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EFL Learners' Errors at a Higher Education Institution

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by
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A copy of the project is available for research purposes at the University Library

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Student Signature Date

Dedication

To my loving and

devoted parents

To my caring husband

To my wonderful kids

Thank you for all your support

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Bahous who was the main and continuous support in the accomplishment of this degree. A thanks is to Dr, Ahmad Oueini for being my second reader.

I would like to thank my family individually starting with my parents. They were there for me at all times. A special thanks to my patient and supportive mother who tried to help in all possible ways. To my husband Firas whose love and support never had a limit. Finally, my kids (Noura and Husam), thank you for being the source of fun when I felt down and overworked. You are the precious jewels of my life, and you illuminate every breath I take through your very existence.

Abstract

This project focuses on the problems in writing that English as a Second Language students face. The project sheds light on the grammatical errors of ESL writing and provides teachers with techniques to help students enjoy the material and at the same time benefit from the Intensive English Program at LAU. The results of the study and analyses are based on the three means of research that include a questionnaire, an interview with the coordinator of the program, and the writings of the students. The findings of the research proved that no matter what the genre of writing is, grammatical errors occur even if in different percentages. Some solutions were suggested. One important solution is that teachers adjust to the proposed techniques and syllabus to satisfy the needs of the students.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction:
    1.1 Research Context
    1.2 Rational of the study
    1.3 Research Questions
    1.4 Participants
2. Literature review:
    2.1 Introduction
    2.2 Writing in the second/foreign language
    2.3 How often do people use foreign language
    2.4 Error/Mistake Distinction
    2.5 Factors affecting the writing of English as a Foreign language
    2.6 Common grammatical errors
    2.7 Teachers' Methods and Techniques to improve the writing skills
3. Methodology:
    3.1 Participants
    3.2 Methods
        3.2.1 Questionnaire
        3.2.2 Interview
        3.2.3 Written Documents
    3.3 Triangulation
    3.4 Ethical Considerations
4. Results
5. Conclusion
6. References
7. Appendix A
8. Appendix B
9. Appendix C
10. Appendix D

List of Tables

Table 1: Age

Table 2: Gender

Table 3: Mother tongue

Table 4: Nationality

Table 5: Rank of English

Table 6: English frequency

Table 7: Translation

Table 8: Last book read in 1st language

Table 9: Last book read in English

Table 10: Major problems in writing

Table 11: Common grammatical mistakes

Table 12: Study grammar daily

Table 13: Refer to syllabus

Table 14: Preferred genre of writings

Table 15: Best thing about intensive

Table 16: Worst thing about intensive

Table 17: Total number of errors/ grammar and mechanics of writing

Table 18: Total number of errors/ grammar and mechanics of writing

Table 19: Grammar and mechanics of writing/cause/effect versus narrative

Table 20: Type and number of errors/cause /effect articles

Table 21: Type and number of errors

Table 22: Percentage of errors in each genre.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Full participation in the world community requires fluency in English that goes beyond the spoken language and that embraces a variety of uses of the written language as well. However, writing itself is a difficult skill for any language user. In fact, both native as well as non-native speakers find writing a very challenging task (Kroll, 2003). Even though native speakers think and write in the same language, they sometimes lack ideas or creativity. Non-native speakers, on the other hand, tend to translate from their mother tongue or overuse the thesaurus to supposedly avoid redundancy.

Research Context

A large number of students seeking higher education in an English medium university in Lebanon choose to join University X. Usually these potential students are required to sit for an English Entrance Exam. Those who get a score below the required cut off are placed in the Intensive English Program (IEP) before starting their major. Usually, these students have English language problems, particularly in written expression. Thus, the IEP is a way to accelerate students' progress in their acquisition of English as a second language. The IEP offers a thorough review of the language skills and sub skills needed for academic purposes. (IEP syllabi, Appendix D)

Rationale of the study

Texts written by second language (L2) students are less effective than those written by L1 students (Kroll, 2003). They are generally shorter, less cohesive, and contain many syntactical, lexical, and semantical errors among others (Hyland, 2003). Thus, language teachers are required to develop a systematic plan of what needs to be learned. They have to select and sequence the content and tasks that will hopefully lead to the desired learning outcomes (Hyland, 2003, 54). It might be hard to identify the needs of learners, but gathering all the information one can get about students is important in making a course as effective as possible. It is hard to detect the needs of the students because these can refer to the immediate language skills or future goals (Hyland, 2003, 58).

The main purpose of this study is to examine common morphological and syntactic errors made by students enrolled in the IEP at University X, and recommend changes to help them deal with these language problems and write more effectively (see for example Mortimer 2001). Moreover, such a research will benefit language teachers as it will help them facilitate the teaching/learning process that should lead to students' progress.

Research Questions

This study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What approaches do university IEP teachers follow to teach writing skills?
2. What are IEP students' common grammatical errors?
3. How do IEP teachers deal with errors?
4. What are the most common and effective techniques to improve university academic writing?

Sample/Participants

Participants in this study are first-year university students registered in the first semester in the IEP at University X. The researcher chose two IEP sections randomly. The ages of the students range between seventeen and twenty years old. More than half of these students come from English medium schools; they studied English as a Second Language (ESL) for more than thirteen years.

The following chapter will review the research concerning error analysis and common grammatical mistakes.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Learning to write in English, as a second or third language, continues to be a major educational goal throughout the world. It is regarded as the acquisition of basic language skills that should help learners build on them to become more efficient in the target language. Without these acquired skills, further education may be largely impossible.

This chapter reviews the literature available on the subject. It, first, overviews what researchers in the field say about writing in the second foreign language. it, then, discusses the error/mistake distinction. Later the factors affecting the writing in English as a second language are outlined and the reference to the contrastive rhetoric is pointed out. Common grammatical errors are scrutinized. Finally, methods and techniques used to improve second/ foreign language writing students are discussed.

Writing in the Second/Foreign Language

Writing does not just convey information; in fact, it reflects a lot about the writer (Fedderholt, 2001). Yet writing in a foreign language tends not to be a very popular subject at school or at the university. Students feel that it is only of relevance to them for the artificial purpose of passing exams (Fedderhololt, 2001). Fedderhololt (2001) reports on the low enthusiasm Danish students have as they are required to write more than twenty assignments per year.

Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) confirmed the importance of writing for specific purposes in English to university students enrolled in an English medium university in

the Arab World. They claim that mastery of written academic English is a central aim of teaching English in Jordanian universities (JUST) and institutions, since English is the language of instruction there. English is needed for taking notes, describing objects, writing essays, answering written questions, and writing experimental reports among others (Khuwaileh & AlShoumali 2000). They add that the main problem is that students do not get enough training in Arabic (L1) or in English (L2). They suggest that students need to learn about contrastive rhetoric between the two languages (see also McDaniel, 1994; Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 2003).

Myles (2002) adds that although ESL learners may have negative attitudes toward writing, many of them are financially and professionally committed to graduating from English speaking universities. As a result, they have strong reasons for learning and improving their skills. Students should learn writing not only because people frequently have to communicate with each other in writing but also because writing helps students learn (Myles, 2002). To Raimes (1983), writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary. When students write, they have a chance to be adventurous with language and to take risks. When they write, they become involved with the new language.

Candlin (1987) discussed four areas of concern: properties of the finished piece of writing, process through which such a piece of writing comes to existence, how students acquire the relevant complex of skills and mental abilities, and what teachers need to know in order to help their students acquire the ability to write.

Before going deep into the grammatical errors and the factors affecting them, it is essential to highlight the error/mistake distinction.

Error/Mistake Distinction

Writing - the act of composing – can create problems for students, especially for those writing in a second language in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling (Myles, 2002). Students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills (Myles, 2002). However, to reach the needed proficiency, students pass through a period of time where their writings are filled with errors or mistakes.

"Not only to err is human, but there is none other that human error: animals and artifacts do not commit errors" (James, 1998, 1). In order for a human being to improve oneself, one is "bound to make the odd mistake" (Goethe, 1974, 17). These odd mistakes may take place in language. James (1998) added that

> If a learner is inclined and able to correct a fault in his or her input, it is assumed that the form selected was not the one intended, and we shall say that the fault is a Mistake. If on the other hand, the learner is unable or in anyway disinclined to make the correction, we assume that the form the learner used was the one intended, and that is an Error (p. 78).

Thus, a mistake is an instance of language that is being unintentionally deviant by its author while an error is either intentionally or unintentionally deviant (James, 1998). The last confusion that might take place is with the lapses of the pen or figures on the keyboard. These can quickly be detected and self-corrected by their writer.

At this level, error analysis is needed to determine the causes and consequences of the unsuccessful language. James (1998) finds error analysis significant. Such analysis tells teachers what needs to be taught and allows learners to test their hypothesis about their L2.

Hence, an error analysis of students' written errors could be used to provide insights concerning students' areas of weaknesses and the factors affecting these areas. Leki (2003) sees that error analysis determines the difficulty of L2 features by cataloging the actual errors that learners make. Analysis assumes that the most difficult features of an L2 to learn are those that differ the most from the L1 as well as the features of L2 that are close but not identical to L1.

Factors affecting the writing in English as a foreign language

Leki (1992) claims that many factors such as students' ages when they begin studying English, how literate they are in their native language, and how proficient they want to become in English, affect whether ESL students become more or less good writers of English. In order to explain the proficiency in the second language writing, it is best to refer to Contrastive Rhetoric (see Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 2003) which is an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers. These problems are usually explained by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language (Connor, 2003; 223)

Connor (1996) explains that ESL students often mention that when they write in English, they translate or attempt to translate first language words, phrases and organization into English. Writing becomes choppy and does not flow. Teachers comment that ESL students use patterns of language and stylistic conventions that they have learned in their native languages and cultures. This transfer is not just idiosyncratic variation but involves recurring patterns of organization and rhetorical conventions reminiscent of writing in the students' native language and culture.

The L1 rhetorical and cultural preferences influence the differences between L1 and L2 writing. Students have various ways for presenting information and arguments in their L1. These ways may not transform straightforwardly to many English L1 academic contexts (Grabe 2001) Wang (2003) emphasized that in the domain of L2 writing, the 'skilled' or 'unskilled' L2 writers switch back and forth between their L1 and L2 in order to work through a particular problem.

The L1 factor was also studied by Kroll (2003) who found out that ESL writers retrieve information about a writing topic from the memory they have in the first language. Then they translate it into English before writing anything down. This act of translation led to a decrease in the quality of the content in the writing. Hyland (2002) gives the following examples: A Chinese writer suffered because he used his native tongue to develop ideas and organize the paper. The result was his English writing was contaminated by Chinese rhetoric. A Japanese student had a very difficult time making teachers understand his writing. The sentences tended to be short and a direct translation of Japanese sentences Myles (2002) supported Silva (1993) by saying that L2 writing is closely dependent on the L1. Although L2 (English) writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in many ways from L1 (non English native language) writing, L1 models have had a significant influence on L2 writing instruction and the development of a theory of L2 writing. L1 and L2 writing are similar in their broad outlines; both L1 and L2 writers employ a recursive composing process, involving planning, writing and revising, to develop their ideas and find the appropriate linguistic and rhetorical means to express them. However, when the two writings were closely examined, important differences

were revealed. L2 writers did less planning at the global and local levels. They devoted more attention to figuring out the topic and generating ideas.

Moreover, Myles (2002) discussed some social and cognitive factors that affect language learning. To her, learners with positive attitudes, motivation, and concrete goals will have these attitudes reinforced if they experience success. Likewise, learners' negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success or by failure. The research concluded that motivational factors probably do not make much difference on their own, but they can create a more positive context in which language learning is likely to flourish. In short, learners may continue to exhibit errors in their writing for the following social reasons:

1- Negative attitudes towards the target language,

2- Continued lack of progress in the L2,

3- A wide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture, and

4- A lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning. The basic cognitive factor is the language transfer, defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired.

Furthermore, Cohen and Carson (2001) reviewed various studies that have compared L1 and L2 writing. There are similarities among the strategies used for the two processes. Many language teachers and students think through their L1 and even write a text first in the L1 to enhance the production of good writing in the foreign language, at least at the beginning and intermediate levels. Reported data collected from 8 ESL students showed that the students used strategies for L2 writing similar to those of L1 writing: engaging in

limited prewriting, planning and heavy use of rescanning. Yet, the ESL student edited and corrected the work more than L1 writers did.

Other studies contrasted L1 and L2 strategies (see also Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Uzawa & Cumming, 1989; Friedlander, 1990); they showed that students revert to the L1 in order to think about the writing task: Six Spanish speaking adults in an ESL program used the same writing strategies for writing in L1 and L2. Another similar study involved four Japanese students studying ESL. The four students reported that they generally used the L1 for generating ideas, searching for topics, developing concepts, and organizing information. When these writers compose in the foreign language, they limit the amount of information in the essay, simplify the syntax and the vocabulary, and neglect questions about the audience (Cohen & Carson 2001).

Hirose (2006) saw that the L1 effect does not always influence students' organization in writing. ESL writers with higher abilities in both languages tended to choose different organizational patterns whereas the lower participants used similar patterns in L1 and L2. Hoch (n.d.) sees writing for a second language learner as an extension of listening and speaking. Therefore, the students must have opportunities to build, extend and refine oral language in order to improve their written output. The students should be comfortable at risk taking; especially that writing involves some risk taking. (Hoch, n.d.) These students need to know their efforts are appreciated and that the message they are trying to convey is valued over the form. (Hoch, n.d.) This supports Elqobai (2006) who sees that motivational and attitudinal perspectives towards the intended L2 may influence the language learning process.

Becica (1996) also sees that speaking fluently in the second language enhances the writing process and generates ideas. However, the problem lies in the fact that in most cases, inter-student communication both in and outside class is in the first language. Thus, we might have slow learners of English because they spend most of the time speaking another language.

The studies conducted by Krashen (1984) indicate that voluntary pleasure reading contributes to the progress in writing ability. The study also reported that parents of good writers used to read for them more often as they were children. The parents themselves also read a lot. Krashen also discussed Bamberg's study that supports the generalization that good writers not only did more expository writing in high school, they even had more instructions on issues of form, supporting ideas, paragraph structure, etc.

Kroll (2003) confirmed that people who read the most are invariably the best writers. But reading is not common among these students, even in their first language.

Since the emergence of the second language writing research, many studies have been conducted with Arabic L1 students to investigate the specific characteristics and rhetorical patterns in Arabic as compared to English. The investigation revealed the impact of language group on the use of L1-L2 translation as a strategy during the L2 writing process and it effect on the quality and the quantity of the written text (Elqobai, 2006).

Again, Khuwaileh and AlShoumali's (2000) study explores students' writing skills in English and Arabic. They look for an association between poor writing across languages. The sample they chose consisted of 150-second year university students taking English and Arabic for academic purposes. Arabic was their first language (L1) studied for

twelve years and English the second studied for seven years. They all had to write two essays about co-education, in each language and with a three months gap of time to avoid literal translation. They were assessed by two English language and two Arabic language teachers. The results of the research confirmed what Kaplan (1996) stated that speakers of Arabic transfer rhetorical patterns from their mother tongue into their English writing. Bjork and Raisanen (1997) note that the rhetorical use of reference in L1 can affect the cohesion of texts in L2. Although the rating processes showed that the participants' essays included different types of errors, the lack of cohesion, coherence, and verb tense errors were the most serious and frequent ones. The writings suffered from the absence of logical link between sentences in both languages. Both texts lacked the connectors of sequence, consequences, contrast, addition, and illustration. More than one third of the participants did not use transition words to guide the discussion of their arguments. Paragraphs appeared to be lists of sentences. In Arabic, 55% wrote compositions with no logical linking of ideas. The problem of no paragraph division was more serious in Arabic, because sentences were longer. Excessive use of the pronoun (it) to replace the "Co-education" was common in Arabic and English texts. The subjects' mistakes were frequent in both languages like verb tenses, irregular past tenses, and Subject-Verb-agreement. In both languages, participants frequently used the simple past, ignoring other tenses like the past perfect or present progressive. 34% used overgeneralization in writing the endings of simple past or past participle in English. The last common error dealt with was the third person singular, where the (s) was omitted with subjects like he, she and it. Major errors were in grammar. Khuwaileh and AlShoumali noticed that the deficiencies in writing of English are not solely the responsibility of the English teachers.

The problem already exists in L1. There appears to be a gap between what is taught and what learners will use when they have to write creatively. Thus reconsideration of Arabic teaching objectives and curricula needs to be first priority in JUST and all Arab countries. "If Arabic is not taught properly in its homeland, then it will not be in a better position anywhere else" (Khuwaileh & AlShoumali 2000, 181).

Since research in Arabic rhetoric is very limited, conferences in the Arab world (Cairo, Lebanon and Jordan to name a few) discussed studies that dealt with distinctive features of Arabic, Arabic and English contrasts, and contrastive rhetorical studies of Arabic native students' writing in English (Connor, 2003). The issue of Arabic rhetoric became the concern of many linguists. (See Al Haq & Ahmad, 1994; Batainah, 2005; El Sayed, 1992; Fakhri, 2004; Mahmoud, 2005; Zughol, 1991, to name a few).

El-Sayed (1992) discussed translation as a factor affecting the second language writing. If a student could write a good composition in Arabic and translate it perfectly to English, this does not mean s/he could write a good English composition. Many students have mastered the elements of grammar but lacked the power of turning that knowledge to practical ends, the use of English which is idiomatic and native and not one which marks the writer as a foreigner (El-Sayed, 1992). The researcher also pointed out the major problems that result from the Arabic – English translation during writing. One of the problems is that in Arabic, the use of unfamiliar and big words is looked upon as a mark of a good writer. However, in ESL classes students try to do the same for English. As a result, the writings tend to be confusing. Some other problems might be the over use of conjunctions in Arabic, though they are limited ('wa' and 'fa'). However, there is diversity of English conjunctions but not over used in one sentence (El-Sayed, 1992).

James (1998) also discussed the mother tongue influence. He studied a case study of unsolicited letter of enquiry in EL2 sent by a Brazilian (L1 Portuguese). Upon studying it, James categorized errors according to their level. His results proved the existence of interlingual errors. Interference happens "when an item or structure in the second language manifests some degree of difference and some similarity with the equivalent item or structure in the learner's first language (Jackson 1987, 101). Towell and Hawkins (1994) argued and claimed that errors could be fully described in terms of the target language without the need to refer to the L1 of the learners. Abu Shanab (1978) reported that L1 (Arabic) was a major influence especially with tenses, prepositions and pronouns. Non-standard dialect is a factor, which prevents children from using Standard English in their writing. Williamson and Hardman (1997) conducted a study based on analysis of writing obtained from students' first language. The sample contained randomly selected schools of different socioeconomic backgrounds. The first task was to comment on a rule which applied to some field of activity or context they were familiar with. The second task was to submit a piece of persuasive writing based on a strongly held personal opinion. There were instances of confusion whether a given form is an instance of non-standard dialect or simply a slip of the pen, or whether there is mixing between non-standard dialect and colloquialism (There is this house....colloquial Standard English). Some of the common features were the use of non-standard past tense and according to location of school. The incidences of non standard dialect per word of written text decrease with age.

Anxiety is another factor affecting the writing process. Raimes (1987) observed and examined ESL students' written work. She saw signs of anguish. Student writers chew

their pencils, shuffled their feet, sighed, groaned and stretched. They asked how much they were supposed to write. "Their anguish became our anguish as we read more and more pieces of writing not only filled with grammatical errors but empty of life and content" (Raimes, 1987, p.262). Raimes thinks that if we take much care of grammar, we might have flat paragraphs and we will respond to piece of writing as item checkers, and not as real readers. The students she was observing worried about accuracy. They stopped after each sentence and went back and checked it for inflection, word order, punctuation, etc. The prison of the word and sentence has stronger bars that restrict them before they begin to develop their ideas. Thinking and writing should be inseparable when students compose (Berthoff, 1978) Berthoff realized that in ESL, editing skills are more stressed than creativity.

In Winer's research (1992), the students themselves highlighted four areas as problems in ESL writing:

1- Students dread writing, especially writing to be graded. To them, producing a piece of writing has always come after a period of suffering.

2- Students witnessed boredom with general topics and intimidation by technical ones.

3- Students felt insecure about their own writing skills.

4- Students felt insecure about the teacher's teaching skills, particularly in giving feedback, making errors, and grading.

Social and cognitive factors affect language learning. To Myles (2002), exploration of social factors gives us some idea of why learners differ in the rate of L2 learning, in proficiency type, and in ultimate proficiency. The research conducted showed that learners with motivation, positive attitudes, and concrete goals will have these attitudes

reinforced if they experience success. Language transfer is a cognitive factor related to writing error. The process of transfer is defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been acquired (Myles, 2002)

The last factor concerned with the common errors in writing is that of the Media's effect. Larocque (1996) studies the types of writings of 10 journalists from *Time Magazine*. Larocque noticed that journalists often use too many prepositional phrases in stories, which results in lack of clarity. "One sentence / paragraph writing is a common but unattractive convention in journalism"(Laroque, 1996, p.6). Another issue is the obtrusive writing which is packing more than one main idea in a sentence. The result of the research was that the excessive length and faulty structures are two of the reasons for unreadable obtrusions in media writing which affect negatively the writings of Political Science students.

Common Grammatical Errors

English is a tricky language. No matter how many years you have gone to school, you are probably confronted almost everyday with grammar or usage questions that make you stop and think. Grammar is just as important as instrument of communication as content, and a text cannot be written cohesively without attention being paid to how meaning is being expressed through the grammar (Krashen 1999). Hinkel and Fotos (2002) assured that although grammar teaching has been a controversial issue among educators and methodologists, it remained one of the foundations in English language teaching worldwide.

Yates and Kenkel's (2002) recommended that L2 writing teachers pay more attention to global or textual aspects of the writing assignment and less to surface-level concerns, so that they would become more writing teachers and less language teachers.

A research was conducted by Semke and Lynch/Klemans in an effort to gain insight into the attitudes of ESL student writers towards errors in their writing. The sample included 100 students of beginning ESL freshman writing classes. When asked "How important is it to you for your English teacher to point out your errors in grammatical forms in your writing?" 93 % felt it was very important. Somewhat fewer felt as strongly about spelling corrections, vocabulary and punctuation. The questionnaire explored perceptions about the importance of accuracy. When asked how important it was to them to have as few errors as possible in their written work, 91 students answered that it was very important. Students were hopeful about the possibility of eliminating errors. The best way to avoid making the same mistake was doing something in response to the teacher's indication of errors (Leki, 1991).

Truscott (1996) takes the strong position that grammar correction in L2 is useless, ineffective, and harmful and that it should be abandoned. He claims that correction causes stress and demotivates students. In addition to that, it takes up too much of teacher's and students' time which could be more productively spent on other aspects of writing.

Ferris (2004) agrees that error correction that are poorly made will not help students and may even mislead them. However, a lot of research has proven that *effective* error correction can help at least some ESL writers (See also Bates, Lane & Lange, 1993; Ellis, 1998; Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998; Reid, 1997).

ESL writing teachers appeared to think of themselves as primarily language teachers, rather than composition instructors. Thus, they focused mainly on students' language errors in writing instead of giving students feedback on their ideas or organization (Ferris, 2003).

Furthermore, Leki (1992) considers that teaching writing to ESL students is not radically different from teaching writing to native English speakers. Many of the same techniques, attitudes and even syllabus work well with ESL students. The teachers themselves are in fact language teachers who would less likely abandon the traditional views of teaching writing and more likely 'resist the de-emphasis on grammar characteristic of process methodologies' (p.7). As a result, she indicated that "it makes sense to give feedback on content first" (p.134). She adds that teachers can provide help for ESL writers beyond correction of grammar errors by showing the writers different ways to focus on the logical and organizational flow of their writings (Leki, 1992).

Non-native speakers of English fear that their reports, papers, letters and memos may seem un-English or difficult to understand. Thus, they think that the least they can do is have their work free of grammatical errors (Mc Daniel, 1994).

The findings of the study conducted by Fazio (2001) indicated that only grammar feedback group and the grammar plus content group made progress in grammatical accuracy at a statistically significant level.

Hedge (1998), while acknowledging the importance of grammar in producing written work, comments that "good writers tend to concentrate on getting the content right and leave details like spelling, punctuation and grammar until later"(p.23). Some of the common errors were discussed previously in articles or books. They do not stop there,

many writers dedicated a whole research for the sake of detecting one common grammatical error. Zobl (1989) discussed inappropriate passive morphology (be) and the past participle, hence (be + en) in English writing of L2 learners. (Example: Most people are fallen in love and marry with somebody). The sample was thirty eight university students (22 males & 16 females), whose L1 was Chinese and whose mean score on TOEFL was 578.9, to begin undergraduate or graduate study. The task was to rank sentences as grammatical, ungrammatical, or not sure, and to correct those they considered ungrammatical. The study confirms that all thirty eight subjects accepted and used (be + en). It also assures Zobl's proposal that the passive rule never fully replaces the rule for native like unaccusatives.

Taylor (1975) conducted a study on twenty native Spanish speaking students in order to examine the relationship between the strategies of overgeneralization and transfer, on one hand, and the degree to which elementary and intermediate ESL students use these strategies while learning English on the other hand. The error types were categorized into errors of overgeneralization, transfer, and translation… The results indicated that the errors made by elementary and intermediate students were not qualitatively different.

The learners' language is characterized by linguistically incorrect and/or contextually inappropriate forms and expressions, 'known as errors'. In addition, some pragmatic and linguistic deviations take place and make language sound 'unnatural' or 'strange' (Mahmoud, 2005).

Mahmoud's study presents data verifying the theoretical claims and informal observations about collocation problems encountered by Arab learners of EFL. The conclusion was that collocations constitute an area of difficulty in learning English as a

foreign language. The Arab-speaking students commit errors when producing collocations in English, especially the lexical combinations. Students mostly transferred intralingually from Arabic using English words

Another interesting research was carried out by Abu Shanab (1978). The sample was Saudi students who were studying English in Aramco Training Center. He analyzed the grammatical errors in the composition of 163 students. The data of the study were collected at two different periods. Errors in the verb category were most frequent. In addition, Abu Shanab found that overgeneralization and avoidance resulted in most of the errors.

Kharma (1982) undertook a study in Kuwait to investigate the errors in definite and indefinite articles committed by Arab students at the university level. The results uncovered some of the causes of errors in articles. The percentages of errors were recorded as 36.6% in the indefinite articles 'a' & 'an', 51.4% in zero articles, and 31.7% in the definite article 'the'.

Karallah (1986) investigated the morphological and syntactic errors committed by third secondary students in Jordan. The sample was 100 compositions written by students sitting for the general high secondary school exam. He analyzed the data by identifying, categorizing and finally describing the errors. The results showed that semantically and syntactically related items proved to be a major source of errors for Jordanian students. Moreover, influence of the mother tongue seemed to account for most students' errors.

Bataineh (2005) analyzed compositions written by Jordanian EFL students. She was able to identify nine types of errors concerning articles. Though articles are unstressed and almost inaudible in oral communication, they are most frequent in written English. Their

presence or absence changes the meaning. The results suggest that the majority of errors made by the four groups are the result of overgeneralization and simplification of the English article system. The impact of the subjects' native language was minimal.

Silva (1993) found out that L2 writers wrote shorter texts. They made more overall morphosyntactic errors, more lexicosemantic errors, and errors with verbs, prepositions, articles, and nouns. This is all the result of transcribing and referring to L1.

It seems that the issue at hand was of great interest to the people in the Arab world just as it is the case in Lebanon. The previous researchers provide some insight of what the steps and error categories in this study might be.

Teachers' Methods and Techniques to improve the writing skills

Despite some malpractice in teaching grammar, it remains a vital aspect of language. Thus, the main question is how to teach grammar in a motivating and effective way. Teachers can guide students to notice grammatical forms when using the language in meaningful contexts. Students should be encouraged to use the target language creatively (Hinkel & Fotos 2002).

ESL students see the purpose of their writing classes as primarily to help them eliminate errors. They may not be aware that certain errors in writing may never disappear. The teacher's role is to help and identify the errors. However, teachers should not be "composition slaves" pointing out every error the student makes (Leki 1991).

Leki (2001) reopens the issue of L2 teachers. She reminds teachers that behind many of the papers they read there is a person struggling. This person is very much aware of how much s/he could communicate the thoughts with clarity, precision, force and imagination in the L1.

Kroll (2003) defines the main job of the teachers of writing as working with students to help them achieve improved writing proficiency in accordance with students' needs and course goals, advancing beyond their current skill level. She believes that how best to reach the proficiency in writing sits at the heart of the teaching enterprise.

Similarly, Thornbury (1999) sees the teacher's job as to choose tasks and materials that engage the learners. Tasks and materials that are relevant to their needs, that are involving, that have an achievable outcome, and that have an element of challenge while providing the necessary support, are more likely to be motivating than those that do not have these qualities.

In Williams's (2002) study of second language writing, the writers reported that they perceived tutors to be more helpful, approachable, practical and personal than teachers. To Williams, writers of L2 may apply their knowledge unevenly because they care to focus on the content of their texts. These are errors that second language writers can self correct and they should be encouraged to do so. Other errors, ones that result from lack of knowledge or incomplete knowledge, are more difficult to assess. In fact, Kroll (1990) says that because student populations were so different in their abilities, backgrounds and needs, only a very general approach to writing instruction appeared feasible to address all.

Myles (2002) advises the teachers, while giving appropriate instructions, to take into consideration the influence from various educational, social and cultural experiences that students have in their native language. This includes textual issues, such as rhetorical and cultural preferences for organizing information and structuring arguments, commonly referred to as contrastive rhetoric. Matsuda (1999) points out that there is considerable

diversity even among ESL students in terms of language and cultural backgrounds, prior education, gender, age, and ESL language proficiency, which may make working with ESL students challenging for some writing instructors.

Messer (1996) approves with Matsuda. He suggests that students begin by writing about their personal interests, so that the writing will flow. After observation, she noticed that L2 writers often become so concerned with spelling, syntax and vocabulary that they have trouble sustaining thought about the topic of composition. That is why a good idea would be to offer ESL students' opportunities to select their own topics and be open minded when teachers respond to the content and form of their writing.

The degree of relatedness of the first language to the second language is important. The ESL teacher should try to find out the pressures that the student is experiencing to discard the first language. The teacher should also realize what the student's motivation and pressures are to learn English (Becica, 1996).

Becica (1996) suggests that the teacher should analyze the students and be able to group them in order to provide them with appropriate instruction. To her, the group of Arabs learning English as a second or a third language is considered a homogeneous group. All of these students will tend to have, to a degree, similar language –learning problems. Beyond these similarities, neither two students are alike, nor should the whole class be treated as a 'faceless anonymity'. Kroll (2003) also sees that because student populations were so different in their abilities, backgrounds and needs, only a very general approach to writing instruction appeared feasible to address all the students.

Miller (1999) administered some exercises for seventh graders to share benefits of E-Prime with other teachers, and especially with students. E-Prime involves avoiding the

use of the verb to be in both oral and written form. She gave each student a piece of candy as an object to observe. Then they had to use E-prime which forced them to express themselves in more precise language usage. The findings were that E-Prime could aid freshman composition students. This technique helps students write from experience and familiarity, and it increases clarity.

Another study was carried out in Sweden (Sullivan & Lindgren 2002) where computer program is used to record a writing session (J-Edit, Track it). The method provides students with an opportunity to look into their own composing processes both linguistically and holistically. A group of four adult learners of English following a municipal adult education program to obtain university entrance requirements took part in the study. Three were Swedish and one was Brazilian. A quantitative analysis of the writing sessions using the statistics provided by the programs showed clear differences in writing patterns among the four writers. The writers all found it useful to view their writing strategies; they were made aware of their individual writing behaviors. Sullivan and Lindgren (2002) emphasized the promotion of life-long learning techniques which would continue to strengthen the writer's linguistics awareness even after the students have left the classroom.

Writers shared both similar and opposing views. They argued whether the teaching of grammar should be emphasized while teaching writing. Ellis (1990), however, says that formal instruction can have a positive effect on learner's ability and concludes that the answer to whether formal instructions work is "Yes." It is necessary for learners to notice features in the input which they receive which can become part of their acquired knowledge. Ellis offered guidelines – which match the principles of modern

methodology with particular goals of the EFL-for the inclusion of grammar in a composition class;

1- Grammar should not detract from the meaning oriented nature of composition teaching.

2- Grammar correction should be avoided in teacher feedback.

3- Grammar component should be directly linked to the editing process. He concluded that by following the guidelines, composition writing courses will not only afford students the chance to develop as creative writers, but also help to consolidate the basic grammatical knowledge they are building up through other parts of the curriculum (Ellis, 1990, 183).

There are as many answers as there are many teachers and teaching styles, or learners and learning styles. Raimes (1983) suggested that as you produce a piece of writing, you should watch out for syntax, content, grammar, mechanics, organization, word choice, writer's process, audience and purpose (Raimes, 1983, 22). She thinks that a principal job as teachers of composition is not to search for errors… However, when ESL students write, they make a lot of mistakes, and it becomes necessary for us to device ways of dealing with errors so that they do not become the sole focus of the piece of writing. She advised to see errors as friends and not enemies to be conquered. To her, errors tell about the students and their learning process. It is possible to use errors in student's writing to plan. It would be great if the teacher gives the students the opportunity to correct errors before the teacher does. The first draft would be to concentrate on the meaning, then revise and look for errors. It is the teacher's responsibility to train them to read drafts without reaching for a pen and consider only the ideas that the writer has tried to express.

In her article about 'Anguish', Raimes (1987) discussed the importance of using praise and honest criticisms of ideas which may help students want to revise and proofread. 'Teachers must give students at upper levels the opportunity to use the new language of theirs to form concepts, not just to ask for salt' (Raimes, 1987, 264). Praises should be used while marking papers. When students get papers, they gasp in horror because there are writings all over it. They assume it is all correction, but then they look closely and see more praise "I like this point", "Interesting idea!"

Paulus (1999) stressed that "ESL writing instruction needs to move to a process approach" (p. 265) as the process approach would teach students not only how to edit, but also to develop strategies to generate ideas, compose multiple drafts, deal with feedback, and revise their written work on all levels (Paulus, 1999).

Badger and White (2000) discussed three approaches to writing. Pincas (1982) sees writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, with attention focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices. Pincas (1982) sees writing as mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher. Tribble (1996) discussed the process approach as predominantly to do with linguistic skills; such as planning and drafting, and there is much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge about grammar and text structure (Tribble, 1996, 39). Second language learners were compared to babies. The former develop, rather than, learn writing skills, and the latter develop, rather than, learn their mother tongue (Badger & White, 2000).

Badger and White (2000) regarded Genre Approach as an extension of product approaches. They regard writing as predominantly linguistic, but they emphasize that writing varies with social situation. The model provided sees writing as a series of stages leading from a particular situation to a text, with teachers facilitating learner's progress by enabling appropriate input of knowledge skills (Badger & White, 2000).

Another important aspect is the teacher's evaluation of the students' writing. Shui (2001) explored whether two groups of teachers gave similar scores to the same writing and used the same criteria in their judgments. He examined the difference between native and nonnative EFL teachers' ratings of ten written samples which were selected randomly in the fall of 1998 from writings of third year students in the English department of a University in Mainland, China. From eighty-six class written assignments gathered in no particular order, every eight essay was selected for the study. Students were asked to write a 250 word expository essay on the topic of TV and newspaper.

The sample of the teachers was forty-six teachers: twenty three Chinese with proficiency in English and twenty three English. They rated ten expository essays using a ten point scale. They wrote and ranked three reasons for their ratings. The results showed that teachers with English background attended more positively in their criteria to content and language whereas Chinese teachers attended more negatively to the organization and length of the essay. Native English speaking teachers are found to be more tolerant of the students' errors than non-native speaking teachers.

Winer (1992) provided four tips in how to help students:

1- Having the students and teachers together design writing tasks and then actually doing them,

2- Requiring revision of tasks and responses,

3- Guiding peer coaching,

4- Providing guided practice in topic development; and students helping students and teachers analyze and understand the writing process through writing journals.

Powers (1993) investigated whether traditional collaborative strategies are appropriate and effective for second language writers. The result was that many of the techniques that had been so successful with native-speaking writers appeared to fail when applied to ESL writers. This is because ESL writers have first language rhetoric different from the rhetoric of academic English with which they are struggling. Therefore, the teachers should teach students directly what their writing should look like by supplying them with formats for presenting written response to various academic assignments (Powers, 1993).

Hyland was a bit specific concerning topics to focus on. Writing improvement can be measured by counting gross increases in features such as relative clauses, modality and passives which are seen as important to successful writing (Hyland, 2002).

Murphy (1997) provided tips for ESL tutors to use. To him, line by line proofreading can be tedious and time consuming, even though grammatical errors often pose a major problem for ESL students. The tips focus on the fact that teachers should understand the student's point in the essay, not on the parts they do not understand. Reading the paper out loud to the student might help the student to hear the grammatical or spelling problems. Teachers should make sure that students understand their comments, especially the ones in the margins. The teacher should remember the learning is a process that continues from a session to another.

Input-enhanced communicative syllabi were suggested by Hinkel and Fotos (2002). These syllabi present grammar points indirectly; grammar forms are introduced through carefully designed activities but are not usually instructed formally. Thus the learners will analyze aspects of the target language. They will notice and then process linguistic structures that have been introduced to them within purely communicative contexts. This strategy might be problematic. Although the communicative approach relies on meaning and lacks formal instruction, many communicative textbooks are structure based proceeding from easy to difficult grammar forms and lexical items. Moreover, learners feel more secure with an instructional format to achieve the necessary gains, to exit the program and to enter regular academic classes (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002). The topic at hand has been investigated along the years and in different aspects. The results matched in some aspects and differed in others. The following chapter will deal with the methods used to conduct this research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this project is to study ESL students' common grammatical errors in writings. This chapter discusses the methods and procedures used to gather the data needed for the research. It also includes a description of the samples, the methods used for collecting data, and the research instruments employed.

As recommended by Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005), the researcher found it best to use a variety of tools to gather data. Data were collected from questionnaires that were administered to a random sample of 34 ESL students out of a population of 107 students (see Appendix A). An interview was conducted with the coordinator of the program (see Appendix B). The third instrument was document analysis. The researcher analyzed two genres of writings by ESL students at two different times (see Appendix C, samples of students' writings). All three methods were used to ensure triangulation.

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Participants

The participants in the research were students from randomly chosen sections of IEP at University X. During the fall semester of 2006-2007, the IEP consisted of 107 students divided into 5 sections. Section fourteen (20 students) and section fifteen (24 students) were selected. The day the questionnaires were distributed, only 40 students were present. All students filled in the questionnaires voluntarily. Also, the students' essays collected and examined were written in regular class sessions in the presence of the class

teacher to avoid pressuring students. 40 students were present to write the first paragraph. As for the second writing session, the sample was only 38 students.

Methods

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed to the learners to help the researcher develop and understand the factors affecting students' second/foreign language learning and the major grammatical errors.

According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2000), the advantage of the questionnaire is that participants are free to answer at their own time, at their own pace. In addition, the discomfort which may result from direct contact is avoided. Another advantage is that it guarantees confidentiality; therefore, more truthful responses would be obtained than with personal interviews. Hence, the questionnaires were distributed by the teacher of each section to the students who were given a 15 minute period to fill it in. A letter was sent to the coordinator of the program before the distribution of the questionnaires to take permission.

The questionnaire consisted of some direct questions concerning the age, gender, the first language, the rank of English, the type of schooling system and the interest of ESL students in English. The rest of the questions were open ended concerning the skills that the students feel need to be improved. Another question was about the Intensive English Program. Other questions dealt with the weaknesses of writing in English, especially the grammatical ones (see Appendix A).

Interview

The process of interviewing helps generate useful information about live experiences and their meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In fact, interview helps us understand our fellow human beings especially the semi-structured ones that allow for a greater flexibility in interviewing the subjects. Semi-structured interviews consist of predetermined questions, but the order can be altered based on the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate. Moreover, the face to face interviews offer the possibility of modifying the line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that questionnaires cannot (Robson, 2002). The interview allows the qualitative researchers to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings individuals bring to them.

Thus, the researcher conducted one semi-structured interview with the coordinator of the IEP program to shed light on the background of the students, factors affecting the students' weakness in writing, the common grammatical mistakes they do and to have an overview of the syllabus that is designed to help these students (see Appendix B).

The coordinator of the program was presented first with the questions. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The face-to-face interview was done in half an hour. The researcher thought half an hour was quite enough because anything under half would be unlikely valuable and too long interviews may get to be boring for the interviewee (Robson, 2002).

Written Documents

In order to answer the research questions, it was essential to study samples of students' writings. Analyzing the questionnaires or the interview were not enough to know specifically what types of morphological and syntactic errors students make when they write; which types of errors are more frequent in students' two genres of writing; and in which text-type students make higher percentage of errors. The researcher chose two writings with different genres. The first one was a cause – effect writing that was given the second week of the semester to know the quality of students' writings before Intensive. The second one was a narrative writing that the participants wrote some time after their midterms. In both writings, the teacher of the section was in class giving the students proper instructions and help as if it were a regular writing session.

Triangulation

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, triangulation of data sources, methods, and data collection strategies was done in order to have more confidence in the insight to be gained.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), research studies involve analyzing data and one of the most common means of gathering data is through triangulation. Triangulation is fundamental as it makes the findings valid and improves data quality and accuracy for interpretation. This confirms what Cohen, et al. (2000). To them qualitative research is based on subjective measurements of fact, and the best way to know what is reliable and valid in qualitative and quantitative research is triangulation which is defined as the use of two or more methods. If different methods of assessment or investigation produce the same results, then the data are likely to be valid.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting a research, it is essential to look at the ethics that lie in the process. Moreover, it is imperative to make sure that participants in a research study are protected from physical or psychological harm, discomfort or danger that may arise due to research procedures. Once the data has been collected, researchers should make sure that no one else has access to the data. Whenever possible the names of the subjects should be removed from all data collection forms (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003)

The initial stage of the research involved a written request to the coordinator of the IEP asking permission to first interview her, then distribute questionnaires to students, and finally collect two sets of different genres of class writings. The participants were not obliged to fill in the questions. Students were informed at the beginning of the semester that two of their writings were going to be collected by a researcher. After writing one was handed, students were told by their teacher that it was one of the research's writings and similarly with the other one. None of the participants objected.

Chapter four covers the results of the research and the detailed classification of each item in the form of tables with some explanation about each.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter deals with the results of the three methods used for data collection:

Questionnaires:

All participants filled the questionnaires but some left questions with no answers; others gave silly answers to some questions which meant they took the questionnaire lightly.

Table 1: Age

	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age	40	18.98	1.05	18	21

The ages of the students ranged between 18 and 21 as they are all first year university students.

Table 2: Gender

Gender	Number	Percent
Female	13	32.50%
Male	27	67.50%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

The majority of the participants were males (67.50%) and the rest (32.50%) were females. Males seem to be less proficient in languages than females. Thus, many do not get the required score in the English Entrance Exam. Therefore, they end up being required to attend one or two semesters of Intensive English before joining the regular Program.

Table 3: Mother Tongue

Mother Tongue	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Arabic	35	87.50%	87.50%
French	4	10.00%	97.50%
English	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Table 4: Nationality

Nationality	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Lebanese	29	72.50%	72.50%
Jordanian	3	7.50%	80.00%
Syrian	2	5.00%	85.00%
Lebanese/French	2	5.00%	90.00%
Turkish	1	2.50%	92.50%
Algerian	1	2.50%	95.00%
Saudi	1	2.50%	97.50%
Canadian	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Tables 3 and 4 show that the majority of the students were of Arabic origin using Arabic as their first language. Whether Lebanese, Jordanian, Syrian or Saudi, participants had Arabic as L1. Only 10% had French as the L1. They consisted of two Lebanese, a Turkish, and an Algerian participant. Among the students there is a Canadian whose mother tongue is English.

Table 5: Rank of English

Rank of English	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Second	27	67.50%	67.50%
Third	12	30.00%	97.50%
First	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Thirty percent of the students were French educated and the majority (67.50%) were English educated who had studied at least 7 years of English in school. 67.50% were

exposed to all the details of the language and at every grade the information was reviewed and expanded a bit. However, the teaching was not enough for some English educated students to pass their English Entrance Exam.

Table 6: English Frequency

English Frequency	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Class Discussion	16	40.00%	40.00%
Home & Class	5	12.50%	52.50%
With Friends	4	10.00%	62.50%
Traveling	4	10.00%	72.50%
Missing	3	7.50%	80.00%
Work	3	7.50%	87.50%
With Teachers	3	7.50%	95.00%
Class & Traveling	1	2.50%	97.50%
Class	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Unfortunately 40% of the students used English only in classroom discussion. The other 60% was distributed among places such as home (with maid), while traveling, with friends, and during part time jobs. 7.50% use the language with teachers and the same percentage left the question without answering.

Table 7: Translation

Translation	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	15	37.50%	37.50%
Yes	13	32.50%	70.00%
Sometimes	9	22.50%	92.50%
I was & Now I Stopped	2	5.00%	97.50%
Not Applicable	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

The factor of translation affects directly the use of the second language and the frequency of errors. The majority (37.50%) deny the concept of translation. Only two admitted that

they used to translate, but as a result of the intensive classes they are starting to think and write in English.

Table 8: Last book read in 1st language

Last Book in 1st Language	Number	Percent
Banat Arryad	1	2.50%
Black Hands	1	2.50%
Broken Wings	2	5.00%
Impossible Love	1	2.50%
Joubran	3	7.50%
l'Amour au Temps de Cholera	1	2.50%
Leila & Wolf	1	2.50%
Les Miserables	1	2.50%
Madame Beauvarie	1	2.50%
Newspaper	3	7.50%
Political Book	2	5.00%
Prophet	1	2.50%
Taghour	1	2.50%
The Rock	1	2.50%
Missing	20	50.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Table 9: Last book read in English

Last Book in English	Number	Percent
Missing	17	42.50%
English Skills Book	4	10.00%
The Butcher	3	7.50%
Harry Potter	2	5.00%
11 Minutes	1	2.50%
Devil Wears Prada	1	2.50%
Divinci Code	1	2.50%
Angel & Deamon	1	2.50%
Crime Never Pays	1	2.50%
Little Women	1	2.50%
Memories of China	1	2.50%
MonteCristo	1	2.50%
Prince Machiavelli	1	2.50%
Romantic Book	1	2.50%
Slavery	1	2.50%
Brave New World	1	2.50%
The Notebook	1	2.50%
The Pearl	1	2.50%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Reading in the first language is not common just like the reading in the second language. Reading in the first language covered newspapers and books taken in middle if not elementary school. As for reading in the second language, 42.50 % did not bother to mention the name of the book. 10% considered the course book as the last book they've read in English. Other answers varied.

Table 10: Major Problems in Writing

Major Problems	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Grammar	11	27.50%	27.50%
Express Oneself	8	20.00%	47.50%
Organizing Ideas	5	12.50%	60.00%
Spelling	4	10.00%	70.00%
Vocabulary	3	7.50%	77.50%
Grammar & Spelling	2	5.00%	82.50%
Missing	1	2.50%	85.00%
None	1	2.50%	87.50%
Can't Write Under Conditions & Organizing Ideas	1	2.50%	90.00%
Organizing Ideas & Vocabulary	1	2.50%	92.50%
Can't Write Under Conditions	1	2.50%	95.00%
Grammar & Vocabulary & Express Oneself	1	2.50%	97.50%
Vocabulary & Expressing Oneself	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

In fact, 27.50% admitted that their major problems are grammatical errors, followed by the difficulty to express oneself. 12.50% of the participants had difficulty in organizing their ideas. 2.50% mentioned that they do not have any problems. Another 2.50% did not even answer the question. Two students found it hard to write under conditions.

Table 11: Common Grammatical Mistakes

Common Grammatical Mistakes	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Verb Tenses	7	17.50%	17.50%
Subject Verb Agreement	6	15.00%	32.50%
Preposition	3	7.50%	40.00%
Compound Verbs	3	7.50%	47.50%
Transition Words	3	7.50%	55.00%
Fragments	2	5.00%	60.00%
Plural Nouns	2	5.00%	65.00%
Punctuation	2	5.00%	70.00%
Comma Splices	2	5.00%	75.00%
Run On sentences	1	2.50%	77.50%
Reflexive Pronouns	1	2.50%	80.00%
Verb Tenses & Run On sentences	1	2.50%	82.50%
Compound Verbs & Plural Nouns	1	2.50%	85.00%
Irregular Verbs	1	2.50%	87.50%
Possessive & Contractions	1	2.50%	90.00%
Transition Words & Punctuation	1	2.50%	92.50%
Subject Verb Agreement & Compound Verbs	1	2.50%	95.00%
Conjunction	1	2.50%	97.50%
Subject Verb Agreement & Relative Pronouns	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

When asked about the grammatical errors, students took a while to answer. They were confused about the name of the error or how to classify it. The majority admitted that verb tenses and S-V agreement are two major problems. The rest of the errors were of lower percentages.

Table 12: Study Grammar Daily

Study Grammar Daily	Number	Percent
No	40	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Table 13: Refer to Syllabus

Refer to Syllabus	Number	% of Total
No	40	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Intensive English students never studied daily their grammatical concepts. They also never referred to the syllabus to be aware of future topics to be covered.

Table 14: Preferred Genre of Writings

Genre of Writings	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Cause / Effect	13	32.50%	32.50%
Exemplification	6	15.00%	47.50%
Descriptive	6	15.00%	62.50%
Narrative	4	10.00%	72.50%
Narrative & Descriptive	2	5.00%	77.50%
Descriptive & Cause/Effect	2	5.00%	82.50%
Narrative & Compare/Contrast	2	5.00%	87.50%
Compare / Contrast	2	5.00%	92.50%
Missing	1	2.50%	95.00%
Cause / Effect & Compare/Contrast	1	2.50%	97.50%
Descriptive & Narrative	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Cause/ effect writing was the genre of writing preferred by IEP students. To them, it is easier to express themselves in this genre of writing. They, however, seemed to have problems dealing with the exemplification and the descriptive genres. Also, students were not sure what to include in their writings for each genre: They had problems choosing the correct key terms for each.

Table 15: Best Thing about Intensive

Best Thing about Intensive	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Teacher	11	27.50%	27.50%
Improve English	8	20.00%	47.50%
Writing Sessions	6	15.00%	62.50%
Friends & Teachers	4	10.00%	72.50%
Grammar Sessions	2	5.00%	77.50%
Friends	2	5.00%	82.50%
Missing	1	2.50%	85.00%
Reading & Writing & Listening Sessions	1	2.50%	87.50%
Reading & Writing Sessions	1	2.50%	90.00%
Reading Sessions	1	2.50%	92.50%
Improve English & Friends	1	2.50%	95.00%
Time of Class	1	2.50%	97.50%
Help Of Instructor	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Table 16: Worst Thing about Intensive

Worst Thing about Intensive	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Schedule	21	52.50%	52.50%
Missing	7	17.50%	70.00%
Waste of Time	4	10.00%	80.00%
Grammar	1	2.50%	82.50%
Reading Sessions	1	2.50%	85.00%
Reading Sessions & Schedule	1	2.50%	87.50%
Repeating Program more than once	1	2.50%	90.00%
# of Hours in Intensive	1	2.50%	92.50%
Talk in English All the Times	1	2.50%	95.00%
Using English	1	2.50%	97.50%
Listening & Grammar Sessions	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

IEP students find the intensive English a burden that they have to suffer for a whole semester. They agree that the good things about intensive are the teachers and the improvement of the English language of the students. They dislike having the classes at early hours and 10% thinks it is a waste of time.

Written Documents

Students' writings were corrected by the researcher and by the teacher of the class to have to ensure reliability. The grades were compared and the errors in each writing were detected. The types of errors were categorized into lists including all the morphological and syntactic errors found. The total number of errors was 392. 51% of the errors were done in the cause/effect sample, whereas 48.7% errors in the narrative sample.

Table 17

Total # of Errors
Grammar & Mechanics of Writing

	Cause Effect Sample		Narrative Sample	
Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Prepositions	37	19%	37	22%
Verb Tenses	18	9%	52	30%
Wrong Word Choice	37	19%	23	13%
Articles	25	13%	6	3%
Subject Verb Agreement	21	11%	9	5%
Run Ons	12	6%	6	3%
Plural Nouns	9	5%	4	2%
Sequencers	2	1%	9	5%
Comma Splices	10	5%	1	1%
Fragments	4	2%	6	3%
Irregular Past Verb Tenses	3	2%	5	3%
Contraction	5	3%	1	1%
Conjunctions	3	2%	2	1%
Relative Pronouns	1	1%	4	2%
Reflexive Pronouns	4	2%	0	0%
Adverbs in Wrong Places	4	2%	0	0%
Pronoun Reference Agreement	0	0%	3	2%
Conditional Sentences	2	1%	0	0%
Gerunds	1	1%	1	1%
Negation	0	0%	2	1%
Punctuation	0	0%	1	1%
Grand Total	198	100%	172	100%

Table 18

Grammar & Mechanics of Writing

	Cause Effect Sample		Narrative Sample	
Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Affect vs Effect	0	0%	16	84%
Their vs There	1	33%	2	11%
Its vs It's	2	67%	0	0%
Which vs Witch	0	0%	1	5%
Grand Total	3	100%	19	100%

The study at hand analyses the written errors of students. In fact, it was effective in revealing the grammatical areas they are weak in. Participants made errors in the same categories although the time lapse between the two collected writings was around two months. In these two months, these recurrent grammatical errors were supposedly explained clearly in the Intensive English classes (see IEP syllabus, Appendix D). However, when classifying the errors in the two genres, it was of almost equal percentages. In the first genre, students were starting intensive, but the writing was of cause/effect smooth genre. Students had problems writing the narrative genre which confirms what Khuwaily and AL Shoumali (2000) discussed earlier.

Misuse of preposition was the most problematic error and equal number of errors was presented in both genres. The narrative genre required that one tells a story and some things that happened, thus one might need to switch between tenses. This was the major problem in the narrative writing. The total number of errors from verb tenses was 52 errors from the total number which is 191. Some errors were presented in the cause/effect genre but not in the narrative genre and vice versa. The reasons might be because the students got over them during intensive, or because the genre itself does not require the appearance of such a grammatical structure.

In the cause/effect writings, the word choice and the prepositions were top errors. 12% of the errors dealt with articles which is quite a large percentage concerning a simple lesson. Verb tenses and subject verb agreement were of almost equal percentages and

among top 5 errors. The rest of the errors' percentages ranged between 1% and 5% which is acceptable.

In the narrative genre, verb tenses ranked one followed by prepositions. These two errors covered 50% of the errors. Right in third place is wrong word choice. The **Affect/Effect** error of 9% comes in fourth place. Actually the topic of the narrative article was "Talk about an incident that affected your life." Most of the students misused the words affect/effect not aware of the fact that affect is a verb and effect is the noun. The errors were countless. Some sentences with the effect/affect error in addition to other errors were:

Ex: Failing at my classes *effects* on my life in many ways.

The most incident that *effected* on me is the death of my aunt.

In fact the previous two sentences include errors in prepositions and verb tenses in addition to the affect/effect error.

Some errors exist but shyly, their percentage is not more than 1%. They exist once or twice in the cause/effect writings and equally in the narrative writings.

The confusion between **contraction** and **possessive** is one example. The writings included samples such as:

It's (Its- Possessive) students and *it's* (Its- Possessive) teachers make you feel *your* (you're-contraction) outside Lebanon.

…to give *its* students an outstanding education.

This means *your* (you're-contraction) getting good education.

Their/There

Some other errors are the result of troublesome words such as their (possessive noun) and there (adverb of place).

Examples

...where *their* is no such an American university.

I realized that *there* are a lot of poor people...

Table 19

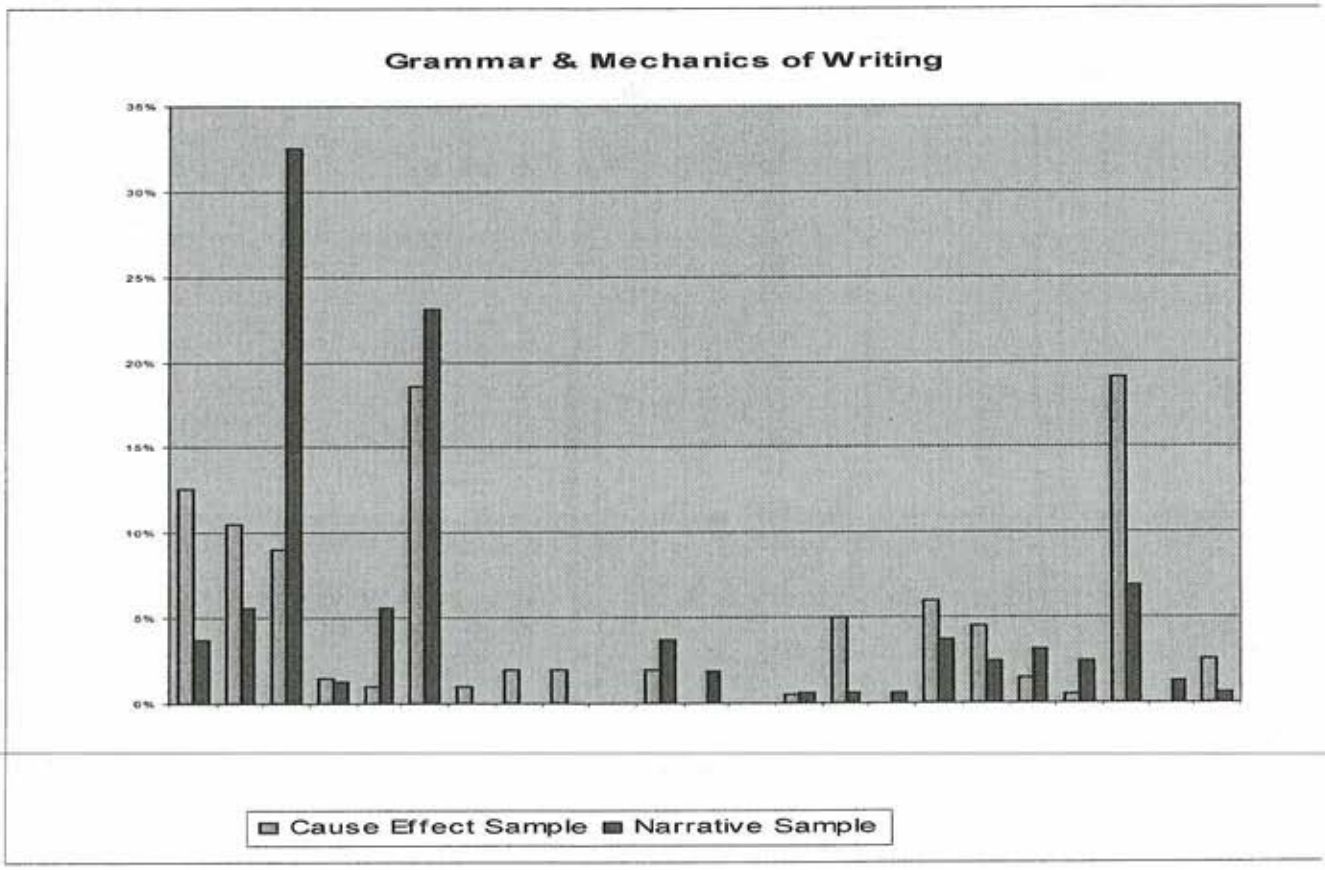

Table 20

Grammar & Mechanics of Writing in Cause/Effect Articles

	# of Errors				
Type of Error	0	1	2	3	4
Wrong Word Choice		8	6	3	2
Prepositions		3	8	6	
Subject Verb Agreement		6	6	1	
Articles		4	4	2	1
Verb Tenses		4	1	4	
Run Ons		7	1	1	
Comma Splices		4	3		
Plural Nouns		4	1	1	
Reflexive Pronouns		4			
Fragments		4			
Conjunctions		3			
Adverbs in Wrong Places		2	1		
Contraction		2		1	
Sequencers		2			
Conditional Sentences		2			
Irregular Past Verb Tenses		1	1		
Gerunds		1			
Relative Pronouns		1			

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EFL Learners' Errors at a Higher Education Institution

A Project Presented to the Faculty of
the Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
Master of Arts in Education
Emphasis: TESOL

by
Rola AlMekkawi Farhat

Under the direction of
Dr. Rima Bahous

LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
February, 2008

LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

We hereby approve the project of
Rola AlMekkawi Farhat

EFL Learner's Errors at a Higher Education Institution

Date submitted: February, 2008

Education Department

Dr. Rima Bahous, Supervisor [redacted]

Dr. Ahmad Oueini, Second Reader: [redacted]

A copy of the project is available for research purposes at the University Library

[redacted] ....Feb.1.2008.

Student Signature Date

Dedication

To my loving and

devoted parents

To my caring husband

To my wonderful kids

Thank you for all your support

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Bahous who was the main and continuous support in the accomplishment of this degree. A thanks is to Dr, Ahmad Oueini for being my second reader.

I would like to thank my family individually starting with my parents. They were there for me at all times. A special thanks to my patient and supportive mother who tried to help in all possible ways. To my husband Firas whose love and support never had a limit. Finally, my kids (Noura and Husam), thank you for being the source of fun when I felt down and overworked. You are the precious jewels of my life, and you illuminate every breath I take through your very existence.

Abstract

This project focuses on the problems in writing that English as a Second Language students face. The project sheds light on the grammatical errors of ESL writing and provides teachers with techniques to help students enjoy the material and at the same time benefit from the Intensive English Program at LAU. The results of the study and analyses are based on the three means of research that include a questionnaire, an interview with the coordinator of the program, and the writings of the students. The findings of the research proved that no matter what the genre of writing is, grammatical errors occur even if in different percentages. Some solutions were suggested. One important solution is that teachers adjust to the proposed techniques and syllabus to satisfy the needs of the students.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction:
    1.1 Research Context
    1.2 Rational of the study
    1.3 Research Questions
    1.4 Participants
2. Literature review:
    2.1 Introduction
    2.2 Writing in the second/foreign language
    2.3 How often do people use foreign language
    2.4 Error/Mistake Distinction
    2.5 Factors affecting the writing of English as a Foreign language
    2.6 Common grammatical errors
    2.7 Teachers' Methods and Techniques to improve the writing skills
3. Methodology:
    3.1 Participants
    3.2 Methods
        3.2.1 Questionnaire
        3.2.2 Interview
        3.2.3 Written Documents
    3.3 Triangulation
    3.4 Ethical Considerations
4. Results
5. Conclusion
6. References
7. Appendix A
8. Appendix B
9. Appendix C
10. Appendix D

List of Tables

Table 1: Age

Table 2: Gender

Table 3: Mother tongue

Table 4: Nationality

Table 5: Rank of English

Table 6: English frequency

Table 7: Translation

Table 8: Last book read in 1st language

Table 9: Last book read in English

Table 10: Major problems in writing

Table 11: Common grammatical mistakes

Table 12: Study grammar daily

Table 13: Refer to syllabus

Table 14: Preferred genre of writings

Table 15: Best thing about intensive

Table 16: Worst thing about intensive

Table 17: Total number of errors/ grammar and mechanics of writing

Table 18: Total number of errors/ grammar and mechanics of writing

Table 19: Grammar and mechanics of writing/cause/effect versus narrative

Table 20: Type and number of errors/cause /effect articles

Table 21: Type and number of errors

Table 22: Percentage of errors in each genre.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Full participation in the world community requires fluency in English that goes beyond the spoken language and that embraces a variety of uses of the written language as well. However, writing itself is a difficult skill for any language user. In fact, both native as well as non-native speakers find writing a very challenging task (Kroll, 2003). Even though native speakers think and write in the same language, they sometimes lack ideas or creativity. Non-native speakers, on the other hand, tend to translate from their mother tongue or overuse the thesaurus to supposedly avoid redundancy.

Research Context

A large number of students seeking higher education in an English medium university in Lebanon choose to join University X. Usually these potential students are required to sit for an English Entrance Exam. Those who get a score below the required cut off are placed in the Intensive English Program (IEP) before starting their major. Usually, these students have English language problems, particularly in written expression. Thus, the IEP is a way to accelerate students' progress in their acquisition of English as a second language. The IEP offers a thorough review of the language skills and sub skills needed for academic purposes. (IEP syllabi, Appendix D)

Rationale of the study

Texts written by second language (L2) students are less effective than those written by L1 students (Kroll, 2003). They are generally shorter, less cohesive, and contain many syntactical, lexical, and semantical errors among others (Hyland, 2003). Thus, language teachers are required to develop a systematic plan of what needs to be learned. They have to select and sequence the content and tasks that will hopefully lead to the desired learning outcomes (Hyland, 2003, 54). It might be hard to identify the needs of learners, but gathering all the information one can get about students is important in making a course as effective as possible. It is hard to detect the needs of the students because these can refer to the immediate language skills or future goals (Hyland, 2003, 58).

The main purpose of this study is to examine common morphological and syntactic errors made by students enrolled in the IEP at University X, and recommend changes to help them deal with these language problems and write more effectively (see for example Mortimer 2001). Moreover, such a research will benefit language teachers as it will help them facilitate the teaching/learning process that should lead to students' progress.

Research Questions

This study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What approaches do university IEP teachers follow to teach writing skills?
2. What are IEP students' common grammatical errors?
3. How do IEP teachers deal with errors?
4. What are the most common and effective techniques to improve university academic writing?

Sample/Participants

Participants in this study are first-year university students registered in the first semester in the IEP at University X. The researcher chose two IEP sections randomly. The ages of the students range between seventeen and twenty years old. More than half of these students come from English medium schools; they studied English as a Second Language (ESL) for more than thirteen years.

The following chapter will review the research concerning error analysis and common grammatical mistakes.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Learning to write in English, as a second or third language, continues to be a major educational goal throughout the world. It is regarded as the acquisition of basic language skills that should help learners build on them to become more efficient in the target language. Without these acquired skills, further education may be largely impossible.

This chapter reviews the literature available on the subject. It, first, overviews what researchers in the field say about writing in the second foreign language. it, then, discusses the error/mistake distinction. Later the factors affecting the writing in English as a second language are outlined and the reference to the contrastive rhetoric is pointed out. Common grammatical errors are scrutinized. Finally, methods and techniques used to improve second/ foreign language writing students are discussed.

Writing in the Second/Foreign Language

Writing does not just convey information; in fact, it reflects a lot about the writer (Fedderholt, 2001). Yet writing in a foreign language tends not to be a very popular subject at school or at the university. Students feel that it is only of relevance to them for the artificial purpose of passing exams (Fedderhololt, 2001). Fedderhololt (2001) reports on the low enthusiasm Danish students have as they are required to write more than twenty assignments per year.

Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) confirmed the importance of writing for specific purposes in English to university students enrolled in an English medium university in

the Arab World. They claim that mastery of written academic English is a central aim of teaching English in Jordanian universities (JUST) and institutions, since English is the language of instruction there. English is needed for taking notes, describing objects, writing essays, answering written questions, and writing experimental reports among others (Khuwaileh & AlShoumali 2000). They add that the main problem is that students do not get enough training in Arabic (L1) or in English (L2). They suggest that students need to learn about contrastive rhetoric between the two languages (see also McDaniel, 1994; Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 2003).

Myles (2002) adds that although ESL learners may have negative attitudes toward writing, many of them are financially and professionally committed to graduating from English speaking universities. As a result, they have strong reasons for learning and improving their skills. Students should learn writing not only because people frequently have to communicate with each other in writing but also because writing helps students learn (Myles, 2002). To Raimes (1983), writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary. When students write, they have a chance to be adventurous with language and to take risks. When they write, they become involved with the new language.

Candlin (1987) discussed four areas of concern: properties of the finished piece of writing, process through which such a piece of writing comes to existence, how students acquire the relevant complex of skills and mental abilities, and what teachers need to know in order to help their students acquire the ability to write.

Before going deep into the grammatical errors and the factors affecting them, it is essential to highlight the error/mistake distinction.

Error/Mistake Distinction

Writing - the act of composing – can create problems for students, especially for those writing in a second language in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling (Myles, 2002). Students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills (Myles, 2002). However, to reach the needed proficiency, students pass through a period of time where their writings are filled with errors or mistakes.

"Not only to err is human, but there is none other that human error: animals and artifacts do not commit errors" (James, 1998, 1). In order for a human being to improve oneself, one is "bound to make the odd mistake" (Goethe, 1974, 17). These odd mistakes may take place in language. James (1998) added that

> If a learner is inclined and able to correct a fault in his or her input, it is assumed that the form selected was not the one intended, and we shall say that the fault is a Mistake. If on the other hand, the learner is unable or in anyway disinclined to make the correction, we assume that the form the learner used was the one intended, and that is an Error (p. 78).

Thus, a mistake is an instance of language that is being unintentionally deviant by its author while an error is either intentionally or unintentionally deviant (James, 1998). The last confusion that might take place is with the lapses of the pen or figures on the keyboard. These can quickly be detected and self-corrected by their writer.

At this level, error analysis is needed to determine the causes and consequences of the unsuccessful language. James (1998) finds error analysis significant. Such analysis tells teachers what needs to be taught and allows learners to test their hypothesis about their L2.

Hence, an error analysis of students' written errors could be used to provide insights concerning students' areas of weaknesses and the factors affecting these areas. Leki (2003) sees that error analysis determines the difficulty of L2 features by cataloging the actual errors that learners make. Analysis assumes that the most difficult features of an L2 to learn are those that differ the most from the L1 as well as the features of L2 that are close but not identical to L1.

Factors affecting the writing in English as a foreign language

Leki (1992) claims that many factors such as students' ages when they begin studying English, how literate they are in their native language, and how proficient they want to become in English, affect whether ESL students become more or less good writers of English. In order to explain the proficiency in the second language writing, it is best to refer to Contrastive Rhetoric (see Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 2003) which is an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers. These problems are usually explained by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language (Connor, 2003; 223)

Connor (1996) explains that ESL students often mention that when they write in English, they translate or attempt to translate first language words, phrases and organization into English. Writing becomes choppy and does not flow. Teachers comment that ESL students use patterns of language and stylistic conventions that they have learned in their native languages and cultures. This transfer is not just idiosyncratic variation but involves recurring patterns of organization and rhetorical conventions reminiscent of writing in the students' native language and culture.

The L1 rhetorical and cultural preferences influence the differences between L1 and L2 writing. Students have various ways for presenting information and arguments in their L1. These ways may not transform straightforwardly to many English L1 academic contexts (Grabe 2001) Wang (2003) emphasized that in the domain of L2 writing, the 'skilled' or 'unskilled' L2 writers switch back and forth between their L1 and L2 in order to work through a particular problem.

The L1 factor was also studied by Kroll (2003) who found out that ESL writers retrieve information about a writing topic from the memory they have in the first language. Then they translate it into English before writing anything down. This act of translation led to a decrease in the quality of the content in the writing. Hyland (2002) gives the following examples: A Chinese writer suffered because he used his native tongue to develop ideas and organize the paper. The result was his English writing was contaminated by Chinese rhetoric. A Japanese student had a very difficult time making teachers understand his writing. The sentences tended to be short and a direct translation of Japanese sentences Myles (2002) supported Silva (1993) by saying that L2 writing is closely dependent on the L1. Although L2 (English) writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in many ways from L1 (non English native language) writing, L1 models have had a significant influence on L2 writing instruction and the development of a theory of L2 writing. L1 and L2 writing are similar in their broad outlines; both L1 and L2 writers employ a recursive composing process, involving planning, writing and revising, to develop their ideas and find the appropriate linguistic and rhetorical means to express them. However, when the two writings were closely examined, important differences

were revealed. L2 writers did less planning at the global and local levels. They devoted more attention to figuring out the topic and generating ideas.

Moreover, Myles (2002) discussed some social and cognitive factors that affect language learning. To her, learners with positive attitudes, motivation, and concrete goals will have these attitudes reinforced if they experience success. Likewise, learners' negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success or by failure. The research concluded that motivational factors probably do not make much difference on their own, but they can create a more positive context in which language learning is likely to flourish. In short, learners may continue to exhibit errors in their writing for the following social reasons:

1- Negative attitudes towards the target language,

2- Continued lack of progress in the L2,

3- A wide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture, and

4- A lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning. The basic cognitive factor is the language transfer, defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired.

Furthermore, Cohen and Carson (2001) reviewed various studies that have compared L1 and L2 writing. There are similarities among the strategies used for the two processes. Many language teachers and students think through their L1 and even write a text first in the L1 to enhance the production of good writing in the foreign language, at least at the beginning and intermediate levels. Reported data collected from 8 ESL students showed that the students used strategies for L2 writing similar to those of L1 writing: engaging in

limited prewriting, planning and heavy use of rescanning. Yet, the ESL student edited and corrected the work more than L1 writers did.

Other studies contrasted L1 and L2 strategies (see also Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Uzawa & Cumming, 1989; Friedlander, 1990); they showed that students revert to the L1 in order to think about the writing task: Six Spanish speaking adults in an ESL program used the same writing strategies for writing in L1 and L2. Another similar study involved four Japanese students studying ESL. The four students reported that they generally used the L1 for generating ideas, searching for topics, developing concepts, and organizing information. When these writers compose in the foreign language, they limit the amount of information in the essay, simplify the syntax and the vocabulary, and neglect questions about the audience (Cohen & Carson 2001).

Hirose (2006) saw that the L1 effect does not always influence students' organization in writing. ESL writers with higher abilities in both languages tended to choose different organizational patterns whereas the lower participants used similar patterns in L1 and L2. Hoch (n.d.) sees writing for a second language learner as an extension of listening and speaking. Therefore, the students must have opportunities to build, extend and refine oral language in order to improve their written output. The students should be comfortable at risk taking; especially that writing involves some risk taking. (Hoch, n.d.) These students need to know their efforts are appreciated and that the message they are trying to convey is valued over the form. (Hoch, n.d.) This supports Elqobai (2006) who sees that motivational and attitudinal perspectives towards the intended L2 may influence the language learning process.

Becica (1996) also sees that speaking fluently in the second language enhances the writing process and generates ideas. However, the problem lies in the fact that in most cases, inter-student communication both in and outside class is in the first language. Thus, we might have slow learners of English because they spend most of the time speaking another language.

The studies conducted by Krashen (1984) indicate that voluntary pleasure reading contributes to the progress in writing ability. The study also reported that parents of good writers used to read for them more often as they were children. The parents themselves also read a lot. Krashen also discussed Bamberg's study that supports the generalization that good writers not only did more expository writing in high school, they even had more instructions on issues of form, supporting ideas, paragraph structure, etc.

Kroll (2003) confirmed that people who read the most are invariably the best writers. But reading is not common among these students, even in their first language.

Since the emergence of the second language writing research, many studies have been conducted with Arabic L1 students to investigate the specific characteristics and rhetorical patterns in Arabic as compared to English. The investigation revealed the impact of language group on the use of L1-L2 translation as a strategy during the L2 writing process and it effect on the quality and the quantity of the written text (Elqobai, 2006).

Again, Khuwaileh and AlShoumali's (2000) study explores students' writing skills in English and Arabic. They look for an association between poor writing across languages. The sample they chose consisted of 150-second year university students taking English and Arabic for academic purposes. Arabic was their first language (L1) studied for

twelve years and English the second studied for seven years. They all had to write two essays about co-education, in each language and with a three months gap of time to avoid literal translation. They were assessed by two English language and two Arabic language teachers. The results of the research confirmed what Kaplan (1996) stated that speakers of Arabic transfer rhetorical patterns from their mother tongue into their English writing. Bjork and Raisanen (1997) note that the rhetorical use of reference in L1 can affect the cohesion of texts in L2. Although the rating processes showed that the participants' essays included different types of errors, the lack of cohesion, coherence, and verb tense errors were the most serious and frequent ones. The writings suffered from the absence of logical link between sentences in both languages. Both texts lacked the connectors of sequence, consequences, contrast, addition, and illustration. More than one third of the participants did not use transition words to guide the discussion of their arguments. Paragraphs appeared to be lists of sentences. In Arabic, 55% wrote compositions with no logical linking of ideas. The problem of no paragraph division was more serious in Arabic, because sentences were longer. Excessive use of the pronoun (it) to replace the "Co-education" was common in Arabic and English texts. The subjects' mistakes were frequent in both languages like verb tenses, irregular past tenses, and Subject-Verb-agreement. In both languages, participants frequently used the simple past, ignoring other tenses like the past perfect or present progressive. 34% used overgeneralization in writing the endings of simple past or past participle in English. The last common error dealt with was the third person singular, where the (s) was omitted with subjects like he, she and it. Major errors were in grammar. Khuwaileh and AlShoumali noticed that the deficiencies in writing of English are not solely the responsibility of the English teachers.

The problem already exists in L1. There appears to be a gap between what is taught and what learners will use when they have to write creatively. Thus reconsideration of Arabic teaching objectives and curricula needs to be first priority in JUST and all Arab countries. "If Arabic is not taught properly in its homeland, then it will not be in a better position anywhere else" (Khuwaileh & AlShoumali 2000, 181).

Since research in Arabic rhetoric is very limited, conferences in the Arab world (Cairo, Lebanon and Jordan to name a few) discussed studies that dealt with distinctive features of Arabic, Arabic and English contrasts, and contrastive rhetorical studies of Arabic native students' writing in English (Connor, 2003). The issue of Arabic rhetoric became the concern of many linguists. (See Al Haq & Ahmad, 1994; Batainah, 2005; El Sayed, 1992; Fakhri, 2004; Mahmoud, 2005; Zughol, 1991, to name a few).

El-Sayed (1992) discussed translation as a factor affecting the second language writing. If a student could write a good composition in Arabic and translate it perfectly to English, this does not mean s/he could write a good English composition. Many students have mastered the elements of grammar but lacked the power of turning that knowledge to practical ends, the use of English which is idiomatic and native and not one which marks the writer as a foreigner (El-Sayed, 1992). The researcher also pointed out the major problems that result from the Arabic – English translation during writing. One of the problems is that in Arabic, the use of unfamiliar and big words is looked upon as a mark of a good writer. However, in ESL classes students try to do the same for English. As a result, the writings tend to be confusing. Some other problems might be the over use of conjunctions in Arabic, though they are limited ('wa' and 'fa'). However, there is diversity of English conjunctions but not over used in one sentence (El-Sayed, 1992).

James (1998) also discussed the mother tongue influence. He studied a case study of unsolicited letter of enquiry in EL2 sent by a Brazilian (L1 Portuguese). Upon studying it, James categorized errors according to their level. His results proved the existence of interlingual errors. Interference happens "when an item or structure in the second language manifests some degree of difference and some similarity with the equivalent item or structure in the learner's first language (Jackson 1987, 101). Towell and Hawkins (1994) argued and claimed that errors could be fully described in terms of the target language without the need to refer to the L1 of the learners. Abu Shanab (1978) reported that L1 (Arabic) was a major influence especially with tenses, prepositions and pronouns. Non-standard dialect is a factor, which prevents children from using Standard English in their writing. Williamson and Hardman (1997) conducted a study based on analysis of writing obtained from students' first language. The sample contained randomly selected schools of different socioeconomic backgrounds. The first task was to comment on a rule which applied to some field of activity or context they were familiar with. The second task was to submit a piece of persuasive writing based on a strongly held personal opinion. There were instances of confusion whether a given form is an instance of non-standard dialect or simply a slip of the pen, or whether there is mixing between non-standard dialect and colloquialism (There is this house....colloquial Standard English). Some of the common features were the use of non-standard past tense and according to location of school. The incidences of non standard dialect per word of written text decrease with age.

Anxiety is another factor affecting the writing process. Raimes (1987) observed and examined ESL students' written work. She saw signs of anguish. Student writers chew

their pencils, shuffled their feet, sighed, groaned and stretched. They asked how much they were supposed to write. "Their anguish became our anguish as we read more and more pieces of writing not only filled with grammatical errors but empty of life and content" (Raimes, 1987, p.262). Raimes thinks that if we take much care of grammar, we might have flat paragraphs and we will respond to piece of writing as item checkers, and not as real readers. The students she was observing worried about accuracy. They stopped after each sentence and went back and checked it for inflection, word order, punctuation, etc. The prison of the word and sentence has stronger bars that restrict them before they begin to develop their ideas. Thinking and writing should be inseparable when students compose (Berthoff, 1978) Berthoff realized that in ESL, editing skills are more stressed than creativity.

In Winer's research (1992), the students themselves highlighted four areas as problems in ESL writing:

1- Students dread writing, especially writing to be graded. To them, producing a piece of writing has always come after a period of suffering.

2- Students witnessed boredom with general topics and intimidation by technical ones.

3- Students felt insecure about their own writing skills.

4- Students felt insecure about the teacher's teaching skills, particularly in giving feedback, making errors, and grading.

Social and cognitive factors affect language learning. To Myles (2002), exploration of social factors gives us some idea of why learners differ in the rate of L2 learning, in proficiency type, and in ultimate proficiency. The research conducted showed that learners with motivation, positive attitudes, and concrete goals will have these attitudes

reinforced if they experience success. Language transfer is a cognitive factor related to writing error. The process of transfer is defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been acquired (Myles, 2002)

The last factor concerned with the common errors in writing is that of the Media's effect. Larocque (1996) studies the types of writings of 10 journalists from *Time Magazine*. Larocque noticed that journalists often use too many prepositional phrases in stories, which results in lack of clarity. "One sentence / paragraph writing is a common but unattractive convention in journalism"(Laroque, 1996, p.6). Another issue is the obtrusive writing which is packing more than one main idea in a sentence. The result of the research was that the excessive length and faulty structures are two of the reasons for unreadable obtrusions in media writing which affect negatively the writings of Political Science students.

Common Grammatical Errors

English is a tricky language. No matter how many years you have gone to school, you are probably confronted almost everyday with grammar or usage questions that make you stop and think. Grammar is just as important as instrument of communication as content, and a text cannot be written cohesively without attention being paid to how meaning is being expressed through the grammar (Krashen 1999). Hinkel and Fotos (2002) assured that although grammar teaching has been a controversial issue among educators and methodologists, it remained one of the foundations in English language teaching worldwide.

Yates and Kenkel's (2002) recommended that L2 writing teachers pay more attention to global or textual aspects of the writing assignment and less to surface-level concerns, so that they would become more writing teachers and less language teachers.

A research was conducted by Semke and Lynch/Klemans in an effort to gain insight into the attitudes of ESL student writers towards errors in their writing. The sample included 100 students of beginning ESL freshman writing classes. When asked "How important is it to you for your English teacher to point out your errors in grammatical forms in your writing?" 93 % felt it was very important. Somewhat fewer felt as strongly about spelling corrections, vocabulary and punctuation. The questionnaire explored perceptions about the importance of accuracy. When asked how important it was to them to have as few errors as possible in their written work, 91 students answered that it was very important. Students were hopeful about the possibility of eliminating errors. The best way to avoid making the same mistake was doing something in response to the teacher's indication of errors (Leki, 1991).

Truscott (1996) takes the strong position that grammar correction in L2 is useless, ineffective, and harmful and that it should be abandoned. He claims that correction causes stress and demotivates students. In addition to that, it takes up too much of teacher's and students' time which could be more productively spent on other aspects of writing.

Ferris (2004) agrees that error correction that are poorly made will not help students and may even mislead them. However, a lot of research has proven that *effective* error correction can help at least some ESL writers (See also Bates, Lane & Lange, 1993; Ellis, 1998; Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998; Reid, 1997).

ESL writing teachers appeared to think of themselves as primarily language teachers, rather than composition instructors. Thus, they focused mainly on students' language errors in writing instead of giving students feedback on their ideas or organization (Ferris, 2003).

Furthermore, Leki (1992) considers that teaching writing to ESL students is not radically different from teaching writing to native English speakers. Many of the same techniques, attitudes and even syllabus work well with ESL students. The teachers themselves are in fact language teachers who would less likely abandon the traditional views of teaching writing and more likely 'resist the de-emphasis on grammar characteristic of process methodologies' (p.7). As a result, she indicated that "it makes sense to give feedback on content first" (p.134). She adds that teachers can provide help for ESL writers beyond correction of grammar errors by showing the writers different ways to focus on the logical and organizational flow of their writings (Leki, 1992).

Non-native speakers of English fear that their reports, papers, letters and memos may seem un-English or difficult to understand. Thus, they think that the least they can do is have their work free of grammatical errors (Mc Daniel, 1994).

The findings of the study conducted by Fazio (2001) indicated that only grammar feedback group and the grammar plus content group made progress in grammatical accuracy at a statistically significant level.

Hedge (1998), while acknowledging the importance of grammar in producing written work, comments that "good writers tend to concentrate on getting the content right and leave details like spelling, punctuation and grammar until later"(p.23). Some of the common errors were discussed previously in articles or books. They do not stop there,

many writers dedicated a whole research for the sake of detecting one common grammatical error. Zobl (1989) discussed inappropriate passive morphology (be) and the past participle, hence (be + en) in English writing of L2 learners. (Example: Most people are fallen in love and marry with somebody). The sample was thirty eight university students (22 males & 16 females), whose L1 was Chinese and whose mean score on TOEFL was 578.9, to begin undergraduate or graduate study. The task was to rank sentences as grammatical, ungrammatical, or not sure, and to correct those they considered ungrammatical. The study confirms that all thirty eight subjects accepted and used (be + en). It also assures Zobl's proposal that the passive rule never fully replaces the rule for native like unaccusatives.

Taylor (1975) conducted a study on twenty native Spanish speaking students in order to examine the relationship between the strategies of overgeneralization and transfer, on one hand, and the degree to which elementary and intermediate ESL students use these strategies while learning English on the other hand. The error types were categorized into errors of overgeneralization, transfer, and translation… The results indicated that the errors made by elementary and intermediate students were not qualitatively different.

The learners' language is characterized by linguistically incorrect and/or contextually inappropriate forms and expressions, 'known as errors'. In addition, some pragmatic and linguistic deviations take place and make language sound 'unnatural' or 'strange' (Mahmoud, 2005).

Mahmoud's study presents data verifying the theoretical claims and informal observations about collocation problems encountered by Arab learners of EFL. The conclusion was that collocations constitute an area of difficulty in learning English as a

foreign language. The Arab-speaking students commit errors when producing collocations in English, especially the lexical combinations. Students mostly transferred intralingually from Arabic using English words

Another interesting research was carried out by Abu Shanab (1978). The sample was Saudi students who were studying English in Aramco Training Center. He analyzed the grammatical errors in the composition of 163 students. The data of the study were collected at two different periods. Errors in the verb category were most frequent. In addition, Abu Shanab found that overgeneralization and avoidance resulted in most of the errors.

Kharma (1982) undertook a study in Kuwait to investigate the errors in definite and indefinite articles committed by Arab students at the university level. The results uncovered some of the causes of errors in articles. The percentages of errors were recorded as 36.6% in the indefinite articles 'a' & 'an', 51.4% in zero articles, and 31.7% in the definite article 'the'.

Karallah (1986) investigated the morphological and syntactic errors committed by third secondary students in Jordan. The sample was 100 compositions written by students sitting for the general high secondary school exam. He analyzed the data by identifying, categorizing and finally describing the errors. The results showed that semantically and syntactically related items proved to be a major source of errors for Jordanian students. Moreover, influence of the mother tongue seemed to account for most students' errors.

Bataineh (2005) analyzed compositions written by Jordanian EFL students. She was able to identify nine types of errors concerning articles. Though articles are unstressed and almost inaudible in oral communication, they are most frequent in written English. Their

presence or absence changes the meaning. The results suggest that the majority of errors made by the four groups are the result of overgeneralization and simplification of the English article system. The impact of the subjects' native language was minimal.

Silva (1993) found out that L2 writers wrote shorter texts. They made more overall morphosyntactic errors, more lexicosemantic errors, and errors with verbs, prepositions, articles, and nouns. This is all the result of transcribing and referring to L1.

It seems that the issue at hand was of great interest to the people in the Arab world just as it is the case in Lebanon. The previous researchers provide some insight of what the steps and error categories in this study might be.

Teachers' Methods and Techniques to improve the writing skills

Despite some malpractice in teaching grammar, it remains a vital aspect of language. Thus, the main question is how to teach grammar in a motivating and effective way. Teachers can guide students to notice grammatical forms when using the language in meaningful contexts. Students should be encouraged to use the target language creatively (Hinkel & Fotos 2002).

ESL students see the purpose of their writing classes as primarily to help them eliminate errors. They may not be aware that certain errors in writing may never disappear. The teacher's role is to help and identify the errors. However, teachers should not be "composition slaves" pointing out every error the student makes (Leki 1991).

Leki (2001) reopens the issue of L2 teachers. She reminds teachers that behind many of the papers they read there is a person struggling. This person is very much aware of how much s/he could communicate the thoughts with clarity, precision, force and imagination in the L1.

Kroll (2003) defines the main job of the teachers of writing as working with students to help them achieve improved writing proficiency in accordance with students' needs and course goals, advancing beyond their current skill level. She believes that how best to reach the proficiency in writing sits at the heart of the teaching enterprise.

Similarly, Thornbury (1999) sees the teacher's job as to choose tasks and materials that engage the learners. Tasks and materials that are relevant to their needs, that are involving, that have an achievable outcome, and that have an element of challenge while providing the necessary support, are more likely to be motivating than those that do not have these qualities.

In Williams's (2002) study of second language writing, the writers reported that they perceived tutors to be more helpful, approachable, practical and personal than teachers. To Williams, writers of L2 may apply their knowledge unevenly because they care to focus on the content of their texts. These are errors that second language writers can self correct and they should be encouraged to do so. Other errors, ones that result from lack of knowledge or incomplete knowledge, are more difficult to assess. In fact, Kroll (1990) says that because student populations were so different in their abilities, backgrounds and needs, only a very general approach to writing instruction appeared feasible to address all.

Myles (2002) advises the teachers, while giving appropriate instructions, to take into consideration the influence from various educational, social and cultural experiences that students have in their native language. This includes textual issues, such as rhetorical and cultural preferences for organizing information and structuring arguments, commonly referred to as contrastive rhetoric. Matsuda (1999) points out that there is considerable

diversity even among ESL students in terms of language and cultural backgrounds, prior education, gender, age, and ESL language proficiency, which may make working with ESL students challenging for some writing instructors.

Messer (1996) approves with Matsuda. He suggests that students begin by writing about their personal interests, so that the writing will flow. After observation, she noticed that L2 writers often become so concerned with spelling, syntax and vocabulary that they have trouble sustaining thought about the topic of composition. That is why a good idea would be to offer ESL students' opportunities to select their own topics and be open minded when teachers respond to the content and form of their writing.

The degree of relatedness of the first language to the second language is important. The ESL teacher should try to find out the pressures that the student is experiencing to discard the first language. The teacher should also realize what the student's motivation and pressures are to learn English (Becica, 1996).

Becica (1996) suggests that the teacher should analyze the students and be able to group them in order to provide them with appropriate instruction. To her, the group of Arabs learning English as a second or a third language is considered a homogeneous group. All of these students will tend to have, to a degree, similar language –learning problems. Beyond these similarities, neither two students are alike, nor should the whole class be treated as a 'faceless anonymity'. Kroll (2003) also sees that because student populations were so different in their abilities, backgrounds and needs, only a very general approach to writing instruction appeared feasible to address all the students.

Miller (1999) administered some exercises for seventh graders to share benefits of E-Prime with other teachers, and especially with students. E-Prime involves avoiding the

use of the verb to be in both oral and written form. She gave each student a piece of candy as an object to observe. Then they had to use E-prime which forced them to express themselves in more precise language usage. The findings were that E-Prime could aid freshman composition students. This technique helps students write from experience and familiarity, and it increases clarity.

Another study was carried out in Sweden (Sullivan & Lindgren 2002) where computer program is used to record a writing session (J-Edit, Track it). The method provides students with an opportunity to look into their own composing processes both linguistically and holistically. A group of four adult learners of English following a municipal adult education program to obtain university entrance requirements took part in the study. Three were Swedish and one was Brazilian. A quantitative analysis of the writing sessions using the statistics provided by the programs showed clear differences in writing patterns among the four writers. The writers all found it useful to view their writing strategies; they were made aware of their individual writing behaviors. Sullivan and Lindgren (2002) emphasized the promotion of life-long learning techniques which would continue to strengthen the writer's linguistics awareness even after the students have left the classroom.

Writers shared both similar and opposing views. They argued whether the teaching of grammar should be emphasized while teaching writing. Ellis (1990), however, says that formal instruction can have a positive effect on learner's ability and concludes that the answer to whether formal instructions work is "Yes." It is necessary for learners to notice features in the input which they receive which can become part of their acquired knowledge. Ellis offered guidelines – which match the principles of modern

methodology with particular goals of the EFL-for the inclusion of grammar in a composition class;

1- Grammar should not detract from the meaning oriented nature of composition teaching.

2- Grammar correction should be avoided in teacher feedback.

3- Grammar component should be directly linked to the editing process. He concluded that by following the guidelines, composition writing courses will not only afford students the chance to develop as creative writers, but also help to consolidate the basic grammatical knowledge they are building up through other parts of the curriculum (Ellis, 1990, 183).

There are as many answers as there are many teachers and teaching styles, or learners and learning styles. Raimes (1983) suggested that as you produce a piece of writing, you should watch out for syntax, content, grammar, mechanics, organization, word choice, writer's process, audience and purpose (Raimes, 1983, 22). She thinks that a principal job as teachers of composition is not to search for errors… However, when ESL students write, they make a lot of mistakes, and it becomes necessary for us to device ways of dealing with errors so that they do not become the sole focus of the piece of writing. She advised to see errors as friends and not enemies to be conquered. To her, errors tell about the students and their learning process. It is possible to use errors in student's writing to plan. It would be great if the teacher gives the students the opportunity to correct errors before the teacher does. The first draft would be to concentrate on the meaning, then revise and look for errors. It is the teacher's responsibility to train them to read drafts without reaching for a pen and consider only the ideas that the writer has tried to express.

In her article about 'Anguish', Raimes (1987) discussed the importance of using praise and honest criticisms of ideas which may help students want to revise and proofread. 'Teachers must give students at upper levels the opportunity to use the new language of theirs to form concepts, not just to ask for salt' (Raimes, 1987, 264). Praises should be used while marking papers. When students get papers, they gasp in horror because there are writings all over it. They assume it is all correction, but then they look closely and see more praise "I like this point", "Interesting idea!"

Paulus (1999) stressed that "ESL writing instruction needs to move to a process approach" (p. 265) as the process approach would teach students not only how to edit, but also to develop strategies to generate ideas, compose multiple drafts, deal with feedback, and revise their written work on all levels (Paulus, 1999).

Badger and White (2000) discussed three approaches to writing. Pincas (1982) sees writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, with attention focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices. Pincas (1982) sees writing as mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher. Tribble (1996) discussed the process approach as predominantly to do with linguistic skills; such as planning and drafting, and there is much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge about grammar and text structure (Tribble, 1996, 39). Second language learners were compared to babies. The former develop, rather than, learn writing skills, and the latter develop, rather than, learn their mother tongue (Badger & White, 2000).

Badger and White (2000) regarded Genre Approach as an extension of product approaches. They regard writing as predominantly linguistic, but they emphasize that writing varies with social situation. The model provided sees writing as a series of stages leading from a particular situation to a text, with teachers facilitating learner's progress by enabling appropriate input of knowledge skills (Badger & White, 2000).

Another important aspect is the teacher's evaluation of the students' writing. Shui (2001) explored whether two groups of teachers gave similar scores to the same writing and used the same criteria in their judgments. He examined the difference between native and nonnative EFL teachers' ratings of ten written samples which were selected randomly in the fall of 1998 from writings of third year students in the English department of a University in Mainland, China. From eighty-six class written assignments gathered in no particular order, every eight essay was selected for the study. Students were asked to write a 250 word expository essay on the topic of TV and newspaper.

The sample of the teachers was forty-six teachers: twenty three Chinese with proficiency in English and twenty three English. They rated ten expository essays using a ten point scale. They wrote and ranked three reasons for their ratings. The results showed that teachers with English background attended more positively in their criteria to content and language whereas Chinese teachers attended more negatively to the organization and length of the essay. Native English speaking teachers are found to be more tolerant of the students' errors than non-native speaking teachers.

Winer (1992) provided four tips in how to help students:

1- Having the students and teachers together design writing tasks and then actually doing them,

2- Requiring revision of tasks and responses,

3- Guiding peer coaching,

4- Providing guided practice in topic development; and students helping students and teachers analyze and understand the writing process through writing journals.

Powers (1993) investigated whether traditional collaborative strategies are appropriate and effective for second language writers. The result was that many of the techniques that had been so successful with native-speaking writers appeared to fail when applied to ESL writers. This is because ESL writers have first language rhetoric different from the rhetoric of academic English with which they are struggling. Therefore, the teachers should teach students directly what their writing should look like by supplying them with formats for presenting written response to various academic assignments (Powers, 1993).

Hyland was a bit specific concerning topics to focus on. Writing improvement can be measured by counting gross increases in features such as relative clauses, modality and passives which are seen as important to successful writing (Hyland, 2002).

Murphy (1997) provided tips for ESL tutors to use. To him, line by line proofreading can be tedious and time consuming, even though grammatical errors often pose a major problem for ESL students. The tips focus on the fact that teachers should understand the student's point in the essay, not on the parts they do not understand. Reading the paper out loud to the student might help the student to hear the grammatical or spelling problems. Teachers should make sure that students understand their comments, especially the ones in the margins. The teacher should remember the learning is a process that continues from a session to another.

Input-enhanced communicative syllabi were suggested by Hinkel and Fotos (2002). These syllabi present grammar points indirectly; grammar forms are introduced through carefully designed activities but are not usually instructed formally. Thus the learners will analyze aspects of the target language. They will notice and then process linguistic structures that have been introduced to them within purely communicative contexts. This strategy might be problematic. Although the communicative approach relies on meaning and lacks formal instruction, many communicative textbooks are structure based proceeding from easy to difficult grammar forms and lexical items. Moreover, learners feel more secure with an instructional format to achieve the necessary gains, to exit the program and to enter regular academic classes (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002). The topic at hand has been investigated along the years and in different aspects. The results matched in some aspects and differed in others. The following chapter will deal with the methods used to conduct this research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this project is to study ESL students' common grammatical errors in writings. This chapter discusses the methods and procedures used to gather the data needed for the research. It also includes a description of the samples, the methods used for collecting data, and the research instruments employed.

As recommended by Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005), the researcher found it best to use a variety of tools to gather data. Data were collected from questionnaires that were administered to a random sample of 34 ESL students out of a population of 107 students (see Appendix A). An interview was conducted with the coordinator of the program (see Appendix B). The third instrument was document analysis. The researcher analyzed two genres of writings by ESL students at two different times (see Appendix C, samples of students' writings). All three methods were used to ensure triangulation.

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Participants

The participants in the research were students from randomly chosen sections of IEP at University X. During the fall semester of 2006-2007, the IEP consisted of 107 students divided into 5 sections. Section fourteen (20 students) and section fifteen (24 students) were selected. The day the questionnaires were distributed, only 40 students were present. All students filled in the questionnaires voluntarily. Also, the students' essays collected and examined were written in regular class sessions in the presence of the class

teacher to avoid pressuring students. 40 students were present to write the first paragraph. As for the second writing session, the sample was only 38 students.

Methods

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed to the learners to help the researcher develop and understand the factors affecting students' second/foreign language learning and the major grammatical errors.

According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2000), the advantage of the questionnaire is that participants are free to answer at their own time, at their own pace. In addition, the discomfort which may result from direct contact is avoided. Another advantage is that it guarantees confidentiality; therefore, more truthful responses would be obtained than with personal interviews. Hence, the questionnaires were distributed by the teacher of each section to the students who were given a 15 minute period to fill it in. A letter was sent to the coordinator of the program before the distribution of the questionnaires to take permission.

The questionnaire consisted of some direct questions concerning the age, gender, the first language, the rank of English, the type of schooling system and the interest of ESL students in English. The rest of the questions were open ended concerning the skills that the students feel need to be improved. Another question was about the Intensive English Program. Other questions dealt with the weaknesses of writing in English, especially the grammatical ones (see Appendix A).

Interview

The process of interviewing helps generate useful information about live experiences and their meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In fact, interview helps us understand our fellow human beings especially the semi-structured ones that allow for a greater flexibility in interviewing the subjects. Semi-structured interviews consist of predetermined questions, but the order can be altered based on the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate. Moreover, the face to face interviews offer the possibility of modifying the line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that questionnaires cannot (Robson, 2002). The interview allows the qualitative researchers to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings individuals bring to them.

Thus, the researcher conducted one semi-structured interview with the coordinator of the IEP program to shed light on the background of the students, factors affecting the students' weakness in writing, the common grammatical mistakes they do and to have an overview of the syllabus that is designed to help these students (see Appendix B).

The coordinator of the program was presented first with the questions. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The face-to-face interview was done in half an hour. The researcher thought half an hour was quite enough because anything under half would be unlikely valuable and too long interviews may get to be boring for the interviewee (Robson, 2002).

Written Documents

In order to answer the research questions, it was essential to study samples of students' writings. Analyzing the questionnaires or the interview were not enough to know specifically what types of morphological and syntactic errors students make when they write; which types of errors are more frequent in students' two genres of writing; and in which text-type students make higher percentage of errors. The researcher chose two writings with different genres. The first one was a cause – effect writing that was given the second week of the semester to know the quality of students' writings before Intensive. The second one was a narrative writing that the participants wrote some time after their midterms. In both writings, the teacher of the section was in class giving the students proper instructions and help as if it were a regular writing session.

Triangulation

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, triangulation of data sources, methods, and data collection strategies was done in order to have more confidence in the insight to be gained.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), research studies involve analyzing data and one of the most common means of gathering data is through triangulation. Triangulation is fundamental as it makes the findings valid and improves data quality and accuracy for interpretation. This confirms what Cohen, et al. (2000). To them qualitative research is based on subjective measurements of fact, and the best way to know what is reliable and valid in qualitative and quantitative research is triangulation which is defined as the use of two or more methods. If different methods of assessment or investigation produce the same results, then the data are likely to be valid.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting a research, it is essential to look at the ethics that lie in the process. Moreover, it is imperative to make sure that participants in a research study are protected from physical or psychological harm, discomfort or danger that may arise due to research procedures. Once the data has been collected, researchers should make sure that no one else has access to the data. Whenever possible the names of the subjects should be removed from all data collection forms (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003)

The initial stage of the research involved a written request to the coordinator of the IEP asking permission to first interview her, then distribute questionnaires to students, and finally collect two sets of different genres of class writings. The participants were not obliged to fill in the questions. Students were informed at the beginning of the semester that two of their writings were going to be collected by a researcher. After writing one was handed, students were told by their teacher that it was one of the research's writings and similarly with the other one. None of the participants objected.

Chapter four covers the results of the research and the detailed classification of each item in the form of tables with some explanation about each.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter deals with the results of the three methods used for data collection:

Questionnaires:

All participants filled the questionnaires but some left questions with no answers; others gave silly answers to some questions which meant they took the questionnaire lightly.

Table 1: Age

	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age	40	18.98	1.05	18	21

The ages of the students ranged between 18 and 21 as they are all first year university students.

Table 2: Gender

Gender	Number	Percent
Female	13	32.50%
Male	27	67.50%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

The majority of the participants were males (67.50%) and the rest (32.50%) were females. Males seem to be less proficient in languages than females. Thus, many do not get the required score in the English Entrance Exam. Therefore, they end up being required to attend one or two semesters of Intensive English before joining the regular Program.

Table 3: Mother Tongue

Mother Tongue	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Arabic	35	87.50%	87.50%
French	4	10.00%	97.50%
English	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Table 4: Nationality

Nationality	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Lebanese	29	72.50%	72.50%
Jordanian	3	7.50%	80.00%
Syrian	2	5.00%	85.00%
Lebanese/French	2	5.00%	90.00%
Turkish	1	2.50%	92.50%
Algerian	1	2.50%	95.00%
Saudi	1	2.50%	97.50%
Canadian	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Tables 3 and 4 show that the majority of the students were of Arabic origin using Arabic as their first language. Whether Lebanese, Jordanian, Syrian or Saudi, participants had Arabic as L1. Only 10% had French as the L1. They consisted of two Lebanese, a Turkish, and an Algerian participant. Among the students there is a Canadian whose mother tongue is English.

Table 5: Rank of English

Rank of English	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Second	27	67.50%	67.50%
Third	12	30.00%	97.50%
First	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Thirty percent of the students were French educated and the majority (67.50%) were English educated who had studied at least 7 years of English in school. 67.50% were

exposed to all the details of the language and at every grade the information was reviewed and expanded a bit. However, the teaching was not enough for some English educated students to pass their English Entrance Exam.

Table 6: English Frequency

English Frequency	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Class Discussion	16	40.00%	40.00%
Home & Class	5	12.50%	52.50%
With Friends	4	10.00%	62.50%
Traveling	4	10.00%	72.50%
Missing	3	7.50%	80.00%
Work	3	7.50%	87.50%
With Teachers	3	7.50%	95.00%
Class & Traveling	1	2.50%	97.50%
Class	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Unfortunately 40% of the students used English only in classroom discussion. The other 60% was distributed among places such as home (with maid), while traveling, with friends, and during part time jobs. 7.50% use the language with teachers and the same percentage left the question without answering.

Table 7: Translation

Translation	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	15	37.50%	37.50%
Yes	13	32.50%	70.00%
Sometimes	9	22.50%	92.50%
I was & Now I Stopped	2	5.00%	97.50%
Not Applicable	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

The factor of translation affects directly the use of the second language and the frequency of errors. The majority (37.50%) deny the concept of translation. Only two admitted that

they used to translate, but as a result of the intensive classes they are starting to think and write in English.

Table 8: Last book read in 1st language

Last Book in 1st Language	Number	Percent
Banat Arryad	1	2.50%
Black Hands	1	2.50%
Broken Wings	2	5.00%
Impossible Love	1	2.50%
Joubran	3	7.50%
l'Amour au Temps de Cholera	1	2.50%
Leila & Wolf	1	2.50%
Les Miserables	1	2.50%
Madame Beauvarie	1	2.50%
Newspaper	3	7.50%
Political Book	2	5.00%
Prophet	1	2.50%
Taghour	1	2.50%
The Rock	1	2.50%
Missing	20	50.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Table 9: Last book read in English

Last Book in English	Number	Percent
Missing	17	42.50%
English Skills Book	4	10.00%
The Butcher	3	7.50%
Harry Potter	2	5.00%
11 Minutes	1	2.50%
Devil Wears Prada	1	2.50%
Divinci Code	1	2.50%
Angel & Deamon	1	2.50%
Crime Never Pays	1	2.50%
Little Women	1	2.50%
Memories of China	1	2.50%
MonteCristo	1	2.50%
Prince Machiavelli	1	2.50%
Romantic Book	1	2.50%
Slavery	1	2.50%
Brave New World	1	2.50%
The Notebook	1	2.50%
The Pearl	1	2.50%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Reading in the first language is not common just like the reading in the second language. Reading in the first language covered newspapers and books taken in middle if not elementary school. As for reading in the second language, 42.50 % did not bother to mention the name of the book. 10% considered the course book as the last book they've read in English. Other answers varied.

Table 10: Major Problems in Writing

Major Problems	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Grammar	11	27.50%	27.50%
Express Oneself	8	20.00%	47.50%
Organizing Ideas	5	12.50%	60.00%
Spelling	4	10.00%	70.00%
Vocabulary	3	7.50%	77.50%
Grammar & Spelling	2	5.00%	82.50%
Missing	1	2.50%	85.00%
None	1	2.50%	87.50%
Can't Write Under Conditions & Organizing Ideas	1	2.50%	90.00%
Organizing Ideas & Vocabulary	1	2.50%	92.50%
Can't Write Under Conditions	1	2.50%	95.00%
Grammar & Vocabulary & Express Oneself	1	2.50%	97.50%
Vocabulary & Expressing Oneself	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

In fact, 27.50% admitted that their major problems are grammatical errors, followed by the difficulty to express oneself. 12.50% of the participants had difficulty in organizing their ideas. 2.50% mentioned that they do not have any problems. Another 2.50% did not even answer the question. Two students found it hard to write under conditions.

Table 11: Common Grammatical Mistakes

Common Grammatical Mistakes	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Verb Tenses	7	17.50%	17.50%
Subject Verb Agreement	6	15.00%	32.50%
Preposition	3	7.50%	40.00%
Compound Verbs	3	7.50%	47.50%
Transition Words	3	7.50%	55.00%
Fragments	2	5.00%	60.00%
Plural Nouns	2	5.00%	65.00%
Punctuation	2	5.00%	70.00%
Comma Splices	2	5.00%	75.00%
Run On sentences	1	2.50%	77.50%
Reflexive Pronouns	1	2.50%	80.00%
Verb Tenses & Run On sentences	1	2.50%	82.50%
Compound Verbs & Plural Nouns	1	2.50%	85.00%
Irregular Verbs	1	2.50%	87.50%
Possessive & Contractions	1	2.50%	90.00%
Transition Words & Punctuation	1	2.50%	92.50%
Subject Verb Agreement & Compound Verbs	1	2.50%	95.00%
Conjunction	1	2.50%	97.50%
Subject Verb Agreement & Relative Pronouns	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

When asked about the grammatical errors, students took a while to answer. They were confused about the name of the error or how to classify it. The majority admitted that verb tenses and S-V agreement are two major problems. The rest of the errors were of lower percentages.

Table 12: Study Grammar Daily

Study Grammar Daily	Number	Percent
No	40	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Table 13: Refer to Syllabus

Refer to Syllabus	Number	% of Total
No	40	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%

Intensive English students never studied daily their grammatical concepts. They also never referred to the syllabus to be aware of future topics to be covered.

Table 14: Preferred Genre of Writings

Genre of Writings	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Cause / Effect	13	32.50%	32.50%
Exemplification	6	15.00%	47.50%
Descriptive	6	15.00%	62.50%
Narrative	4	10.00%	72.50%
Narrative & Descriptive	2	5.00%	77.50%
Descriptive & Cause/Effect	2	5.00%	82.50%
Narrative & Compare/Contrast	2	5.00%	87.50%
Compare / Contrast	2	5.00%	92.50%
Missing	1	2.50%	95.00%
Cause / Effect & Compare/Contrast	1	2.50%	97.50%
Descriptive & Narrative	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Cause/ effect writing was the genre of writing preferred by IEP students. To them, it is easier to express themselves in this genre of writing. They, however, seemed to have problems dealing with the exemplification and the descriptive genres. Also, students were not sure what to include in their writings for each genre: They had problems choosing the correct key terms for each.

Table 15: Best Thing about Intensive

Best Thing about Intensive	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Teacher	11	27.50%	27.50%
Improve English	8	20.00%	47.50%
Writing Sessions	6	15.00%	62.50%
Friends & Teachers	4	10.00%	72.50%
Grammar Sessions	2	5.00%	77.50%
Friends	2	5.00%	82.50%
Missing	1	2.50%	85.00%
Reading & Writing & Listening Sessions	1	2.50%	87.50%
Reading & Writing Sessions	1	2.50%	90.00%
Reading Sessions	1	2.50%	92.50%
Improve English & Friends	1	2.50%	95.00%
Time of Class	1	2.50%	97.50%
Help Of Instructor	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

Table 16: Worst Thing about Intensive

Worst Thing about Intensive	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Schedule	21	52.50%	52.50%
Missing	7	17.50%	70.00%
Waste of Time	4	10.00%	80.00%
Grammar	1	2.50%	82.50%
Reading Sessions	1	2.50%	85.00%
Reading Sessions & Schedule	1	2.50%	87.50%
Repeating Program more than once	1	2.50%	90.00%
# of Hours in Intensive	1	2.50%	92.50%
Talk in English All the Times	1	2.50%	95.00%
Using English	1	2.50%	97.50%
Listening & Grammar Sessions	1	2.50%	100.00%
Grand Total	40	100.00%	

IEP students find the intensive English a burden that they have to suffer for a whole semester. They agree that the good things about intensive are the teachers and the improvement of the English language of the students. They dislike having the classes at early hours and 10% thinks it is a waste of time.

Written Documents

Students' writings were corrected by the researcher and by the teacher of the class to have to ensure reliability. The grades were compared and the errors in each writing were detected. The types of errors were categorized into lists including all the morphological and syntactic errors found. The total number of errors was 392. 51% of the errors were done in the cause/effect sample, whereas 48.7% errors in the narrative sample.

Table 17

Total # of Errors
Grammar & Mechanics of Writing

	Cause Effect Sample		Narrative Sample	
Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Prepositions	37	19%	37	22%
Verb Tenses	18	9%	52	30%
Wrong Word Choice	37	19%	23	13%
Articles	25	13%	6	3%
Subject Verb Agreement	21	11%	9	5%
Run Ons	12	6%	6	3%
Plural Nouns	9	5%	4	2%
Sequencers	2	1%	9	5%
Comma Splices	10	5%	1	1%
Fragments	4	2%	6	3%
Irregular Past Verb Tenses	3	2%	5	3%
Contraction	5	3%	1	1%
Conjunctions	3	2%	2	1%
Relative Pronouns	1	1%	4	2%
Reflexive Pronouns	4	2%	0	0%
Adverbs in Wrong Places	4	2%	0	0%
Pronoun Reference Agreement	0	0%	3	2%
Conditional Sentences	2	1%	0	0%
Gerunds	1	1%	1	1%
Negation	0	0%	2	1%
Punctuation	0	0%	1	1%
Grand Total	198	100%	172	100%

Table 18

Grammar & Mechanics of Writing

	Cause Effect Sample		Narrative Sample	
Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Affect vs Effect	0	0%	16	84%
Their vs There	1	33%	2	11%
Its vs It's	2	67%	0	0%
Which vs Witch	0	0%	1	5%
Grand Total	3	100%	19	100%

The study at hand analyses the written errors of students. In fact, it was effective in revealing the grammatical areas they are weak in. Participants made errors in the same categories although the time lapse between the two collected writings was around two months. In these two months, these recurrent grammatical errors were supposedly explained clearly in the Intensive English classes (see IEP syllabus, Appendix D). However, when classifying the errors in the two genres, it was of almost equal percentages. In the first genre, students were starting intensive, but the writing was of cause/effect smooth genre. Students had problems writing the narrative genre which confirms what Khuwaily and AL Shoumali (2000) discussed earlier.

Misuse of preposition was the most problematic error and equal number of errors was presented in both genres. The narrative genre required that one tells a story and some things that happened, thus one might need to switch between tenses. This was the major problem in the narrative writing. The total number of errors from verb tenses was 52 errors from the total number which is 191. Some errors were presented in the cause/effect genre but not in the narrative genre and vice versa. The reasons might be because the students got over them during intensive, or because the genre itself does not require the appearance of such a grammatical structure.

In the cause/effect writings, the word choice and the prepositions were top errors. 12% of the errors dealt with articles which is quite a large percentage concerning a simple lesson. Verb tenses and subject verb agreement were of almost equal percentages and

among top 5 errors. The rest of the errors' percentages ranged between 1% and 5% which is acceptable.

In the narrative genre, verb tenses ranked one followed by prepositions. These two errors covered 50% of the errors. Right in third place is wrong word choice. The **Affect/Effect** error of 9% comes in fourth place. Actually the topic of the narrative article was "Talk about an incident that affected your life." Most of the students misused the words affect/effect not aware of the fact that affect is a verb and effect is the noun. The errors were countless. Some sentences with the effect/affect error in addition to other errors were:

Ex: Failing at my classes *effects* on my life in many ways.

The most incident that *effected* on me is the death of my aunt.

In fact the previous two sentences include errors in prepositions and verb tenses in addition to the affect/effect error.

Some errors exist but shyly, their percentage is not more than 1%. They exist once or twice in the cause/effect writings and equally in the narrative writings.

The confusion between **contraction** and **possessive** is one example. The writings included samples such as:

It's (Its- Possessive) students and *it's* (Its- Possessive) teachers make you feel *your* (you're-contraction) outside Lebanon.

…to give *its* students an outstanding education.

This means *your* (you're-contraction) getting good education.

Their/There

Some other errors are the result of troublesome words such as their (possessive noun) and there (adverb of place).

Examples

...where *their* is no such an American university.

I realized that *there* are a lot of poor people...

Table 19

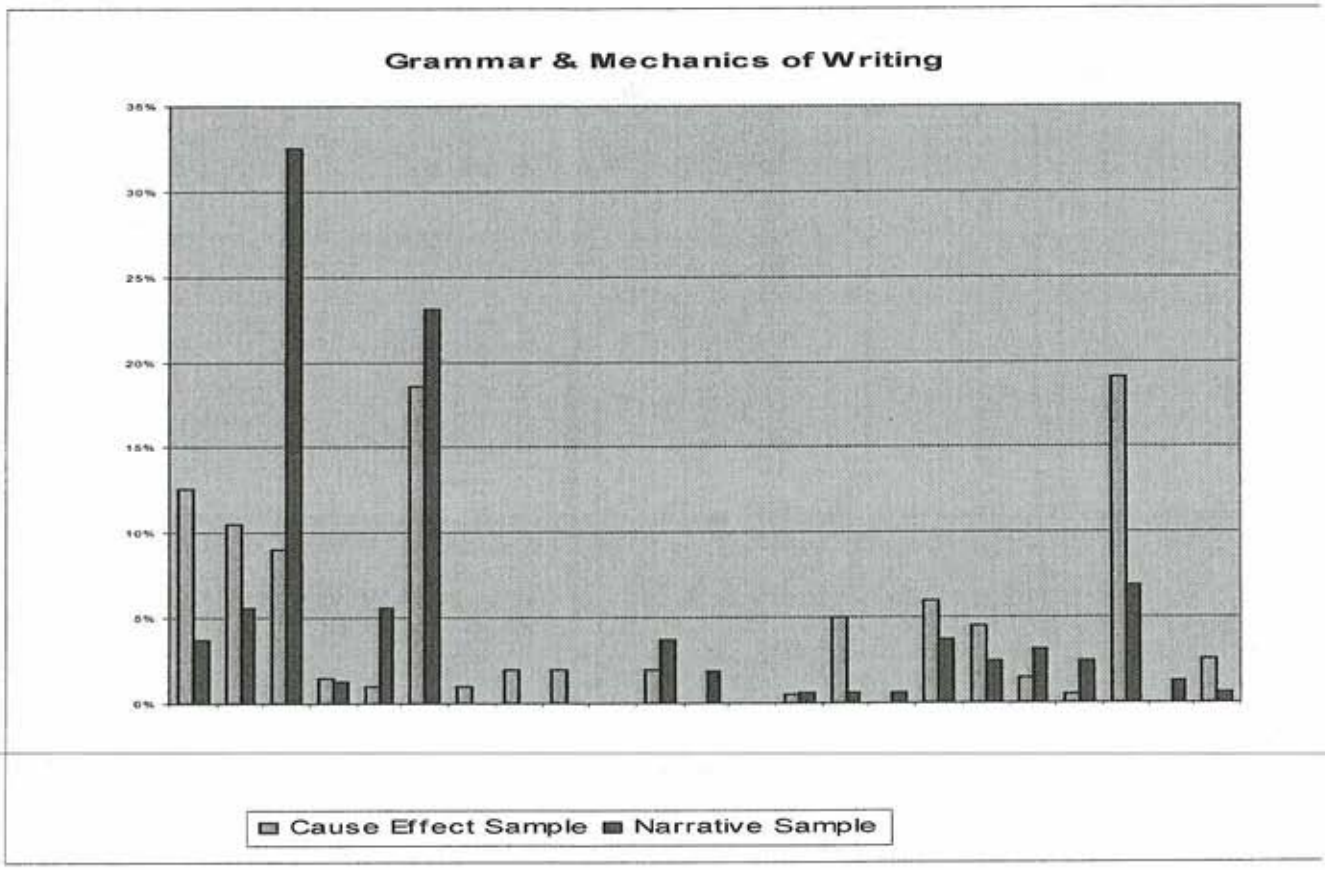

Table 20

Grammar & Mechanics of Writing in Cause/Effect Articles

	# of Errors				
Type of Error	0	1	2	3	4
Wrong Word Choice		8	6	3	2
Prepositions		3	8	6	
Subject Verb Agreement		6	6	1	
Articles		4	4	2	1
Verb Tenses		4	1	4	
Run Ons		7	1	1	
Comma Splices		4	3		
Plural Nouns		4	1	1	
Reflexive Pronouns		4			
Fragments		4			
Conjunctions		3			
Adverbs in Wrong Places		2	1		
Contraction		2		1	
Sequencers		2			
Conditional Sentences		2			
Irregular Past Verb Tenses		1	1		
Gerunds		1			
Relative Pronouns		1			

Table 21

Grammar & Mechanics of Writing in Narrative Articles

	# of Errors					
Type of Error	0	1	2	3	4	5
Verb Tenses		2	8	4	3	2
Wrong Word Choice		8	6	1		
Prepositions		3	2	7	1	1
Articles		4	1			
Sequencers		1	4			
Fragments		4	1			
Subject Verb Agreement		2		1	1	
Run Ons		3		1		
Plural Nouns		2	1			
Irregular Past Verb Tenses		1	2			
Relative Pronouns		2	1			
Pronoun Reference Agreement		1	1			
Negation		2				
Conjunctions			1			
Gerunds		1				
Comma Splices		1				
Punctuation		1				
Contraction		1				

Table 22 is the comparison of the percentages among the results of detailed number of errors. For example 19% of the cause/effect writings contained 1 wrong word choice. However, 31% of the narrative articles had 1 wrong word choice. The verb tenses and the prepositions are the only two errors that had 5 as the number of error occurrence per narrative article.

Table 22

		% of Error				
Type of Error	type of Article	1	2	3	4	5
Wrong Word Choice	Cause/Effect	19%	14%	7%	5%	
	Narrative	31%	23%	4%	0%	0%
Verb Tenses	Cause/Effect	10%	2%	10%	0%	
	Narrative	8%	31%	15%	12%	8%
Prepositions	Cause/Effect	7%	19%	14%	0%	
	Narrative	12%	8%	27%	4%	4%
Sequencers	Cause/Effect	5%	0%	0%	0%	
	Narrative	4%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Subject Verb Agreement	Cause/Effect	14%	14%	2%	0%	
	Narrative	8%	0%	4%	4%	0%
Articles	Cause/Effect	10%	10%	5%	2%	
	Narrative	15%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Irregular Past Verb Tenses	Cause/Effect	2%	2%	0%	0%	
	Narrative	4%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Comma Splices	Cause/Effect	10%	7%	0%	0%	
	Narrative	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Plural Nouns	Cause/Effect	10%	2%	2%	0%	
	Narrative	8%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Fragments	Cause/Effect	10%	0%	0%	0%	
	Narrative	15%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Relative Pronouns	Cause/Effect	2%	0%	0%	0%	
	Narrative	8%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Pronoun Reference Agreement	Narrative	4%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Conjunctions	Cause/Effect	7%	0%	0%	0%	
	Narrative	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Adverbs in Wrong Places	Cause/Effect	5%	2%	0%	0%	
Run Ons	Cause/Effect	17%	2%	2%	0%	
	Narrative	12%	0%	4%	0%	0%
Gerunds	Cause/Effect	2%	0%	0%	0%	
	Narrative	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Reflexive Pronouns	Cause/Effect	10%	0%	0%	0%	
Negation	Narrative	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Punctuation	Narrative	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Conditional Sentences	Cause/Effect	5%	0%	0%	0%	
Contraction	Cause/Effect	5%	0%	2%	0%	
	Narrative	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The most problematic in both genres was the word choice; second prepositions, verb tenses and subject verb agreement and all errors follow in descending order.

The following are some detailed explanations of the top six errors and some examples of the errors from the students' writings.

Wrong Word Choice

In both genres of writing, the students used words that are either a translation from the native language or lack of enough vocabulary.

Examples:

Failing makes all my friends *go out from our relation.*

The accident affected my relation with __ environment *which arounds me.*

Moussa the *Iraquian* champion knocked me down.

I *felt* in love …

Once a day…

… to *stand in front of* difficulties.

Death do not *afraid me* any more.

This incident affected me to *be lating* for joining university.

LAU is underprovided by __ university of NY.

Students need parkings to *put their cars in.*

The university give students cash money and *erases* the money from the tuition fees.

It *has* the best *studies* in Business.

My dream is to be *in* AUB.

I chose LAU to be my *education place.*

It will allow me to have a good job *with prestiges.*

I started to *do* my dreams.

My head was *paining.*

Verb Tenses

Students suffered from the switch in verb tenses especially in the second genre of writing. The second genre is narrative and thus students seemed to get confused and switched tenses. The verb tenses are very much related to time. If one is talking about something that happened the past tense should be used. The same goes if one is talking about something happening in the present time or might happen in the future. Moreover, students forget a lot that even if they are talking in the present time about something that happened in the past, the past tense is required. Another important thing is that students forget that after 'to', the verb is in infinitive form.

Some good examples of errors concerning the switch in verb tenses are:

My two friends did not know each other; I *always introduce* these friends to each other.

It was raining and the car *slide* and *rotates.*

We found a hidden spot where we *can sit* and *relaxed*

I remember that a little girl came and *asks* me for money.

I began to *brought* to him everyday his medicine and everything he *needs.*

Prepositions

Prepositions were either put in wrong places or were a pure translation from Arabic. Students committed the same number of errors concerning prepositions in the genres of writings.

Examples:

Failing *at* my classes effects *on* my life in many ways.

I was bleeding *in* all over my face.

I started to pay attention *for* my behavior.

I felt in love *on* him more and more.

If I was driving *in* the accident.

LAU is one of the most interesting universities *of* Lebanon.

It's known *by* the best degrees.

Subject/ Verb Agreement

Among the first school lessons that we cover in school is the concept of subject/verb agreement. If the subject is singular, the verb should be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb should be plural. Yet, a major confusion is adding the –s. The plural sign of the noun is adding the –s, whereas the singular present form of the verb requires the –s and not the plural form,

Some examples of the errors in students' writings are:

When strange incidents *happens*…

My parents *was* very scared on me…

Every person in life *face* many difficulties that could affect him negatively.

He should follow the girl that *understand* him.

Death *do not* afraid me anymore.

Every year, this university *graduate* about 1500 students.

Everybody *have* to join a university…

When the student thinks he/she *don't* pass the course.

No one *get* lost in it.

I *prefers* the education at LAU. There *is* many reasons. There *is* many excellent universities in Beirut.

Articles

It was disappointing to find errors in articles. Articles are considered the base when teaching English as a Second/Foreign language (Thornbury, 1999). The percentage was not a low one mainly in the cause/effect sample. Articles are considered to be taken for granted. 'A' is used before the singular noun that begins with a vowel. 'An' is used before a singular noun that begins with a consonant. As for 'The', it is a definite article that can precede both singular and plural nouns. Not every error was the result of the lack of article. In fact, some errors were because articles were misplaced or not needed.

Examples

When __ strange incident happens…

It affects me in __ very bad way.

I will hear *a* very nice news.

I always wanted to become *a* NBA coach.

__ LAU degree opens…

LAU is the best place to meet *a* good friends.

Irregular Past Verb Tenses

Regular verbs are changed into the past tense by adding -d, -ed or doubling the consonant then adding –ed. However, irregular verbs do not stick to the rule when used in the past tense. Students should memorize the form of irregular verbs. Some errors were:

Examples

This incident forbidded (forbade) me from playing football.

I am sure that we *chosen* (chose) the right university.

I *thinked* (thought) of going to London.

She *band* (bent) over me and kissed my hand.

Interview

The interview was held with the coordinator of the IEP. Her work is divided into administrative duties, teaching, and planning of the syllabus. When asked about the students' background, she reported that the bulk of the students come from Lebanon and the gulf. A small percentage of the students come from other countries around the world. The students have almost the same age level ranging between 18 and 21. They were placed in Intensive English because they have failed the English entrance exam. The Lebanese students have a deficiency in oral skills; they fear oral presentations. As for those coming from the gulf, their school curriculum is weak. They might be good at the verbal level, but when it comes to writing, they are clueless. The IEP is to bridge the gap between oral fluency and the written deficiency.

The interviewee discussed some factors that affect the weakness in language acquisition. The most clear cut factors are related to having Arabic as the first language. She reiterated that translation was/still is a major factor when students write: This is evident in their writing. The schools they graduate from is another factor. They are not exposed to the English language except in the few English classes that are set by the school administration. Students do not use English except in English classes. Students do not read; in fact, they come to the Intensive English Program with minimal skills of reading. The interviewee constantly revises the syllabus to cater for the best ways in language acquisition. Most of the students come to the program with the same deficiencies in

grammar, reading and writing. Even if the skills are taken in different sessions, the syllabus focuses on integration. By the end of the intensive English semester, students should be able to write paragraphs, essays, comprehend in listening lab, and give oral presentations.

The coordinator of the program believes that each student is unique in his/her learning skills and areas of weaknesses. The recurring grammatical errors are not dealt with appropriately. Some of the major errors deal with unity, coherence, and cohesion. However, the major ones concern sentence skills: SV agreement, run on, incorrect verb usage, verb tenses, prepositions, faulty parallelism and shift in pronoun usage.

Finally, the recommendations for the students to avoid going into intensive is to read, read and read. Many students are discouraged by the mere fact of being placed in intensive. English should be taken seriously because it is vital. One should be open-minded to improve. In fact, this chapter proved that there are basic needs of students, teachers and program itself. However, they always have to be open for change and improvement in order to meet the needs of the learners in the language program. The following chapter is the wrap up of the research at hand with some suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The study examined the common syntactic as well as morphological error that Intensive English students at University X make when writing in English as a Second/Foreign Language. The researcher then recommends changes to help these learners deal with the above mentioned language problems and thus write more efficiently in the target language.

The research questions were the following:

1. What approaches do university IEP teachers follow to teach writing skills?

2. What are IEP students' common grammatical errors?

3. How do IEP teachers deal with errors?

4. What are the most common and effective techniques to improve university academic writing?

These questions were answered either through the questionnaire, the interview or the written documents. All three techniques emphasized what Myles (2002) and Connor (1996) said about the ESL students having difficulties in expressing themselves in English. They often translate from their mother tongue or create new rules. The problem of word choice reflects this factor. Moreover, it was obvious that ESL students were scared to communicate in English which is considered an important factor in improving written English (Becica, 1996).

The study showed that students' most recurrent grammatical errors are the following: Prepositions, verb tenses, wrong word choice, and subject verb agreement. After two months of Intensive English, students still made the same grammatical errors in their

writings, although the before mentioned grammatical points were supposedly covered in the Intensive English classes in the first few weeks (See IEP Syllabus, Appendix D). In fact, Reid (1990) reported that regardless of the type of text, writers use similar grammatical constructions, and thus, make similar grammatical errors. Therefore, it is imperative to teach grammatical rules, but these rules should be taught in an enjoyable and practical way.

Another issue to ponder about is contrastive rhetoric between the Arabic and the English language. Students whose first language is Arabic tend to use their Arabic writing style in English (see Connor, 1996; 2003; Mahmoud, 2005; El Sayed, 1992; Fakhri, 2004; to name a few).

Recommendations

Intensive English language teachers should be aware of modern methods and approaches to teach the English language in general and grammatical structure and mechanics in specific as well as cater for the different learning styles of their learners. Their first priority in class should be to meet students' needs. Thus, in order to do so, they need to find ways to facilitate the teaching/learning process. They may achieve this by following another approach that may motivate learners more: such approach may either be the task-based learning which would encourage students to speak fluently, discuss topics, thus be accurate when it comes to presenting the work in writing (see for instance, Willis, 1996). The results of this study may help them if they follow the sequence of errors in descending order; they may be able to formulate the syllabus in a way to cover important and common grammatical rules first. IEP staff should provide students with common

terms and hints to help them write in the specific genre required. On the other hand, students should be able to discuss different topics orally in English before performing the writing. They should be more aware of both the syntactic and morphological errors they tend to make when writing in the target language.

One point to ponder about is the reasons behind the continuous failure and problems these students have. It may be important to go back to the language curriculum followed in the schools and try to change the process followed there. However, one should remember that IEP students come from different backgrounds. Hence, such recommendation may be of benefit for very few students only.

Limitations

This research had a couple of limitations. It is only limited to the students in the samples and it focused on the aspect of grammar only. It is essential to have more studies to detect grammatical errors that might occur in another genre of writing.

Further Research

Further research is needed in order to investigate all aspects of language not only grammar. It is not enough to deal only with the grammatical errors. It would be helpful to deal with students' weaknesses in all different writing texts and language skills. Moreover, this study used only two genres of writing. Therefore, further studies are needed to investigate whether or not different writing methods would lead to similar grammatical errors. One may take the issue a step further and investigate whether students face the same language problems in both their L1 and their L2.

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Appendix A

The following Questionnaire is designed to help me in my MA research project. Please answer all the questions honestly to know your point of view concerning the problems in writing of English, especially the grammatical ones.

All the information will be kept anonymous. You are welcome to know the results of the project after the work is completed.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Rola AlMekkawi Farhat.

Questionnaire: Errors in writing of English as a foreign language.

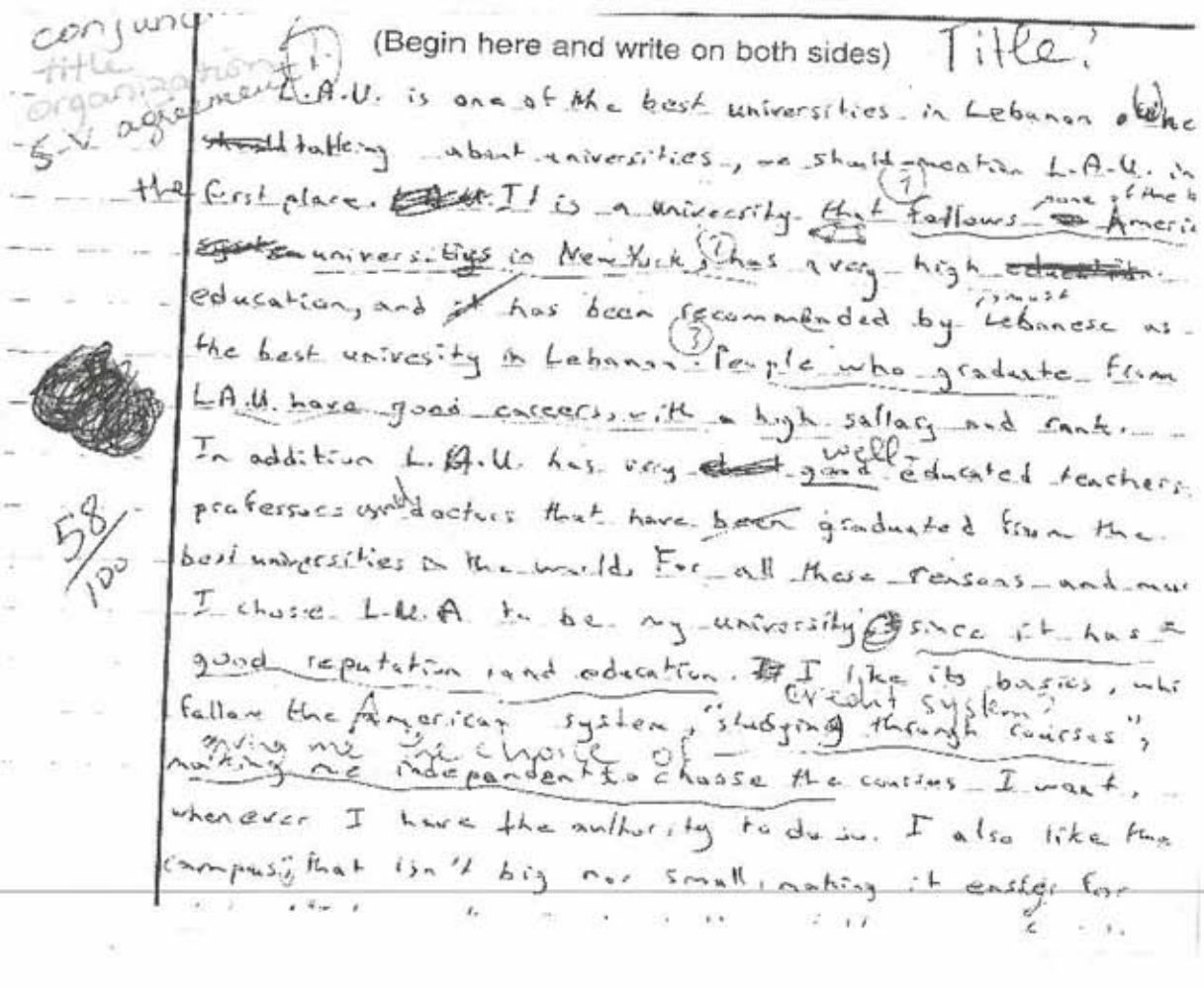
1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Nationality:
4. Schooling system:
5. Mother Tongue:
6. English is your _____ language.
7. What was the last book you read in your first language?
8. What was the last book you read in English?
9. How often do you use English?
10. Do you think in your first language and then translate your ideas to English?
11. What do you think are your major problems in writing?
12. What do you think are your common grammatical errors?
13. Do you study grammatical lessons daily?
14. Do you refer to your syllabus while studying?
15. What kinds of writings would you like to do (descriptive, narrative, compare/contrast, cause/effect, exemplification etc...)?
16. What was the best thing about intensive?
17. What was the worst thing about intensive?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Who are your students in Intensive? Their background and L1?
3. What are the common factors affecting L2 acquisition?
4. How do you design the syllabus?
5. What are the common grammatical errors in the students' writings?
6. What are your recommendations for students?

Appendix C



conjunc
title
organization
S-V agreement

(Begin here and write on both sides) Title!

L.A.U. is one of the best universities in Lebanon (the
talking about universities, we should mention L.A.U. in
the first place. It is a university that follows one of the A
universities in New York, has a very high
education, and has been recommended by most Lebanese as
the best university in Lebanon. People who graduate from
L.A.U. have good careers with a high salary and rank.
In addition L.A.U. has very well educated teachers,
professors and doctors that have been graduated from the
best universities in the world. For all these reasons and mo
I chose L.A.U to be my university since it has a
good reputation and education. I like its basics, whi
follow the American system, "studying through courses",
CREDIT system
giving me the choice of
making me independent to choose the courses I want,
whenever I have the authority to do so. I also like the
campus, that isn't big nor small, making it easier for

58/100

(Begin here and write on both sides)

why did you choose LAU tobyour university ?

Title?

LAU is one of the best universitys in Lebanon. I've choosen LAU, for ceverat reasons First of all, it is the number one university in the school of bussiness. Most of students wich are graduat from it, have been accepted in some very importan companys, banks, industrics .... Second, the idea of creating two branches, one in Beirut, and the second one in Jbeil, is very interesting and importa On one hand, students learn in Jbeil, far from their parents and family, learn to be selfconbident, if they are taking a dorm or even a flat renting house there. And on the other hand, for exemple, Jbeil is a very good location for students of Pharmacie for exemple, they could experiences do a direct

58/100

(Begin here and write on both sides)

Title?

I chose LAU to be my university for many reasons. Getting sp. enrolled in LAU isn't a simple thing ~~to do~~. This university will open many doors in front of you. Having the word degree from it will offer simplify many jobs for you. LAU isn't like any other university by it's students, it's teachers so you will feel like you're outside Lebanon.

very brief. this is not a full paragraph

Switch in point of view

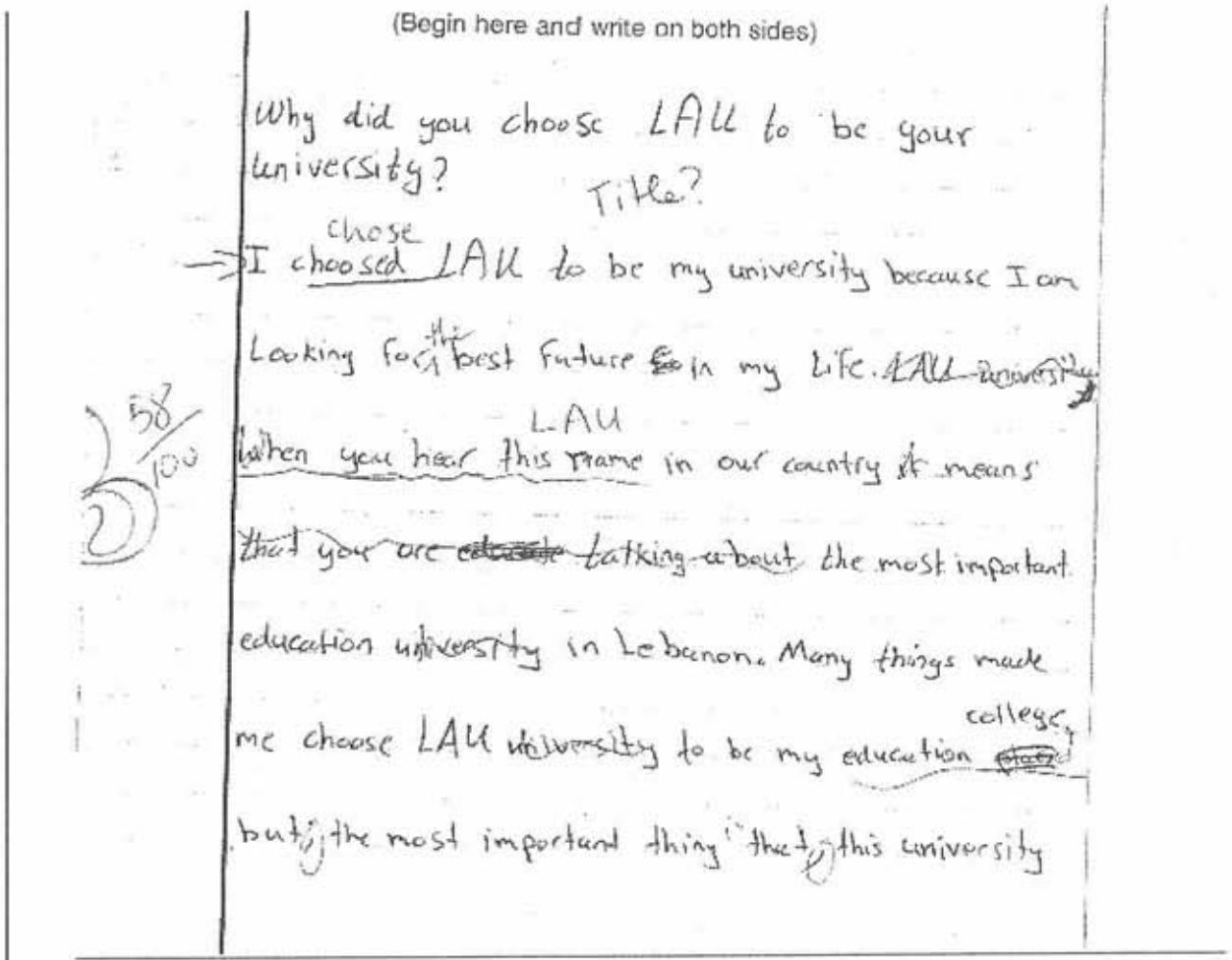
53/100

(Begin here and write on both sides)

Title?

I saw (past) many universities in Lebanon and in London, but at last the one that I can (present) is LAU. During the last year of my school, I thought of going to many universities in Lebanon, but the best

56/100



(Begin here and write on both sides)

Why did you choose LAU to be your university?

Title?

I choosed (chose) LAU to be my university because I am Looking for the best future in my Life. ~~LAU university~~

58/100

When you hear this (LAU) name in our country it means that you are ~~educate~~ talking about the most important education university in Lebanon. Many things made me choose LAU university to be my education college, but the most important thing that this university

(Begin here and write on both sides)

Title?

There are several reasons why I chose LAU to be my university. First of all, ~~It is~~ the teachers are wonderful and kind, run-on they like helping students in their studies. LAU is a very beautiful university, It has lots of majors for students to take, word I also have lots of friends here. My ~~ma~~ major is buisness, sp. and it is a great place to study it. However, no student can enter a university that they are not happy to enter in

60/100

- word Choice (1) (Begin here and write on both sides)
title
Run on (2)
S. vague (1)

Why did you choose LAU to be your univers
Title?

Lebanese American University is one of
the best universities that was born in Lebano
word
due to many reasons. First of all, it is know
by its official certificate, and every one
knows that it is a well-organized and programm
university. In addition to that, every year this
university graduates about 1500 student with
masters degrees and gives them the priority
to work in any place in the world because
as we said before its certificate is know
acknowledged
in every place the whole world. Next thing
is that LAU students are very welcome
to work in hospitals, labs & businesses because
they are well-prepared to do that. For
it

62/100

(Begin here and write on both sides)

"Why did you choose LAU to be your university?" Title?

I chose LAU to be my university for several reason. First of all, it has the best studies courses in the major that I'm going to go for later on which is "Business", and it's the only university who that teaches "Business law which I'm very captivated by. Then, I am a french-educated and I wanted to continue my studies in English, so I have chosen LAU because it's one of the best American Universities in Lebanon. Although I had the choice wether between to stay staying here or to leave leaving the country, but I prefered to stay here because if I left leave, I would have found a lot of difficulties. And It's better to stay

60/100

(Begin here and write on both sides) Title?

53/100

I chose LAU to be my university because it has the best Knowledge as in business major in the Middle East. This university mostly concentrates on the business majors. It has separated buildings and one of these buildings is the business section. It's a huge building. LAU's skills are professional. For example, the way the teachers teach the students and the way they interact with them. What got me attracted to this university is that 3/4 of the teachers are American. LAU is under provided by University of New York. So, when a person graduates, the university certificate gets stamped there and then they take it back so that they can give it to the person. Also, LAU has the best certificate in all the Middle East, and that's what mainly got me attracted and made me enroll in it. It's one of the famous universities.

off topic

fragment

word?

(write on both sides)

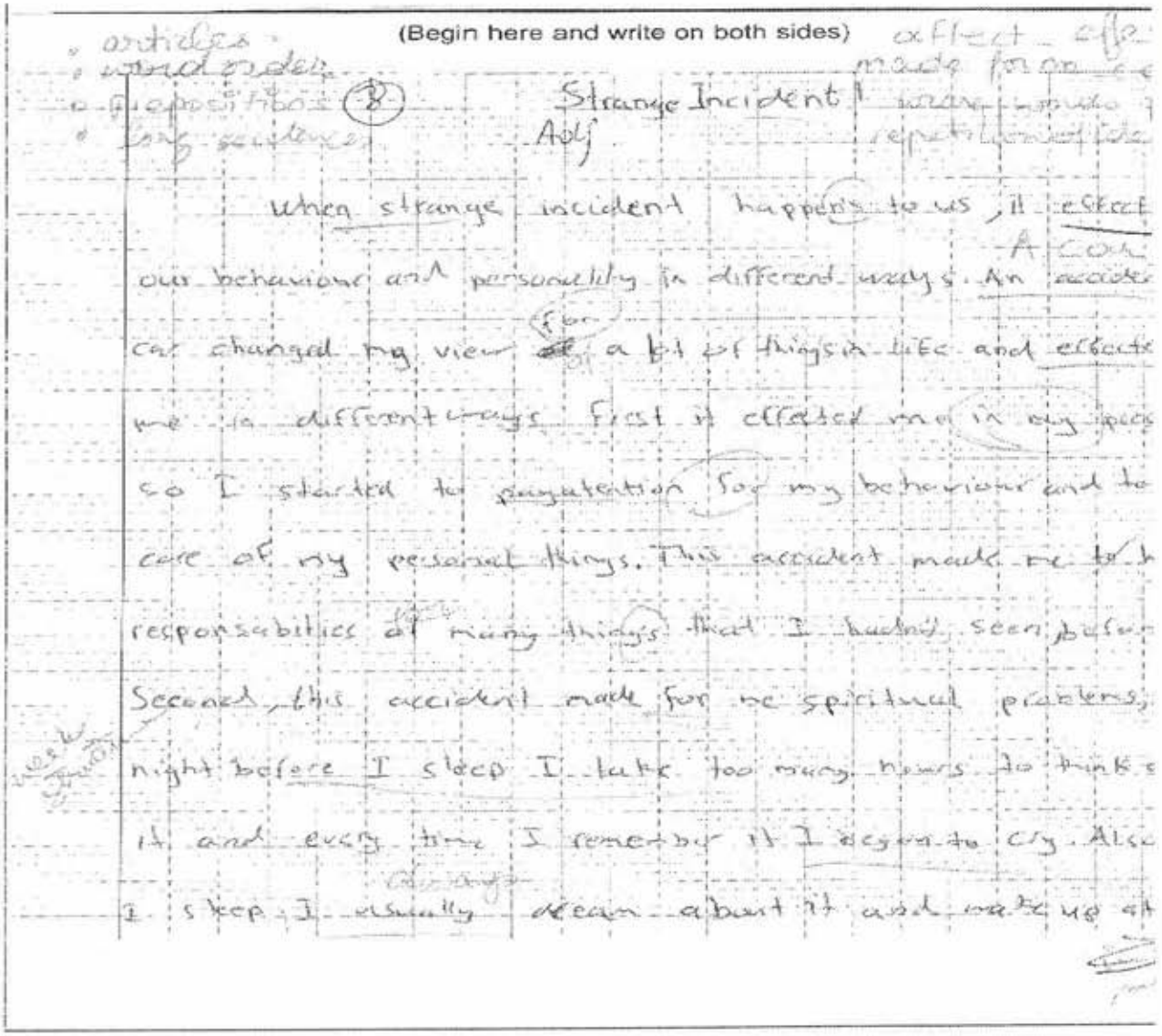
Why did you choose LAU to be your University.?

~~Title?~~

There are many Universities in Lebanon, but I chose LAU for ~~many reasons.~~ ?

58/100

First of all, LAU is the greatest University in Lebanon. It has the best level in each major taken, and the diploma is ~~brought~~ and approved from New York. In addition, LAU facilitates the life of students by allowing them to access at any time to the computer room and the photocopy for free, so students



(Begin here and write on both sides)

articles
word order
prepositions
long sentences

Strange Incident

Adj

When strange incident happens to us, it effect our behaviour and personality in different ways. An accident can changed my view of a lot of things in life and effects me in different ways first it effected me in my psy so I started to meditation for my behaviour and to care of my personal things. This accident made me to h responsibilities of many things that I hadn't seen befo Second, this accident made for me spiritual problems, night before I sleep I take too many hours to think a it and every time I remember it I began to cry. Also I sleep, I usually dream about it and make me

(Begin here and write on both sides)

transition words
wrong word choice
long sentence.

superlative
effect, a
verb

2

Strange Incident

The most incident that effected me
death of my aunt. First of all, I got d
alot, since she was the person who r
me up and I loved her very much.
was like my mother and more than th
I felt that am deprived from care ar
and I was
lost and nobody loves me. The las
is that I couldn't study anym
and concentrate I wished to
Nobody stood beside me, I wa

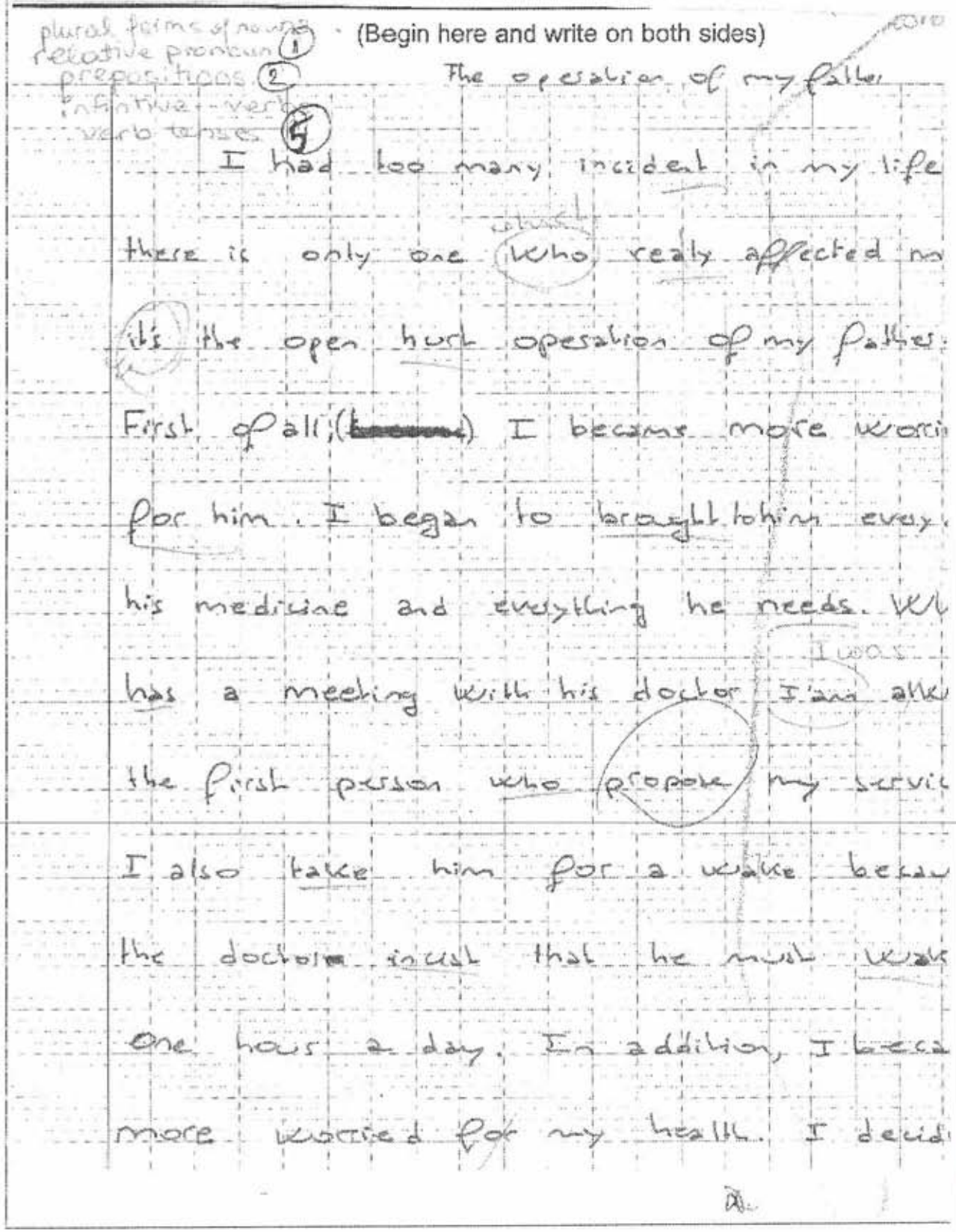
(Begin here and write on both sides)

Repetition

effect
prep
wrong
(go out
with

Failing at classes

Failing at my classes effects on my life in ma
First of all, Faling at my classes makes all my frien
out ~~of~~ from our relation For example, when I failed
intensive program all my friends ~~go~~ moved to high
~~and~~ then I saw my self lonely Second, failing a
classes pushes me up to study For example, when
at intensive I put a decision to study and to h
good great. Finally, failing at intensive program
~~at~~ on ~~my r~~ the relation with my family For
~~I failed~~ Last year, I failed at intinsive prog

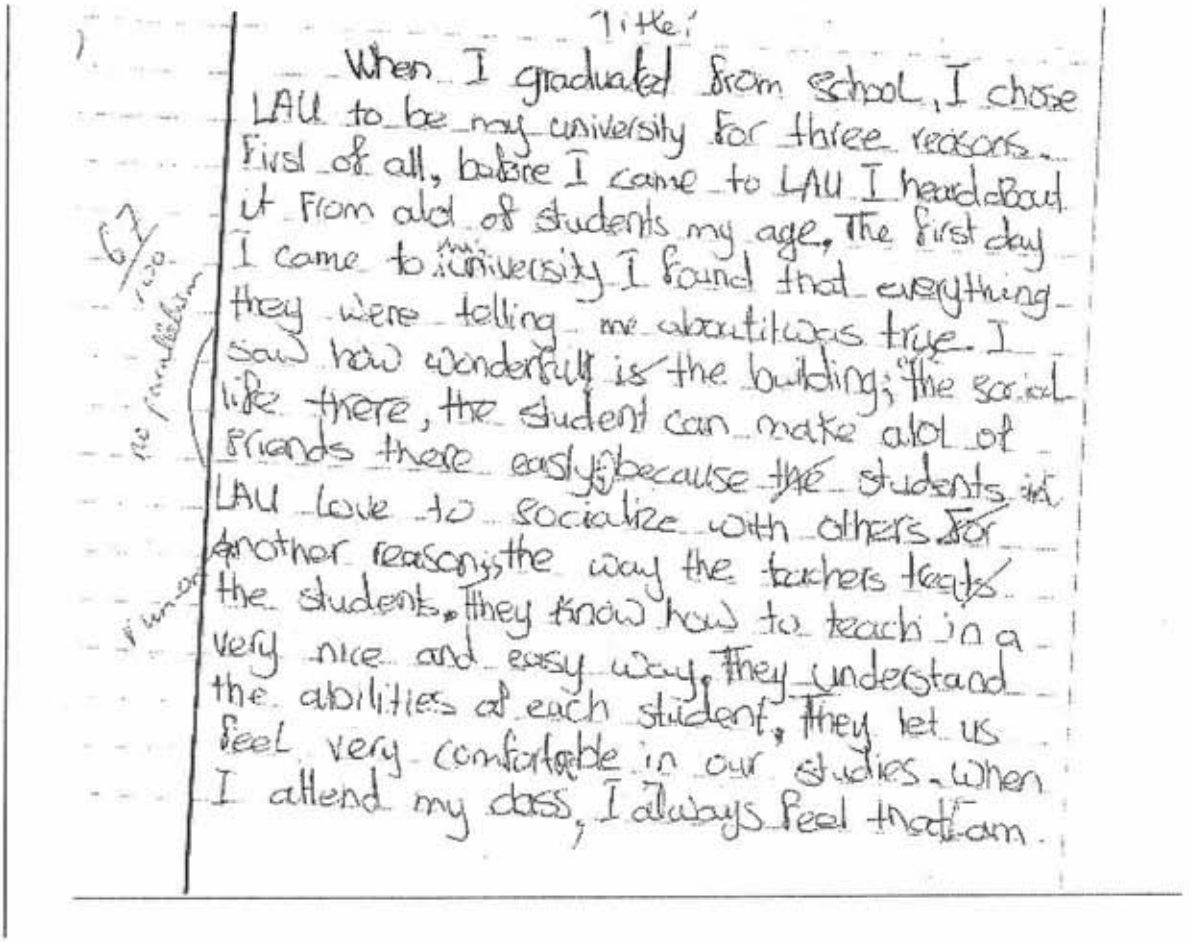


plural forms of nouns
relative pronoun (1)
prepositions (2)
infinitive - verb
verb tenses (5)

(Begin here and write on both sides)

The operation of my father

I had too many incident in my life
there is only one who realy affected m
it's the open hurt operation of my father.
First of all, ([redacted]) I became more worri
for him. I began to brought to him every
his medicine and everything he needs. Wh
has a meeting with his doctor I'am alw
the first person who propose my servic
I also take him for a wake becau
the doctor incist that he must wak
one hour a day. In addition, I beca
more worried for my health. I decid



Title:

When I graduated from school, I chose LAU to be my university for three reasons. First of all, before I came to LAU I heard about it from alot of students my age. The first day I came to the university I found that everything they were telling me about it was true. I saw how wonderful is the building; the social life there, the student can make alot of friends there easily because the students in LAU love to socialize with others. For another reason, the way the teachers teach the students. They know how to teach in a very nice and easy way, they understand the abilities of each student, they let us feel very comfortable in our studies. When I attend my class, I always feel that I am.

(Begin here and write on both sides)

* Why did you LAU to be your university?

Title?

The Lebanese American University is a well known university around the world. There are several reasons why I choose to study at LAU. First, it's location in Lebanon, my homeland country. I felt more confident staying in Lebanon. Most of my family and friends are attending at LAU and they all encouraged me to study business there. Second, there is a strong business school. It has many strong degrees for business. A friend of mine who had studied business at LAU is now a successful man living happily. The last reason is that LAU has a nice campus life. The atmosphere is beautiful with a cozy and chilly weather. Also, the people at LAU are friendly and helpful. These three reasons, I had mentioned in the paragraph, are the reasons why I choose to study at LAU.

END

(Begin here and write on both sides)

plural nouns

verb tenses (4) A Strange Incident

past tense Adj. (1)

I had many strange incidents in my li

most effective one is when I faild in the E

Entrance Exam for the 4th time. It was real

because I studied very well for it and di

Repetition

the passing score. First of all, the first effect tha

that all my friends passed the exam except a few

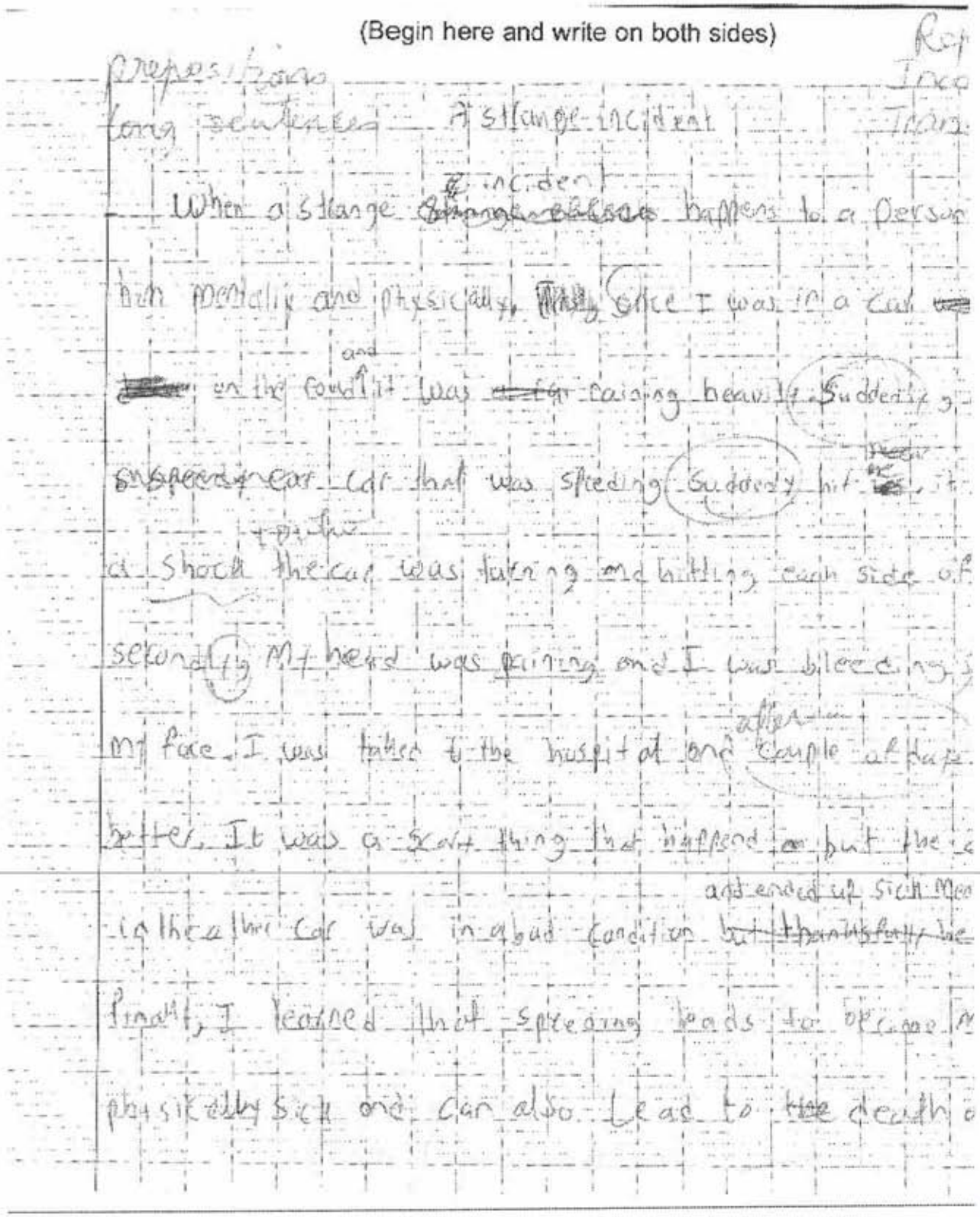
Secondly, it affects on me; the relatio with

looked at me as an immature person who don't

build his own life with success. So I have to

study very well to pass this exam, and be succe

own future life. Finally, the last effect is that


(Begin here and write on both sides)

Appendix D

Lebanese American University
Beirut, Lebanon
School of Arts and Sciences
Humanities Division
Spring 2007

Course Number: ENG 003
Course Title: Intensive English III
Meeting Place:
Instructor:
Office:
Office Hours:
Office Phone Number:
Email:
URL:

Purpose

The purpose of this noncredit advanced English course is to bridge the gap between Intensive English and English 009 academic English proficiency.

Objectives:

This course offers a thorough review of the language skills and sub skills needed for academic purposes.

Learning Outcomes

A student completing this course should:

- Write a well organized paragraph and begin essay writing.
- Demonstrate comprehension of lectures and take comprehensive notes
- Read literally and critically
- Give short oral presentations
- Work their way into written assignments in a set time *(50* minutes)
- Sharpen academic study skills

Chapter 35 Adjectives and Adverbs pp. 488-492
Writing: Examining Cause and Effect pp. 195-204
- Test on mode (cause/effect)

Reading: Chapter 4: Transition Words and Patterns of Organization.
Chapter 7 : Tone
Reading selection: "The Fixed"
Summarizing articles continued
Short story # 3 = quiz on story

Listening: Unit 9: Finding a Niche: The Lives of Young Immigrants pp. 179-204
- (Theme: Immigration)

Saturday April 21 is a Tuesday schedule

Week Nine: April 23-27
Mechanics:
- Chapter 36: Misplaced Modifiers pp. 493-496

Writing: Examining Cause and Effect pp. 195-204
- Test on mode (cause/effect)

Reading: Chapter 5: **Inference**
- Read selections: " Excerpt from Daisy Fay and the Miracle Man" Journal entry # 1
- Review Test *: Drawing Inferences: Too Much of a Good Thing"*

Listening: Unit 7: Emotional Intelligence pp. 135-154 (Theme Education)

Week Ten: May 2-4

Midterm Exams

Week Eleven: May 8-11
Mechanics: Chapter 37: Dangling Modifiers pp. 497-501
- Faulty Parallelism (handout)

Writing: Narrating an event pp. 257-267
- Test on mode

Reading: Chapter 7: **Figurative Language**
- Reading selections: "The Love of My Life"
- The use of Symbols: " The yellow Ribbon"
- Short Story # 4 = quiz based on story

Listening: Unit 7: emotional Intelligence pp. 135-154 (Theme Education)

Week Twelve: 12-19
Mechanics: Conditionals (handout)
Writing: Narrating an event (Continued)
- Compare and Contrast p. 205-220

Reading: Chapter 10: **Fact and Opinion**

Writing: The First and Second Steps in writing pp.47-78
- Chapter 39: Capital Letters p. 507 + test

Reading: Chapter 14: **Skimming and Scanning**
- Reading selections: : " Pesticides: An Asset and a Liability"
"A Fable for Tomorrow" (annotation exercise)
- short story # 1 + quiz on story

Listening: It's better to give than to Receive pp. 113-134 (Theme: Philanthropy)

Week five: March 26-30

Mechanics: Finish all verb forms

Writing: The Third Steps in Writing pp. 79-96 + test
- chapter 42: Quotation Marks pp. 528 + test

Reading: Chapter 2; **Topics, Main Ideas , and Details**
- Reading selections and paraphrasing exercise
- Journal entry #2

Listening: It's Better to Give than to Receive pp. 113-134 (Theme: Philanthropy)

Week six: April 2-5

Mechanics: Chapter 28: Fragments pp. 419-434
- Chapter 29: Run-ons pp. 435-449

Writing: The Fourth Step in Writing pp.97-130 + test
- Chapter 44: Other Punctuation Marks p545

Reading: Chapter 2: **Topics and Main Ideas, and Details**
- short story # 2 and quiz

Listening: It's Better to Give than to Receive pp. 113-134 (Theme: Philanthropy)

Easter Break

Week Seven: April 10-13

Mechanics: Chapter 33: Pronoun Agreement and reference pp. 475-481
- Chapter 34: Pronoun Types pp. 482-487

Writing: Four Bases for Revising Writing pp.131-157 + test

Reading: Chapter 3: **Determining the Author's Purpose**
Reading selections : " The Shepherd's Daughter"
" From Melted Candy Bar to Microwaves"
" Students Who Push Burgers"
Writing summaries (summarizing 2 external articles)

Listening: Unit 9: Finding a Niche: The Lives of Young Immigrants pp. 179-204
- (Theme: Immigration)

Week Eight: April 16- 21

Mechanics: Chapter 41: Apostrophe pp. 519-527

Lecture Material and Schedule

Week One and Two: March1-9

Introduction to the course policy/ Distribution of Syllabus

- **Mechanics**: Sentence Skills Diagnostic Test (handout)
- Overview of the Parts of ESL pointers (handout)
- Chapter 45: Using the Dictionary pp. 550-558
- Chapter 46: Spelling Improvement

Writing: An Introduction to Writing

- Writing as a Skill pp. 10-15
- The Writing Process pp.17-45
- Chapter 43: "Comma" p. 535

Reading: Naming and Identity

- Reading selection " Crickets"
- Journal entry #1based on the chapter

Listening: Unit 3: Early to Bed, Early to Rise, pp. 45-68 (Theme: Medicine)

Week Three: March 12-17

Mechanics: Chapter 26: Subjects and Verbs pp. 411-415

- Chapter 30: Standard English Verbs pp. 450-458
- Chapter 31: Irregular Verbs pp. 459-467

Writing: Writing Process (continued+ test)

- Chapter 38: Paper Format p. 502
- Form for Planning a Paragraph p. 635
- The First and Second Steps in Writing pp.47-78

Reading: Chapter 1: **How We Learn**

- Reading selections: "Multiple Intelligence"
  "What is Intelligence Anyway?"
  SQ3R (external article assignment based on technique)

Listening: Unit 3: Early to Bed, Early to Rise, pp. 45-68 (Theme: Medicine)

Wednesday March 17 is a Monday schedule

Week Four: March 19-23

Mechanics: Consistent Verb Tense (handout)

- Chapter 32: Subject Verb Agreement pp. 468-474
- Additional Information on Verbs (handout)

Textbook

Langan, J. (2003). *English skills (7th ed.)*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Mather, P. & McCarthy, R. (2003). *Reading and all that jazz: Tuning up your reading thinking, and study skills* (2nd ed.) Boston: McGraw Hill.

Ferree, S. & Sanabria, K. (2004). *North star: Focus on listening and speaking 2nd Edition (H Intermediate)*.
Longman: London.

Short Stories (Handout)

An English/English Dictionary (Any edition)

An English Thesaurus

Grade Distribution

Reading	Midterm Exam 20% Final Exam 30% Quizzes on Short Stories 20% H.W. & Quizzes 15% Journal Writing 10% Participation 5%	Mechanics	Midterm Exam 20% Final Exam 30% Quizzes 35% Class work & Homework 10% Participation 5%
Listening	Midterm Exam 20% Final Exam 30% Quizzes 30% Class Activities 20%	Writing	Midterm Exam 20% Final Exam 30% Class Assignments 35% Journal Writing and homework 1 Participation 5%

Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism

Students caught cheating receive a grade of zero on the assignment and a warning. Students caught cheating for the second time in the same course will receive a grade of "F" in the course and a second warning. A grade of zero resulting from cheating is counted in the student's course grade.

Attendance Policy

Students should attend all class sessions and come to class on time. Students absent 6 times for classes meet 3 times a week, or 4 times for classes that meet twice a week will receive an F for the cou Students are responsible for all assignments, class work, and announcements given, even during t absence. Make-up exams will NOT be given.
In case of an unannounced delay of an instructor, students ought to wait in the classroom for 10 minutes

Remarks

Photocopied books are not allowed to be used in the class.

- Reading selection : "Superstitions Helps us Cope"
- Annotation Exercise
- Journal entry# 4
- **Listening:** Unit 7: emotional Intelligence pp. 135-154 (Theme Education)

Saturday 19th is Friday schedule

Week Thirteen: 21-25
Mechanics: Conditionals (continued)
- Chapter 50: Combined Mastery Tests pp. 585

Writing: Compare and Contrast p. 205-220
Reading : Chapter 12 : **Propaganda Techniques**
- Reading selections: " Violence in Television and Video Games"
- Short story # 4 = quiz based on story

Listening: Unit 4: The Eye of the Storm pp.69-90 (Theme: Natural Disasters)

Week Fourteen: May 28- April 1
Mechanics: Chapter 51: Editing Tests p. 593
Writing: Compare and Contrast p. 205-220
Reading: Chapter 13: **Evaluating the Evidence**
Listening: Unit 1: For News Resisters, No News is Good News pp.1-24 (Theme: Medi

Week Fifteen : June 4-8

Revision and **Final Exams**

Teaching Method

Emphasis is placed on reading and listening comprehension, writing, and oral fluency. An integr approach is used in teaching all skills.

Prerequisite

EEE450-499 or equivalent