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Errors in Writing Made by Malaysian Rural Primary School Pupils

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Abstract

This study is to identify errors made by rural primary school pupils in writing and to get information about the causes or sources of errors that lead to pupils' writing problems. The conceptual framework concerns four types of errors committed by rural primary school pupils in writing, namely tense, spelling, and vocabulary. The study is based on Corder's (1971) Error Analysis (EA) and Richards' (1974) Causes or Sources of Errors as its theoretical framework. It was conducted at two rural schools with 44 pupils of Primary 5, aged 11, as the research sample. A written task was taken as the study instrument in order to answer two research questions. This study has revealed that tense is the most frequent error committed by the pupils, followed by punctuation, vocabulary, and spelling. Moreover, the pupils' errors are caused by both interlingual and intralingual transfer. It is concerned with rural primary school settings in Kerian where the majority of the pupils use the Malay language as their medium of instruction. In addition, this study has its implication for English Language Education in Malaysia, in which it affects rural pupils' performance especially in Primary School Achievement Test also known as Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) in English Writing paper. Some adjustments in the education system and the total involvement from education departments are meant to better reduce the number of low performers, especially in English writing to enhance the level of English proficiency in rural schools.

Keywords: Causes of errors, interlingual and interlingual transfer, rural primary school pupils.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching has started in an era where there was the implementation of English and Malay medium schools. English subject was reachable to quite a number of populations which mainly students who went to English medium schools. However, most Malay children were sent off to Malay medium schools because the majority of primary and secondary schools were Malay medium national public schools (Hall, 2015). Students in Malay medium schools were taught English but was very minimal.

English as a subject was at its declining standard at Malay medium schools as most children did not receive adequate education of the language. The negligence of English in Malay medium schools especially in communication had a big impact on students when they entered a tertiary level of education (Musa et al. 2012). On the other hand, the English medium school pupils were fluent in the language that brought about the high standard of English as it was particularly practised daily as a medium of communication.

According to Mustapha (1998, cited in Ien et al. 2017), Malaysian students are claimed to be non-active learners. Referring specifically to rural students, they become dependent learners as a result of “limited facilities and the uncondusive environment in the rural area” (Ien et al. 2017, p. 2). Besides, students who are coming from rural areas and the low socio-economy background will have difficulty in writing as they rarely speak English in their daily communication, and their access to English is limited (Madut & Yunus, 2017). The command of the English language is still poor among rural learners as claimed by Jusun and Yunus (2017) in Lubok Antu, a rural area in Sarawak. English is regarded as an examination subject. As such, English learners in rural Lubok Antu become dependent on their teachers in most aspects especially revision and information.

In this regard, the Ministry of Education has stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 that the ultimate aim of English literacy is to get a minimum pass of 70% with a minimum credit (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This is a target that is possible to achieve for students who sit for SPM or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Education Certificate), PT3 or *Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3* (Form 3 Assessment), and UPSR or *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (the Primary Achievement Test). English is the subject which has always been critical for students to pass especially for those who live in rural areas as claimed by Madut and Yunus (2017). The English proficiency level of secondary students is much lower. It is stated that only 28 percent of students got a minimum credit in the 2011 Malaysian Certificate of Education or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) English Paper as compared to Cambridge 1119 paper (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p. 32).

This study is to investigate the writing difficulty that the pupils are facing after learning English for six years (Musa et al., 2012). This study is conducted also to identify the sources of writing errors so that it may help teachers to find solutions to the problem. Ien et al. (2017) stresses on the teaching methods applied by the teachers, the kinds of responses acknowledged by students from books and instructors and the types of writing activities conducted in the classrooms may provide some room for pupils' writing improvement. In addition, it is a teacher's role to teach the proper use of grammar and correct language when teaching writing. This is expected to help the pupils improve in their writing skill.

It is also significant to highlight their errors in writing as the research gap because there is a need to discover the factors as the prime cause of the errors made in rural primary school settings. Justifying the factors in this study may generate ideas to teachers on the causes or sources of errors that lead to the pupils' difficulties in writing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research underpins the theory of second language acquisition (SLA) and Corder's (1971) Error Analysis and Richards' (1974) Causes of Errors as its conceptual framework.

2.1 The Theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

2.1.1 Chomsky's view on language learners

Chomsky's revolution in linguistics has an extensive effect on language learning theory. He rejects the idea that learning a language is a process of habit formation as he believes in its mental cognitive process. In his review of B.F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior, Chomsky (1959) states that humans adapting to a new language learning, especially language acquisition, could not be clarified by just beginning off with a *tabula rasa* perspective. Chomsky asserts that individuals must have a specific sort of natural limit, which controls the acquisition of language. His theory revolves around the mental representation of language acquisition which is not innate but is based on a learner's experience.

A second language learner learns a language to convey meaning through speaking and also through writing. The process of writing is similar to Chomsky's view on human learning a new language which involves mental cognitive processes in order to compose a written product. If the learner uses phoneme; a sound which is traditionally applied to differentiate meanings in a certain language, the phoneme in the written language is somewhat different. In writing, students are aware that the sound of /θ/ may refer to /th/ sound. It sometimes cannot be noticed by the hearer if the word 'tree' or 'three' is spoken by the non-native speaker but writing solely depends on what the reader 'sees' not 'hears' and therefore it is important for the writer to be precise in his or her written form (Cook, 2001, p. 47) as well as his cognition of words to get the right meaning.

In relation to this, a learner needs Universal Grammar, introduced by Chomsky, as well as proof about a specific language; he/she needs to know sentences of English to realise how to fix the boundary for the request for Verb, Subject, and Object not only in a spoken language but also in a written one. Chomsky (1980) shows carefully how rules in a language are recognised under Universal Grammar and by which specific boundaries are set for a learner to follow.

2.1.2 Ellis' learners' language acquisition

Ellis (1994) provides a source of information on how language acquisition occurs within a language learner's learning circle. Four aspects have to be taken into consideration, as the followings:

- a) Errors
The presence of errors indicates evidence of transfer and creative construction of first language structures in relation to the second language structures.
- b) Acquisition orders and developmental sequences
There should be a fixed order and the acquisition of the first language grammar that occurs in stages.
- c) Variability
Learners make use of their limited linguistic knowledge to suit different functional situations.
- d) Pragmatic features
Learners learn to perform language functions appropriately.

2.1.3 Corder's significance of learners' errors and Error Analysis (EA)

Corder (1971) believes in children's potential in language development by making errors. He strongly resists the word 'mistakes' in which both errors and mistakes are different in learning a language. The term 'errors' is significant in three different ways. The teacher is the first person who recognizes errors done by the second language learner and tells him or her what he or she should do with the errors made. Secondly, it provides valid evidence of how a language is learned or acquired to the researcher regarding approaches and techniques. The third, which is the most important, is to the learners themselves. Learners of the second language consider the errors they are making as a tool they use in order to go through the process of learning. Corder claims that learners employ the strategy of making errors to acquire the first and second languages.

Corder (1971) has established Error Analysis (EA). It emphasizes the significance of errors in L2 learners' interlanguage system (Brown, 1980). New language rules have been created to make a new language system which is different from the target and second language systems (Brudhiprabha, 1972). Any errors made show learners' learning stages and their development of the target language. The learner's errors offer the idea of a language that is systematic at the time he is using it (i.e. has learned). Errors are significant in three separate ways, as the followings:

- a) to the teacher
A learner has made progress with the system he is using and, thus, what remains for him to learn.
- b) to the researcher
How language is acquired, and what strategies the learner is applying in the language while learning.
- c) to the learner himself
Errors are regarded as a tool to test a learner's assumptions about the nature of the language he is learning.

In addition, Gass (2013) has proposed a few steps to analyse grammatical errors made by the second language learners as the followings:

1. Collect data from a sample of learner language. It is typically done with written data.
2. Identify errors. What are the errors? The incorrect sequence of tenses, wrong verb form, singular verb form with plural subjects?
3. Classify errors. Is it an error of agreement?

4. Quantify errors. How many errors of agreement occur?
5. Analyse sources of errors. This refers to interlingual and intralingual errors, discussed below.
6. Remediate. Based on the kind of frequency of an error type, pedagogical intervention is conducted.

2.1.4 *Richard's causes of error*

The root of learners' errors has been studied by many theorists, and they have presented causes or sources of errors as the followings:

a) Interlingual errors

The first errors known as interlingual errors are related to the native language. [Corder \(1971\)](#) has mentioned that interlingual errors arise as a result of the native speakers' practices namely patterns, systems, or rules, obstruct them from obtaining the patterns and rules of the language they learn after their mother tongue. First language interference is the undesirable transfer of the first language upon the learners' target language performance.

b) Intralingual errors

Intralingual errors are errors within the learned language, free from the influence of the native language. The errors made by the learners do not imitate the first language structure at all, and the learner tries to oversimplify the target language because of their limited exposure to the language. In such a case, the learners make an effort to infer the principles behind the information to which they have been uncovered and may create theories that compare neither to the primary language nor the target one ([Richards, 1974](#)).

2.1.5 *Studies on errors in writing*

A study by [Krishnasamy \(2015\)](#) highlights that the Malay language has no time marker (i.e. *telah*) as presented by verb+ 'ed/ied (for regular past tense) and irregular verbs in English. In her analysis of twenty-eight Diploma students, she found that tenses are the most common types of errors that the students made. The second common error is in the use of the verb, and the noun is the third common error made by the students.

In a study done by [Abas \(2004\)](#), rural secondary school students in Kuala Muda Yan District made errors mostly in Simple Present Tense by 50.36 %. This finding is taken from the test result of a high-level group. The second most common error is in Simple Past Tense, it carries 48.75%. The least error made by the students is in Future Tense (35.59%). Meanwhile, intermediate students made most errors in Simple Past Tense (71.67%), followed by Future Tense (69.64%) and the least errors they made are in Simple Present Tense (52.63%).

Punctuation errors are one of the most common errors in English autobiographies written by 15 male students at UAE University ([Al Murshidi, 2014](#)). There were 134 errors in punctuation. The students made the most errors in capitalization. Other than capitalization, errors are also made by the students in the misuse of comma, colon, and semicolon. Another study done in Punjab showed that sixty college students made errors mostly in punctuation, and it is due to ignorance ([Khan & Khan, 2016](#)).

[Botley and Dillah \(2016\)](#) researched spelling errors in argumentative writing

made by university students in three public universities in Sarawak and Sabah. Sarawak is located in northwest Borneo Island and is bordered by the Malaysian state of Sabah to the northeast, Kalimantan (the Indonesian portion of Borneo) to the south, and Brunei in the north. They have discovered that 1018 spelling errors were made by the Degree students, and 867 errors were made by the Diploma students. This study applies Computer-aided Error Analysis (CEA) which is able to analyse very large quantity of data kept digitally in a computer corpus. Words misspelled are like ‘abbuse’, ‘entertainment’, ‘vacum’, and ‘frobidden’. They should be spelled ‘abuse’, ‘entertainment’, ‘vacuum’, and ‘forbidden’. According to [Botley and Dillah \(2016, p. 80\)](#), these errors are due to “interlingual misencodings lead to spelling errors that can be linked back to the learner’s first language”.

A research conducted among Danish upper secondary students in examining errors in vocabulary has revealed that they have very limited receptive vocabulary knowledge. According to the researchers, students have yet to master 2000 words despite learning English for more than ten years. Misspelling, word coinage, and borrowing are considered as types of vocabulary errors in this study ([Henriksen & Danelund, 2015](#)).

2.2 Students’ Difficulties in Writing

A well-written essay with appropriate content, vocabulary, correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation is to be the solution to students’ writing problems ([Tse, 2014](#)). The process of writing a composition takes time into consideration. In the classroom context, students have time to carefully start with the introduction, to take complete the body part of a composition as well as time to make errors, and then to correct them. When looking at a piece of writing, teachers need some time to give feedback to grammatical errors as well as to content and organization ([DeLuca & Bellara, 2013](#)).

Students are always in a situation where they know how to construct sentences, but they often encounter difficulties during the writing process. These problems originate from language teachers’ traditional style of teaching grammar and a lack of practice on students’ part ([Nyang’au, 2014](#)). Students rarely show the development of writing and its strategies that can assist them to be worthy writers. Moreover, teachers may have a lack of thought on their students’ writing strategies and techniques. Therefore, English teachers must recognise their students’ writing strategies in their writing works ([Maarof & Murat, 2013](#)).

According to [Ghabool and Kashef \(2012\)](#), there is an emphasis on students who have problems in writing in which they may struggle in one or more features of writing skills for example the correct use of grammar. They should be having knowledge of grammar as it is vital for them to possess the writing skill ([Krishnasamy, 2015, p. 3](#)). Such difficulty in writing needs is acknowledged and identified by both students and teachers so that students’ writing can be improved. In addition, their writing might allow them to analyse whether what they have written is grammatical or not. The skills of writing should consider good sentence structures and avoid making errors ([Sorg, 2014](#)).

3. METHODS

3.1 Population and Sample

The targeted population of this research was the rural pupils' in Malaysian rural schools. The two schools that participated in this study were *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampong X* and *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Y* in Kerian, Perak. The names of schools are not the real names. *Sekolah Kebangsaan* refers to national schools and *kampung* is a village if it were translated into the Malay language. All pupils were Malays. This study comprised 44 pupils of Primary 5. Nineteen of them were from *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung X* and 25 pupils were from *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Y*. Purposive sampling was occupied in this research to collect the data from a specific population, namely Primary 5 pupils, aged 11, to provide the researchers with the information required.

3.2 Instrument and Data Collection

Words and pictures presented in the written task, which is the main instrument of this research, were applicable to directly lead the researcher to what should be learned about a phenomenon. Text description and the pupil participants involved were highlighted in this research. All 19 transcripts of the essays were collected after the English language lesson ended. The number of transcripts was based on the Primary 5 enrolment of pupils in a class. There was only one class for Primary 5 in *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung X*. The transcripts were marked later by a teacher appointed by the first researcher and the first researcher herself. The same procedure was done in another school, *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Y*, where there was also one class represented for Primary 5, where 25 transcripts were gathered and graded by an English teacher as appointed by the school. A marking scheme or UPSR rubric with bands and descriptors was provided by the researcher for the markers to check the errors and put the errors into suitable bands and marks (see Appendix B).

The identification of errors was tabulated. Examining the various kinds of grammatical errors was on the basis of the most frequent ones. The highest number of grammatical errors was categorized for example under the use of Tense. Tense was located under a few sub-categories such as Simple Present Tense, Simple Past Tense, and other tenses if discovered. In addition, the errors were also found in spelling, punctuation, and language use.

This study used content analysis to analyse the pupils' writing. [Crowley and Delfico \(1996\)](#) suggest that researchers can use content analysis of video, film, and other forms of recorded information to report their subject matter. However, this study was persistent on analysing words (as errors) based on the pupils' writing. The initial and the final stages of the analysis comprised reading the written transcripts in their verbatim form for more than two times, calculating and recalculating the errors' frequency regarding respective categories before placing the ranks of the error committed by the pupils.

This content analysis helped make this research method to be systematic for analysing textual information prepared in a form of pupils' writing in an orderly manner which permitted researchers and teachers as evaluators to make an interpretation about that information. The benefit of having content analysis in this

study, according to Crowley and Delfico (1996) is that researchers might leave out important details found in their research, intentionally or unintentionally, but the transcripts make the complete record available to them all the time they need to refer to. Therefore, the element of bias could be minimized during data collection.

4. RESULTS

The main objective of this study was to analyse pupils' errors and difficulties in writing regarding four areas namely tense, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. This result presented the analysis of data derived from pupils' written transcripts used in this study. The data was presented in accordance with the research questions in order to provide findings and explanations with regards to the research objectives. Data analysis and findings of the errors were divided into subsections according to the areas of errors. For Error Analysis (EA), the descriptions of the results obtained were presented together with the tables and figures showing the total number of errors committed and also the number of respondents committing the errors. Descriptions of the data derived from the EA were followed by interpretations and explanations about respondents' errors and causes or sources of errors that lead to pupils making errors in their writing.

In the guided written task, respondents were instructed to write a story. They needed to write between 80 to 100 words. A set of 2017 UPSR Questions that consisted of three pictures and nine given words, was given to each respondent to complete.

4.1 Schools Involved and Errors Made

Table 1 shows the schools involved and the types of errors made by the pupils.

Table 1. Schools involved and errors made.

Name of school	Types of Error (Frequency)				Total of All Types of Errors
	Tense	Spelling	Punctuation	Vocabulary	
1. Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampong X	57	39	45	46	187
2. Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampong Y	63	42	66	37	208
Total	120	81	111	83	395

The findings in Table 1 clearly show that pupils were weak in using the correct tense. The second highest error making was punctuation. Furthermore, the third error committed was vocabulary and followed by spelling. As a whole, the errors committed to writing among these rural primary school pupils demonstrate that their performance in writing was average and low for certain pupils. It is shown by the overall errors made by the pupils, which is 395 errors.

In brief, the finding shows that the respondents' grasp of using the correct tense in writing was not that stable. They made an effort to construct sentences on their own without any help from their teacher or researcher. The pupils struggled to write complete sentences and added some words to make their story meaningful. They did not have to make any corrections after their essay was marked by teachers. Before the research was conducted, the pupils relied heavily on their teacher to write, and hardly

any effort involved. They were taught and discussed on any topic of writing and the process moved smoothly as planned by their teacher. The findings prove that errors are a threat in writing and the errors become a problem if the pupils are not taught properly on using the correct tenses in writing especially in Section C where they need to do it carefully as it carries 25 marks of the overall score for writing paper. Every pupil who made errors was represented without names but the letter ‘P’ was put for ‘Pupil’ and the number of their transcript for reference.

4.2 Errors Made and Their Categories: Tense

All the errors in the tense presented in Table 2 were taken from the pupils’ written transcript.

Table 2. Errors related to tense.

No.	Errors
1	Last school holiday, I and my family go to....
2	My father taked time....
3	...hotel staff give a keys
4	I go to the market...
5and i buy many...
6	...my parents go to Cameroon highlands...
7	My father take a photos.
8	We to take the photos.
9	We are very happy...
10	My father open the room.

In this section, all the errors in tense involved the Simple Present Tense, the use of the verb to be ‘is’ and ‘are’, the use of Simple Past Tense for regular and irregular verbs, and the addition of verb to be ‘is’, ‘are’, ‘was’ or ‘were’ to the Simple Past Tense verbs.

4.2.1 Errors in tense involving the Simple Present Tense

Analysing the pupils’ writing from the written task, errors were mostly found in the use of the Simple Present Tense as they tended to replace the verb in the Simple Past Tense with the verb in the Simple Present Tense. The verbs like ‘go’, ‘give’, ‘buy’, ‘take’, ‘open’, ‘hope’, ‘accept’, ‘enter’, ‘stay’, ‘sleep’, ‘get’, ‘pay’, ‘hear’ and ‘want’ were used by the pupils from the two rural schools although sometimes the time frame was mentioned. It was found that the pupils apparently used the verb stem without observing the rules of Subject-Verb agreement. The following are some examples taken from the transcript.

- a) “Last school holiday, I and my family go to....” (P33, line 1)
- b) “En. Razik give keys room.” (P21, line 6)
- c) “...and I buy many...” (P3, line 6)
- d) “I and my family take a photo.” (P9, line 11)

The verbs ‘go’, ‘give’, ‘buy’ and ‘take’ should be changed to ‘went’, ‘gave’, ‘bought’, and ‘took’ to make all the above sentences correct in the use of tense. There

are examples made by the pupils in which they combined the Simple Present Tense and the Simple Past Tense in a sentence. They are as follows:

- e) "After they get a rest, they went to tea plantation." (P22, line 8)
- f) "We reached at hotel and take the keys..." (P29, line 2)
- g) "I and family enjoyed to tea plantation and my father take ..." (P37, line 10)

4.2.2 *The use of the verb to be 'is' and 'are'*

The pupils could construct complete sentences for their task. Nevertheless, their wrong use of the verb to be 'is' and 'are', produced deviations to their writing. Examples are presented below:

- h) "We are happy and my friend is good..." (P7, line 8)
- i) "That is so (e)interesting experience for my family." (P30, line 12)
- j) "We is very comfortable..." (P21, line 6)

The first example is wrong as the pupil made use of 'are' instead of 'were'. The second example stresses on 'is' when it should be 'was'. The same pattern of errors made by the third pupil, where she did not observe the Subject-Verb Agreement rules as Plural noun 'We' should agree with its verb 'are'. However, in this study, the pupil has wrongly used the verb as it should be "We were...".

4.2.3 *The use of Simple Past Tense for regular and irregular verbs*

When constructing sentences, the Primary 5 pupils have a tendency to use the verbs in the Simple Past Tense but the change of the verbs for regular and irregular verbs in Past Tense made them commit the errors as follows. The subsequent errors are in:

- k) "Ali's father heard a noise and shocked." (P1, line 6)
- l) "My father taked time three hours." (P3, line 2)

'Heard' is a regular verb. The pupils just need to change it into 'heard' to make perfect in the use of the Simple Past Tense. However, 'taked' is an irregular verb. It does not follow other regular verbs rules where 'd', 'ed', 'ied' can be added. The correct word is 'took'.

4.2.4 *The addition of verb to-be 'is', 'are', 'was' or 'were' to the Simple Past Tense verbs*

The next error made is, adding verb to-be to another verb especially to the Simple Past Tense verb was also discovered in this study. The pupils' sentences related to this error are as the following.

- m) "When we was reached to the hotel, the hotel staff gave my father..." (P23, line 4)
- n) "We is enjoyed." (P21, line 9)
- o) "My father is drove..." and "We are went..." (P44, line 2)

All the verbs to-be are not needed in all the examples given. The addition of the verbs is considered major errors committed as two verbs are placed closely in one sentence and these errors are committed by some pupils repeatedly.

4.3 Errors Made and Their Categories: Spelling

The followings are the spelling errors and their explanation.

4.3.1 *Cameron Highlands*

The spelling errors made by the pupils are ‘Cemron Highland’, ‘Cameroon highlands’, ‘Cameron Higlands’, ‘Camera Highlend’, ‘Cameron Hingland’, and ‘Cameron Hirlon’. This famous place in Pahang was stated in the question but it was written using capital letters.

4.3.2 *interesting*

The deviant spelling of the above word is linked to the misuse of vowel for instance ‘enteresting’ and ‘intresting’. The vowels ‘i’ and ‘e’ were used interchangeably and wrongly. However, the errors in ‘instresting’ and ‘interresting’ are on the missing of ‘e’ and the adding of ‘s’ and ‘r’, respectively.

4.3.3 *tea plantation*

The error made by the pupil is on the word ‘plantation’. The word was written as ‘plantanion’ and ‘planatation’. Nobody misspelled the word ‘tea’ which has one syllable only. Both words (tea plantation) were shown in the question distributed to them.

4.3.4 *reached*

There was an element of omission and addition in spelling the above word. The terms were given by [Botley and Dillah \(2016\)](#) in their study on spelling errors made by university students in Sabah and Sarawak. The first element is shown in ‘reched’ and addition in ‘reachead’.

4.4 Errors Made and Their Categories: Punctuation

Upon identifying errors in punctuation, it is discovered that there were three parts of errors related to punctuation. They are errors in the use of capitalization, errors in the use of a comma, and errors in the use of period. The number of errors made by the pupils is displayed in the following table.

Table 3. Errors related to punctuation.

No.	Punctuation Error	Repetition of Error
1	Capitalization	66
2	Comma	22
3	Period	30
	Total	118

Table 3 presents all errors related to punctuation with all the categories namely capitalization, comma, and period. Distribution of punctuation errors based on categories as adapted from Al Murshidi (2014) makes it easy for analysis and explanation. Errors have been analysed and are found in the pupils' written transcripts and the schoolwork. Among all categories, errors in capitalization were the highest followed by period and comma as the lowest frequency of error related to punctuation.

4.4 Errors Made and Their Categories: Vocabulary

The errors were analysed for vocabulary error to find deviations in the pupils' choice of words for adjective, verb, preposition, and conjunction. It can be clearly seen from examples presented on every part taken from the pupils' writing. This type of error, although ungrammatical, is part of errors made by Malaysian rural primary school pupils in the Kerian district, and it is also part of items that are marked in the UPSR rubric (see Appendix B).

4.4.1 Adjective

p) "My family was interesting the tea plantation."

The wrong use of 'interesting' in the sentence affects the whole meaning.

4.4.2 Preposition

q) "The father reached in the hotel..."

r) "He drove after three hours."

The change of 'in' and 'after' could be made but it is not discussed here as it is only making assumptions.

4.4.3 Conjunction

s) "I bought a strawberry for my friend and a gift."

This error may not be an error if it is spoken. However, the pupil has made the mis-orderly phrase "and a gift" (conjunction) that makes the whole sentence to have an error in their writing.

5. DISCUSSION

The research findings have revealed that most pupils had difficulty in using the correct tense in English writing. Even though it cannot be generalized to all primary school pupils studying in rural areas, the highest number of frequent errors made in tense portrays that these pupils were weak in tense particularly in the Simple Past Tense. The transformation of verb stem, the term given by Richards (1974), or root word, into the verb in the past form, requires them to follow the rules of regular and irregular verbs. Repeated use of the Simple Present Tense in writing a story shows that

the pupils did not comprehend the appropriate tense to be used when writing about something in the past.

This finding is similar to a study conducted by Krishnasamy (2015) on twenty-eight Diploma students. She found that Tenses are the most common types of errors that the students made. This research has displayed that tense is the highest error made by Malaysian rural primary school pupils referring to Table 1. Abas (2004) has also discovered that The Simple Present Tense and The Simple Past Tense have the highest and the second-highest number of errors, respectively made by secondary school students in Kedah. Both research studies show that every student made at least one error in tense(s) in their writing by the approximated mean.

However, Krishnasamy's (2015) and Abas's (2004) results were based upon the data from Diploma students and secondary school students, respectively, who might be exposed to English more than the rural primary school pupils as in this study. Maturity in writing, learning strategies received from teachers and pupils' interests in English should also be taken into consideration. Until recently, there is little interest from language scholars or educators to investigate errors in writing made by rural primary school pupils (Ien et al. 2017). The highest number of errors in tense made by students and pupils in Krishnasamy's (2015), Abas's (2004) and this present research could possibly become the reason for further research. If possible, something should be done to overcome this problem in this research since the pupils are still at the primary level of education.

The second major error made by the pupils was punctuation. The errors were in the use of comma, period, and capitalization which is similar to the pupils' first language (Malay language) that also applies the same rule for punctuation (*tanda baca* in Malay). Furthermore, the vocabulary was another error made by the rural pupils in writing. The vocabulary limitation hindered them from writing using suitable words and lead them to use alternative words instead. Then there us spelling, the least error made by the pupils in writing. This error can also be highlighted because the findings show that these primary school pupils tended to make spelling errors because they spelled certain words according to how they pronounce them. Also, there were two misspelled words which are connected to mother tongue interference.

The causes and sources of error found in this study were both interlingual and intralingual errors. As second language learners, the rural pupils are exposed to two languages that make them bilingual. In the process of learning the second language, they tended to mix, combine, misuse, or apply both rules and linguistic comprehension of the languages into writing without realizing it. Interference from the mother tongue is the root of their writing difficulty. In addition, little exposure of the new language is the factor that pulls the mother tongue's rule into the new language rule and binds English and Malay languages together (Maros et al. 2017).

5.1 Research Implications

The study findings have recommended some implications related to policymakers and practitioners for their teaching practice. These suggestions are significant to those who are closely linked to the pupils particularly to English teachers. The implications are as follows.

5.1.1 Implications for policymakers

The writing problem faced by the rural primary pupils needs to be addressed to the policymakers as State Education Department (JPN) and District Education Office (PPD) in order to help other rural English educators in solving the similar problem of having lower-competency English learners with their sentence and essay writing problems. The use of English textbooks and syllabus might have an impact on pupils' writing if both are not functioning as they are. In addition, teachers and pupils might refer to the resources, and any faulty or flaws from them should be discussed and amended according to the suitability of teaching and learning of writing in the classroom. Teachers' training and effective teaching of writing workshops might be less of help to the teachers without frequent observation and post-mortem from the abovementioned policymakers. Apart from that, training on marking English Writing paper is seen necessary for young and new English teachers so that new and fresh ideas could be exchanged between both parties, teachers, and education officers.

5.1.2 Implications for practice

a. To teachers

The main aim of this study is to help the rural primary school pupils to acknowledge the errors they made in writing. In relation to this, English teachers play a vital role in identifying the areas of difficulty that the pupils are facing in writing especially when they construct sentences to form a meaningful story. Teachers as practitioners will be able to reckon the nature of the learner's errors in the language their pupils are learning and detect the areas they have to improve on. Error analysis is a way for teachers to locate learning problems. As this study looks into the four areas of errors, the difficulty it gives to pupils' writing has revealed the reason why they cannot perform well in the examination.

Errors in tense prove that pupils are still confused with the grammar rules whereas punctuation errors show their weakness in the mechanics of writing. Moreover, spelling is the area where their writing is less helpful whereas vocabulary errors produce the ideas to the readers that the pupils as writers do not comprehend the exact meaning of the choice of words they use. As a result, the errors keep being repeated without them having a chance to correct the errors. Teachers who teach any particular errors committed by the pupils are not aware of the errors that allow them to exist in their pupils' writing.

The errors made give teachers clues about the kind of worksheet they have assigned to the pupils before and whether they should improve on it, which depends on the pupils' level of proficiency. Their teaching techniques especially in teaching writing may work on the pupils and vice versa. As for gender differences in making errors, teachers may have little attention on errors made by both male and female pupils while teaching them the areas of grammar they have had a lack of.

Preparing more worksheets on tense, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary could not be ways to enhance their grammar understanding if teachers do not spot the pupils' errors first. Teachers who provide worksheets on identifying errors in sentences for the pupils to work in a group or as homework would be overlooked on the pupils' capability to construct sentences on their own and without assistance at home. Pairing

the pupils of the average level with the low level one might be helpful sometimes, but it can be harmful if only one party works harder than the other.

b. To pupils

Making errors in all four categories shows the pupils' difficulty in writing may occur when their knowledge of grammar and language use of a second language is limited. Analysing pupils' errors is a tedious job. However, it is effective in determining their level of proficiency in writing and measuring their progress in understanding grammar and language use. Therefore, self-checking and peer checking as what has been done as classroom practice can be less practical without full attention from teachers. They can have a practice of identifying errors themselves and placing them into correct categories of errors, but teachers' guidance is also needed.

It is impacted by the pupils who are given a lot of writing practice either in school or at home especially to those whose performance is low. Familiarising them with guided writing may be helpful to them, but this might let them work without thinking about main ideas and use correct grammar themselves. The pupils who need to be given more stimuli for them to describe with or without helping words, just waste their time looking at them if they are not provided with extra time and discussion with friends and teachers. Pupils' participation and engagement in different activities and trying out new strategies to improve their writing e.g. keeping a journal, or doing a task using a blog, Facebook, or any social media may be beneficial if the teacher does weekly checking and observation.

6. CONCLUSION

Writing is a skill that needs to be developed by language learners. It is considered difficult to learn especially by rural primary school pupils in Malaysia as English is used neither in school nor at home. Encountering problems to organise ideas in paragraphs, to observe coherence and cohesion, and to show linguistic competency such as tense, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary in writing hindered the pupils from producing good quality of writing as they frequently made errors during the writing process.

In line with that, the government has played its role through English programmes to help English teachers facilitate pupils, especially in rural areas to enhance their literacy and writing skill in English. This assists English teachers in grouping the pupils with learning disabilities in order to have remedial sessions to bridge the achievement gap between rural and urban pupils as stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 ([Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013](#)).

Therefore, teachers have to work more on adjusting their teaching strategy to deal with the pupils' errors and provide as much worksheet as they can to solve the problem. To conclude, though this study has revealed the pupils' weakness in writing, the root of this problem might be coming from many factors that have not been investigated yet.

This research focused on Primary 5 pupils only because their writing might be valid to be examined as they had gone through four years of learning English as a second language at school. It is limited to only Primary 5 pupils because they are

capable of showing the maturity in presenting ideas in writing, but making errors in grammar and language use was not an exception. Again, they will not be presenting the whole population of pupils studying in all rural areas in Malaysia.

Since this was a small-scale research study, the writing instruction chosen for pupils to write was only to be restricted to instructions related to their experience and things they were familiar with. Therefore, their extension of ideas and points cannot be generalized to others who may receive different methods and techniques by their language teachers. In addition, the pupils' errors in writing may vary from one to another as a result of their learning process and the influence by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and attitudes towards learning writing skills to achieve their teacher's target; to write well.

Future studies should focus on a larger sample size from different levels of proficiency and different schools. Also, future researchers should take different levels of English proficiency into account so that the result might be more solid and useful to other teachers and pupils of diverse levels. It is also recommended that the duration of the study could be extended to give ample time to the pupils and teachers to go through the analysis process for the sake of getting more valid and reliable findings.

Generally, this study emphasizes errors in tense, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. Perhaps for future research, researchers would focus on just one type of error so that it would be more specific with the addition of many sources of data.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

English UPSR Question Paper (Section C)

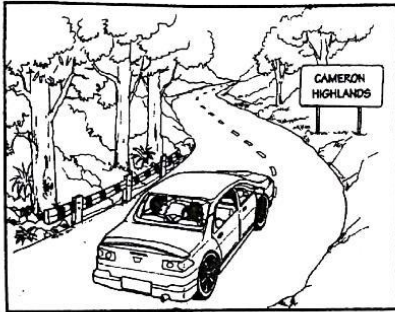
Question 1

Write a story based on the given pictures. You **may** use the words given to help you. Write your story in the space provided.

Your story should be between **80 and 100** words.

Tulis sebuah cerita berdasarkan gambar-gambar yang diberi. Kamu boleh menggunakan perkataan-perkataan yang diberi untuk membantu kamu. Tulis cerita kamu di ruang yang disediakan.

Panjangnya cerita kamu hendaklah antara 80 hingga 100 patah perkataan.



holiday – drove – three hours



reached – hotel – keys – room
– comfortable



tea plantation – interesting – enjoyed
– photos

Appendix B

Rubric for marking UPSR English Writing by Malaysian Examination Board.

Bands	Super Excellent Bands	Excellent Band	Good Band	Satisfactory Band	Weak Band
Section C (25 marks) Descriptors	23-25 marks	18-22 marks	12-17 marks	5-11 marks	0-4 marks
	All ideas are relevant and well-organized in well-plotted paragraphs.	Most ideas are relevant and well-organized in sequenced paragraphs.	Some ideas are relevant and organized in paragraph(s).	Ideas are in paragraph (s).	Most ideas are in chunks and almost disorganized.
	Very excellent and proficient use of the language throughout with hardly any error in grammar and structures.	Excellent use of the language throughout with a few errors in grammar and structures.	Proficient use of the language with some errors in both grammar and structures.	The use of language is just sufficient with frequent errors in grammar and structures.	Poor use of the language with too many multiple errors in grammar and structures.
	Almost perfect in punctuation and spelling with a high command of vocabulary.	A few errors in punctuation and spelling and correct use of vocabulary.	Some errors in spelling and punctuation. Vocabulary is just sufficient.	Frequent errors in spelling and punctuation. Vocabulary is barely sufficient.	Spelling and punctuation errors are found throughout. Vocabulary can hardly convey any meaning.