of feedback on learners' work and which kind of feedback works best for the learners. The result in the figure: 8 shows that the 90% teachers suggested that written feedback is more effective than oral feedback.

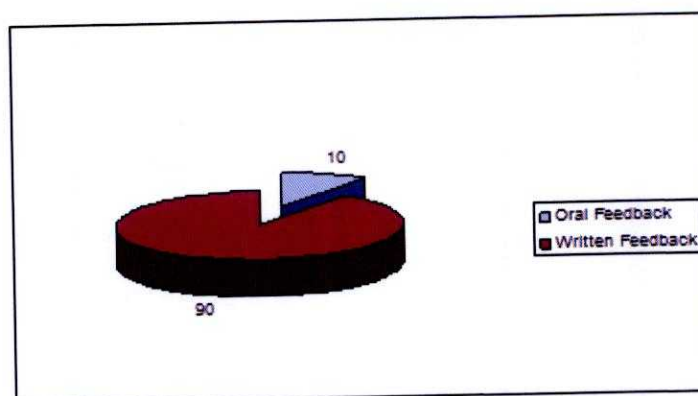


Figure: 8 Effective feedback

Teachers were asked to give reasons for their answers. 10% teachers mentioned that if feedback is given orally, the students get an immediate feedback and students can correct their mistake immediately. Teachers can also be assured that the students understand where they made the mistake.

The majority (90%) of the teachers who preferred written feedback stated that the written feedback gives a chance to a student to look back to their mistakes again. This helps the students to improve. Most of the teachers believed that written feedback is more effective for elementary level students.

Strategies to give feedback

Teachers were asked how they usually give feedback in written work. They were also asked to specify some of the strategies which they usually follow while giving feedback on written works.

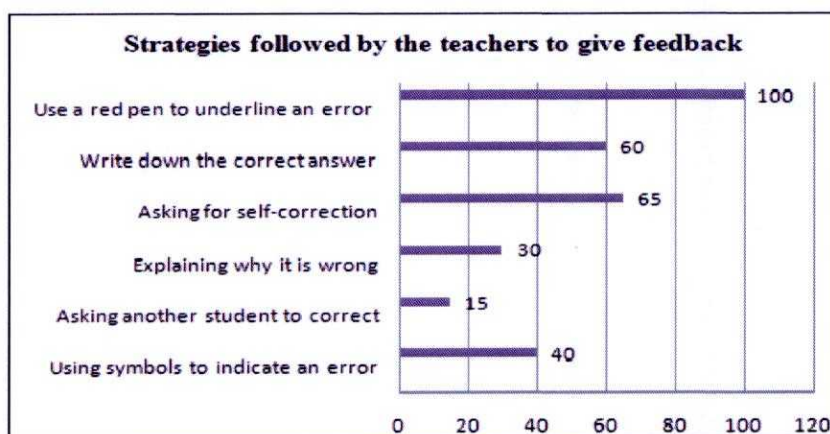


Figure: 9 Strategies to give feedback

From the above graph, it is shown that 65% teachers asked the students to correct their own errors. 60% teachers stated that while correcting a written work, they always write down the correct answer in the copy, 40% teachers stated that they used symbols to show errors, 15% preferred peer correction and 30% teachers pointed out that they explain to the students why it is wrong. 100% of the teachers agreed that they use red pen to identify errors while correcting written scripts.

The teachers were also asked whether learners learn to correct their errors after getting the feedback or they make the same mistake again and again.

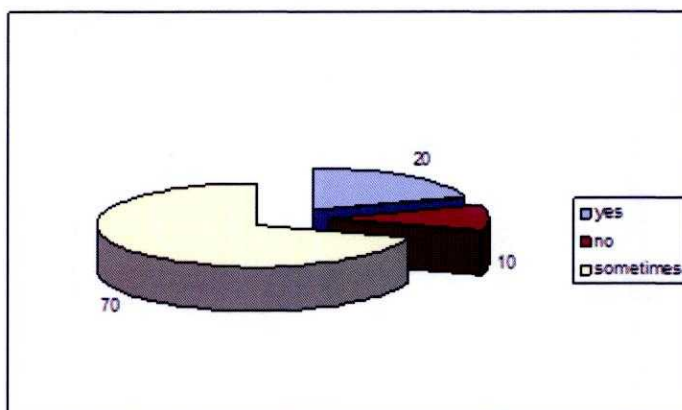


Figure:10 Relation between error and feedback

From the graph it becomes clear that a significant number of teachers (70%) chose the third option. They agreed that sometimes the learners make the same mistake after getting the feedback from them. 20% teachers said that some learners always make the same mistake though they are given feedback on that particular error. 10% of the teachers

stated that after getting feedback, the students do not make the same mistake and feedback can really help them to improve.

The aim of the next question was to find out which techniques the teachers use, when a student makes the same mistake again and again. This was an open ended question. Among the twenty teachers, only six answered this question. The teachers mentioned that they usually try to explain again where the mistake occurred and most of the time they make them write the correct form five or ten times as class work or home work. One of the teachers stated that she tries to keep a note of the students' mistakes and keeps them under her observation.

The teachers were also asked how do they decide that feedback is needed on a particular area. Four possible reasons were given in this question and the teachers were allowed to select more than one option. The result is shown in percentage below:

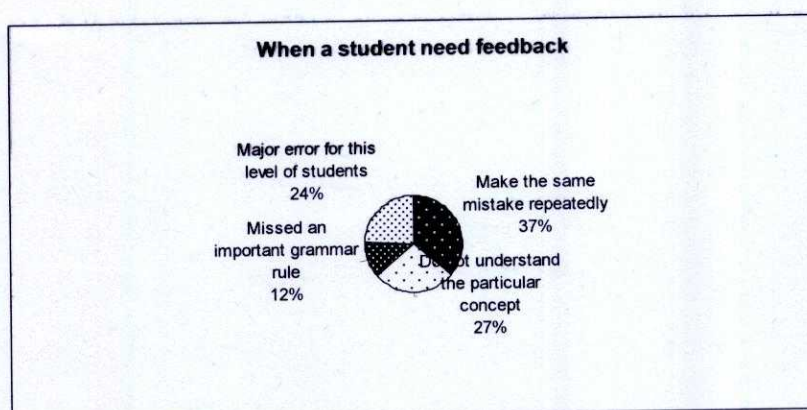


Figure: 11 When does a student need feedback

From the above figure, it is noticeable that 37% teachers stated that they give feedback to a student when he/she makes the same mistake repeatedly, 27% teachers said that they give feedback when a student do not understand a particular concept. 24% teachers mentioned that when a student commits error which is considered as a crucial error for his/her level then the teachers give feedback. 12% teachers pointed out that they give feedback when they feel that a student has missed an important grammar rule.

Thus from the analysis above we find that feedback can play a significant role in learners' language development and most of the teachers agreed to this.

In the next chapter, I would like to focus on the major findings as well as the scope and limitations of this study. I shall also try to give some recommendations on the basis of my findings and a brief summary of the expectations from this study.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This final chapter of my study deals with some major findings, recommendations and the limitations of the study.

5.1 Major Findings:

As discussed in the first chapter, in this study my first objective was to find out the common errors in elementary students' writing. The data collected from the questionnaire and the sample paragraphs showed that most of the students of elementary level have problems in grammar area. My analysis revealed that the common grammatical errors committed by the learners were in sentence structure, tense and in preposition. Students also committed errors in article, number and subject verb agreement. Moreover, spelling errors were obvious in their writings. We can categorize these types of errors into following groups-

- Interference errors
- Overgeneralization errors
- Syntactic errors
- Lexical errors
- Rule restriction errors
- Spelling errors

From the analysis of the data some reasons were also identified which were responsible for these errors. Among all the reasons lack of enough knowledge, overgeneralization, interference got priority. These reasons also became evident by the errors committed by the students. Overgeneralization of a grammar rule was very common for making grammatical errors. At elementary level overgeneralization occurred because in this level, students were not taught all the rules of the target language. Overgeneralization errors also indicated students' lack of knowledge in a particular area, e.g. most of the students mixed up all the tenses which was a indication of their lack of knowledge in tense.

It was expected that the students have the knowledge of basic sentence structure but the data collected from the sample writings showed that a good number of students committed syntactic errors such as fragment, comma splice and run on sentences. Results found from the sample writing highlighted that majority of the students could not generate sentence properly. Therefore, other types of syntactic errors like incomplete sentences, wrong word order and absurd sentences were also found in their writings. These types of errors suggested that students' do not have the habit or enough practice in second language.

In my study, interference was also identified as a major source of error. It was noticeable that L1 can interfere in two ways- in sentence structure and in the use of vocabulary. The first type of errors occurred when the students tried literally to translate from Bangla to English and the second one took place when the students switched the language and created an error. For example, they used Bengali words in the place of English. Transfer of L1 knowledge was seen in case of lexical errors.

Analysis of students' sample writing revealed that the students did not have sufficient vocabulary to express their idea properly. It was also noticed that wrong use of words was a common type of lexical error in their writings. Lack of enough vocabulary, lack of exposure of the target language and confusion between two words because of similar sounds were the main reasons for making lexical errors.

Spelling error was another common type of common error that the students committed frequently while writing. The five types of spelling errors were found after analyzing the sample writings. Sometimes spelling errors like transposition and homonym occurred because of the wrong pronunciation.

Besides the grammatical errors, the analysis also revealed that the students' had problems in the structure of paragraph. Errors in terms of lack of clearness, lack of coherence and lack of correctness were noticeable in most of their writings. It was found that students had difficulties in writing proper topic sentences and concluding sentences. Existence of

the proper topic sentence is important for the clarity of a paragraph because it clearly indicates what the paragraph is going to discuss and having a proper conclusion helps to fulfill the criteria of an organized paragraph. Developing the ideas and thoughts logically and expressing them clearly are also important to bring the coherence in a paragraph. In case of supporting details, my analysis found that the students could not express their thoughts clearly and some of students wrote incomplete sentences as they were not competent enough in the target language. Therefore, lack of coherence was found in their writings.

It was also found that some of the sentences were grammatically correct but they were confusing and it was difficult to understand the meaning of these sentences. Moreover, due to lack of enough vocabulary, the students also chose irrelevant words. Therefore, they faced difficulty to get their message across. Grammatical errors, wrong use of vocabulary also interfered in written communication.

The teachers believed that for elementary level learners feedback is essential to improve their writing skill. Feedback is vital when students repeatedly make the same mistake and a teacher needs to know why does this happen. For elementary level students written feedback is more effective than oral feedback because young learners have a tendency to forget about the oral feedback and correction and they are not matured enough to realize the importance of correction. This assumption led the teachers to emphasize on written feedback as it gave the scope to the students to look back again.

Time management was mentioned as a crucial factor while giving feedback. In a class with many students and many writing scripts, correction of grammar errors and content errors can take enormous amount of teachers' time. As a result, it is difficult for the teachers to use their time more productively on both the grammatical errors and content errors. To solve these problem some teachers mentioned that sometimes students can be asked to do their corrections at home and show the corrected works to them later.

5.2 Recommendation:

As errors occur because of interference of native language teachers need to pay attention to this issue as well. By showing the difference between the native language and target language we can make our learners aware of the interference errors.

The elementary level students usually struggle with both linguistic structure and writing techniques. For this reason, a teacher has to focus on different problems at different times. At this level it may be pointless to correct all the errors. And it is also unmanageable for the students. Again, excessive correction may discourage students for writing. That is why teachers need to prioritize the errors according to their importance. Teachers need to decide which errors need immediate correction and which can be ignored. In the case of grammatical errors, if any grammatical rule is new to the students, providing the correct form can be a better option for reducing the number of errors. Again, development sequence can play an important role for correcting grammatical error. When students are corrected on a point for which they are not ready, then it may be futile to correct them. In this study teachers mentioned that giving feedback takes a lot of teachers' time in the class; so while correcting grammar teachers need to be selective in grammar topics.

Lower level learners not only have difficulties in grammar area but they also have trouble with finding the appropriate word. The study reveals that lack of vocabulary is one of the reasons for interfering written communication. To solve this problem, teachers can give them a glossary of words from which they can choose.

While correcting paragraph writings of the students, teachers need to focus on the organization and content. The study reveals that elementary level students' often have problems in organizing their thoughts. That is why teachers instead of giving them the product may focus on the process of writing because process writing gives learners the opportunity for self correction. If teachers employ process writing then they may get the chance to ask the students to edit and revise their work before submitting.

For the regular errors, teachers can use self correction too. Self correction can be used for common errors like- obvious spelling, punctuation, capitalization. Researches show that self correction with teacher's help is an excellent way to address errors because it allows the students to come up with his or her own responses. This study also shows that most of the teachers have positive attitude towards self correction.

Usually teachers use red pen to mark or underline the errors committed by the learners. Too much use of red pen sometimes may have negative effect on young learners. Again, for elementary level learners underlining may not be enough. At this stage, young learners most of the times fail to identify the errors. For this reason teachers need to be more specific and should give detail feedback for the learners. While giving feedback on written work teachers can also use symbols to indicate errors. Symbols such as Gr for grammatical error, Sp for spelling, Ar for articles, T for tense, ? for whatever was not clear, etc can be used and teachers should introduce the symbols to the students before so that they can understand what those symbols stand for. Many researchers suggested that coding is a fruitful technique (see Appendix-A) for elementary level students as it is a kind of direct feedback.

Conferencing with the students about their errors can also be another useful technique to give feedback. Through this teachers can check students' understanding and at the same time students can inquire about their problems. It also helps to build good relation between teacher and student. While conferencing, teachers can also mention about the strength of the students writings as commenting only on negative points can demotivate them. Again, it will be beneficial for the students if they get comments on the strategies required to improve their writings.

For elementary level students, both oral and written feedback can be good choices for the teachers. In case of written feedback, comments need to be clear, direct and precise; so that the students easily understand the meaning. The teachers in my study mentioned that written feedback is more beneficial for the students than oral feedback because lower level students may not take oral feedback seriously and there is a chance that they may

forget about the error later on. As elementary level students are not mature enough, there is a possibility that they may overlook the written comments. That is why both oral and written feedback is necessary for young learners. Again, the analysis reveals that sometimes students make the same mistake repeatedly. In this situation a teacher needs to find out if there is any problem with the teaching technique and he/she must act accordingly.

After getting feedback, it is important to know whether students rectify themselves or not. If a student self corrects the errors and rewrites then there will be a chance to improve. It also helps students to develop their linguistic competence.

5.3 Limitation:

While collecting the data for the study, I encountered some problems. Convincing the schools authorities for collecting the sample writings was one of them. The school authority did not want to give permission to collect the corrected written scripts. I had to collect the unchecked scripts from both of the schools. As the scripts were not corrected by the teachers, it was difficult to find out how they evaluate the writings and what kind of strategies they follow while giving feedback on written scripts. If the scripts were checked by the class teacher then my study could have been more reliable.

While collecting data by the questionnaire I also faced some problems. It was difficult to have appointments with the teachers and while analyzing the data I found out that some of the teachers did not respond to all the questions. The open ended questions were answered by only the fifty percent of the teachers.

The small number of target group is another limitation of this study. Only fifty students' sample writings were collected from two English medium schools. So, the findings discussed in this study cannot be generalized for all elementary level students. If this study could have been done with more students in different English medium schools then more reliable findings might have been obtained.

Another major limitation of this study was time constraint. Due to the constraint of time, the students could write only one paragraph and the corrected scripts were not given back to them. As a result, it was not possible to find out whether feedback has any positive effect on students' error correction or not. Therefore if we want to draw a conclusion about the errors done by elementary level students and the role of correction then this small scale of research was not enough.

This study tries to give an account regarding error correction and the role of feedback in elementary level. In this level the students start to develop their basic skill of writing in English. If the errors are not treated properly and if feedback is not appropriate for them, then writing in English can be an overwhelming experience for them. Though it is a small scale research, I believe it still can help the elementary level teachers by providing a guideline on error correction and giving effective feedback and thus can assist elementary level students to improve their writing skill.

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Appendix-A

Symbols in the margin or between the lines showing the nature of the error:

M	should be masculine (gender of noun and/or form of adjective)
F	should be feminine (gender of noun and/or form of adjective)
SG	should be singular (number of noun and/or form of adjective)
PL	should be plural (number of noun and/or form of adjective)
AG	make verb ending agree with subject or make adjective ending agree with noun; can be used in conjunction with one of the symbols above
SP	error of spelling, including verb forms, and accents
V (or VOC)	error of vocabulary
T	error of tense
G	error of grammar, e.g. wrong relative pronoun, wrong verb ending
WO	error in word order
R (or REG)	error of register, e.g. slang or informal construction in formal piece
ME	error of meaning other than VOC; meaning not clear
()	omit bracketed words; can be used in combination with other symbols, such as letters or lines
^	words missing; this symbol can be used in combination with other symbols, or suggested words can be written above text
?	(after a symbol). not clear what the student intended the word/phrase to mean

Symbols in the text indicating the seriousness of the error:

<u> </u>	a clear error: the student's version is wrong, unacceptable
<u> </u> <u> </u>	(two underlinings, linked by a loop). The error involves all the underlined words
(<u> </u>)	omit underlined words
/	(slash through word). Repetition of similar error made previously
-----	a lesser error, e.g. not exact meaning; inappropriate register
~~~~~	(wavy line under a group of words). Awkward style: the phrase needs to be reformulated
.....	acceptable, but not the most appropriate word or phrase
/        /	(slashes before and after group of words; suggested wording written above). Preferred/more appropriate wording; can be combined with dotted or wavy underlining, as above

Symbols in the margin:

X	factual error, i.e. not a linguistic error
v	(tick in the text). Good choice of word or phrase; good use of language
v	(tick in the margin). Good/relevant point or sub-point well made
*	refers to comment at end of page/piece
?	(vertical wavy line). The passage is not relevant, or not appropriate to the question set
	(vertical line). Passage to which a marginal comment refers

Source: Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies



## Appendix-B

### Questionnaire

Name :  
Age :  
Teaching experience :  
Training :  

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1. Which types of errors are most common in the written works of the students of grade III?

(You can tick more than one)

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| • Sentence structure | • Subject verb agreement |
| • Tense              | • Number                 |
| • Preposition        | • Spelling               |
| • Article            | • Capitalization         |

2. While writing paragraph what type of common errors do they make?

- |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| • No topic sentence        | • Repetition of sentence  |
| • No concluding sentence   | • Incomplete sentence     |
| • Inappropriate Developers | • Use of irrelevant words |
| • No linking words         | • Absurd sentences        |

3. Do you try to find out why your learners commit all these errors?

- |       |      |
|-------|------|
| • Yes | • No |
|-------|------|

4. Which of the following do you think are the most common sources of errors?

- Ignorance of rule restriction
  - Incomplete application of rules
  - Overgeneralization
  - Inadequate teaching techniques
  - Lack of enough knowledge
  - Others:
-



5. Is learner's first language interference an important reason for committing error?

• Yes

• No

6. Should errors be corrected frequently during a lesson or activity?

• Yes

• No

7. How do you usually give feedback to the learners?

• Oral feedback

• Written feedback

• Both oral and written feedback

8. Which kind of feedback do you think really works for the learners?

• Oral feedback

• Written feedback

9. Why do you think so?

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10. Which of the following strategies do you usually follow to give feedback?

- Asking the student to write down the correct answer
- Pointing out the error and asking the students to self-correct.
- Commenting on an error and explaining why it is wrong, without having the student repeat the correct form
- Asking another student to correct the error.
- Using a symbol to indicate that an error has been made
- Use a red pen to underline an error

11. Do the students realize their errors, after getting the feedback?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

12. Do they make the same mistake again?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

13. What do you do when students make the same mistakes again and again (even after getting feedback)?

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14. How do you decide that the students need feedback on a particular error?

- When students make the same mistake repeatedly
- When you feel that the student/students have not understood a particular concept
- When you feel that the student/students missed an important grammar rule
- When you feel that it a major error for this level of students