

AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNERS' WRITING SKILLS: A CASE STUDY OF LAW STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF LAHOREZarina Anwaar¹, Zubair Iqbal², Saira Rubab³, Kamran Zaib^{4*} (Corresponding author)**Original Article**

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Abstract

The present research aims to investigate the occurrence of syntactic errors in law under-graduate students' final written tests with an assumption to find out the sources of these errors by considering the theory of errors analysis by Gass and Selinker (2008). The significance of the study lies in the fact that there is a need to find out the sources which are the main causes of students' writing deterioration. Errors are natural outcome of learning which are based on various sources. To find out the errors, the data were collected from the law under-graduate students' final written tests of law department of university of Lahore. The collected data were analyzed in two steps. First, the errors were identified and second, they were analyzed accordingly. Two fundamental questions were posed: (a) what kind of syntactic errors are committed by law students? and (b) what are the sources of these errors? The study is quantitative in nature and SPSS version 20 was applied for the graphical representation of errors frequency. The findings of the study showed that there is an extraordinary frequency of syntactic errors in the final written tests of law students. It also proclaimed that there are different sources of errors like omission, deletion, overgeneralization, interference of first language etc. The findings of study suggest some concrete steps for the further researches in finding the errors.

Keywords: Error analysis, Law students, Syntactic Errors, Overgeneralization, Learning, Language

1. Introduction of the Study

Pakistani judiciary system is based on English and law students are bound to learn it. The national language of Pakistan is Urdu while English has been taught as a second language from the playgroup. In 12 years education, English language is taught as a compulsory subject even then students of law fail to produce a cohesive and coherent piece of writing. The only reason behind this issue is lack of the knowledge of formal system of English language rules working in the writing.

Errors occur because the lack of proper knowledge of grammar of L2 on the part of learners

Every language has its own particular grammatical rules. Learning English as L2 learners should have proper knowledge of grammatical rules and the construction of sentences. Law students make number of syntactic errors in their writings due to the lack of knowledge. Susana (2000) explains that syntactic complexity is about to arrange ideas and large piece of information with the help of

independent and subordinate clauses. Syntactic complexity is one of the most difficult area for ESL/EFL learners. Different languages have different syntactical structures. The structure of mother tongue may be totally different from the syntactical structures of target language. Written text of any language including English has unique and specific structure.

English as L2 is very complicated and incomprehensible regarding the structure of sentence, spellings, and the appropriate use of words as compare to their mother tongue. According to behaviorism which is an important theory of language, the process of language learning is a habit formation and the errors made by learners in the second language learning are due to the interference of the rules and habits which are shaped in the first language learning. These learned and well-formed habits of the first language become cause of resistance and interference in the process of structuring the habits of the second language. Consequently, the errors made by learners in the foreign language are the result of the interference of the first language according to the behaviorists (Corder, 1967, 1971 & 1974; James, 1989, 1998; Ziahosseiny, 1999).

Pit Corder (1967) categorizes "errors" into two types; Errors of Competence and Errors of Performance. Errors of competence are related to the knowledge while errors of performance are related to the expression of that knowledge in the usage of the language. Errors of Competence are committed due to the lack of knowledge of target language on part of learners. These errors are further divided into two kinds; inter-lingual Errors and intra-lingual Errors. Inter-lingual errors take place as the result of the interference of L1 in learning of L2. These errors occur by translating word by word idiomatic expressions, lexis and the grammatical rules from L1 to L2. While intra-lingual errors are caused by the overgeneralization of rules of L1 into the learning of L2 because learners do not have

enough knowledge of L2. It is a specific understanding of target language and exhibits itself as a general phenomenon in language learning. Errors of performance occur due to the mistakes such as "slip of tongue". When learners are under pressure and in stress or have some conflicts with the situation they make errors in performance. Usually, this kind of error is not of serious nature and learners can overcome with slight effort.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Second language learning is a complex process which demands a lot of effort and practice. Law students learn English as compulsory subject from one grade to 12th grades but they usually fail to write a cohesive and coherent piece of writing. The study focuses to investigate five syntactic errors in the writing of law students and also tries to point out the wrong choice of words, tense, subject-verb agreement, misspellings and punctuation marks.

1.2. Research Objectives

Research objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the syntactic errors in the writing of law students.
2. To find out the wrong choice of words, spellings, and tense in writing of law students.
3. To identify subject-verb agreement and punctuation marks of law students in their writing.
4. To explore the causes of syntactic errors in the writings of law students

1.3. Research Questions

Research questions of this study are following:

1. What kind of syntactic errors are committed by the law students in writing?
2. How do the causes of syntactic errors in the writing of law students be recognized?

1.4. Delimitation of the Study

Due to time constraints, the study is delimited to five syntactic errors like wrong word choice, misspelling, wrong use of tense, subject

verb disagreement and punctuation marks. Population of this study is law students of university of Lahore.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study is significant in various ways. It is useful in curriculum designing for developing different strategies which enable L2 learners to overcome the errors in their writings. It is also helpful for teachers to understand the sources of errors so that they can develop meaningful material for second language teaching. It is also beneficial for the students so that they get awareness of their syntactic errors and put great effort to overcome those errors; thus, try to produce a cohesive and coherent piece of writing.

2.1 Literature Review

Error analysis plays an important role in second language acquisition. According to Corder (1974) second language learning process is not simply a process of habit formation but it is to acquire a set of rules of that language which are offered to them by the teacher. There are many stages and processes in language learning and one of the most important stage is error making. Dulay and Burt (1974) explain that error making is inevitable in language learning process. It is a clear indication that learner is acquiring and internalizing the rules of language. Although errors which are made by a learner is not a direct measurement of his knowledge of that language yet they convey the nature of learners' knowledge of that language.

Contrastive analysis was generated from the Lado's linguistics across cultures. Lado (1957) claims that in learning second language, such elements which learners find similar to native language acquire them easily, and those elements which are different from native language they feel difficulty in learning them. Lado was the first person to present the technical procedure for the contrastive study. The criticism of contrastive analysis was that those errors foreseen by contrastive analysis were not explained in learners' language

process. It was made clear that through contrastive analysis, learning difficulties were not predicted. It leads towards another theory which is called error analysis. It is to deal with the second language errors as similar to the errors committed in the acquisition of first language and linguists refer them as "developmental errors". By the early 1970's contrastive analysis was superseded by error analysis.

Research by Corder (1981) shows that learners learn L2 in the same way as children learn their first language. Children commit mistakes while learning their mother tongue. Same is the case with the learners of second language. They also commit mistakes while producing the written text in second language. Furthermore, he has distinguished between error and mistake. According to him, mistake is a poor performance of language whether written or oral. This is resulted by the carelessness of learners. It is to say that these are the mistakes on the part of student. In this case, learners are well aware of the rules of language and mistakes take place as an outcome of their negligence. On the other hand, error is incompetency and lack of linguistic knowledge. It cannot be self-corrected because learner has not enough knowledge of the rules of the second language.

Richards (2014) Error Analysis Perspective on second language Acquisition denotes error analysis as a landmark in the process of second language learning. Corder (1967) suggests the linguists to observe the procedure of second language acquisition and various techniques or strategies adopted by the learners. Strevens (1969) apprehends that errors should not be taken something as problematic but they are to be taken as unavoidable features as indication of students' strategies which they adopt in their learning process. If a regular pattern of errors is observed in learners' writing and if they find to make progress through this pattern, these errors would be taken as a sign of their

progress and success in their learning. Second language acquisition is a process in which a learner tries to internalize the grammatical rules of the language which he is learning.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research Design

A research design is defined as a procedural plan that is taken up by the researcher to answer the research questions genuinely, correctly and carefully. This research is quantitative and empirical in nature. The quantitative model is based on positivism as it is characterized by empirical research (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil 2002). Salient features of quantitative approach are numerical, non-descriptive and its mathematical and statistical nature. The results are often shown through tables and graphs. It explores the answers of what, where and when. Quantitative approach is a systematic method of investigation of observable phenomena by using statistical techniques. Some statistical tools have been used in order to measure the quantity of the errors committed by the participants.

3.2. Population of the Study

A research population is generally defined as a huge collection of individuals or items that is the main concern of research inquiry. Polit and Hungler (1999) define the population as a cumulative or entirety of all the objects, subjects or members that are conformed to a set of qualifications. The students of Law Department, University of Lahore are the whole population of this study.

3.3. Sample

A sample is a set of people, objects that is obtained from a large population for a measurement. The sample is representative of the population in order to make sure the generalization of the findings from the research sample to the population (Jones, 1955; Salant & Dillman, 1994). 50 final papers of different subjects of law students have been selected through random sampling from the whole population of law department of the University

of Lahore. Without any gender discrimination, 50 final papers of different law subjects have been selected for analysis.

3.4. Research Instrument

Instruments are the means to collect data in order to conduct a good research because it is inevitable for a research to collect data. Written tests of law students have been used as a research instrument to collect the data. Final term papers of law student have been analyzed by applying the error analysis model of Gass and Selinker (2008).

3.5. Data Analysis

In present study, the analysis of the samples' papers was done by applying the model devised by Gass and Selinker (2008). The procedure of the model is comprised of 6 stages: To Collect data, Identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing source, remediate/suggestion. To collect data is the first step which is to provide the base for the study. It is to gather the data either written or oral. The data for this research has been collected by selecting 50 final papers of different law subjects of law students. Second step is to identify the errors means to point out what is the error e.g. incorrect sequence of tenses, wrong verb form, and singular verb form with plural subject. The concern of this study is to identify the errors at syntactic level. It has been identified that what kind of errors are committed at syntactic level by the law students.

Third step is about the classification of errors e.g. is it an error of agreement? Is it an error in irregular verb? Five syntactic errors (wrong word choice, misspelling, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, tenses) have been identified by the researcher. Fourth step is to quantify the errors e.g. how many errors of agreement occur? How many irregular verb form errors occur? Syntactic errors have been quantified .e.g. It has been observed that if there are spelling mistakes how many times error in spelling has been committed by students.

SPSS version 20 has been used in order to present the errors in numerical order and data has also been shown through graphs. The present study is quantitative in its nature. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) has been used to present the data. Fifth step is to analyze the source of the errors. After identifying and quantifying the errors, sources of errors are observed .i.e. if students commit errors in the use of tenses, sources of that error is examined. Richards (1974) categorization of sources of errors has been used in order to detect the sources of errors. Sixth step is to

suggest or remediate that error by looking at the kind and frequency of that error.

In this study, the focus was on the analysis of syntactic errors. The syntactic errors (Subject-verb disagreement, tenses, punctuation, misspellings, wrong word choice) were detected and analyzed in the text produced by the participants. Reason behind the choice of syntactical errors was to mainly analyze the students' proficiency in the sentence structuring of written English in academic career. Writing skills in English language are needed in order to be proficient in exams because students present the concepts through writing in exams.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gass and Selinker (2008) Model of Error Analysis (Collecting data, Identifying errors, Classifying errors, Quantifying errors, Analyzing source and Remediate/suggestion) • Quantitative method • Richards (1974) sources of errors 	<p>Analysis of law students' writing tests Errors of students in writing tasks at (syntactical level /sentence structures) To quantify the errors To find out the sources of errors</p> <p>LEARNING OUTCOMES Quality of students' learning and performance To enhance students' writing skills</p>
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4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The present chapter contains an analysis of this study. The analysis of the selected exams sheets has been done by using Gass and Selinker (2008) theory of error analysis. At the first step, syntactic errors have been categorized according to the quantity, found in the final papers. At the second stage, errors have been interpreted and explained according to the theory as mentioned above. The results for the analysis of errors analyzed in the study are then presented, and the significance of the occurrence of syntactical errors by the students of law has been discussed in detail.

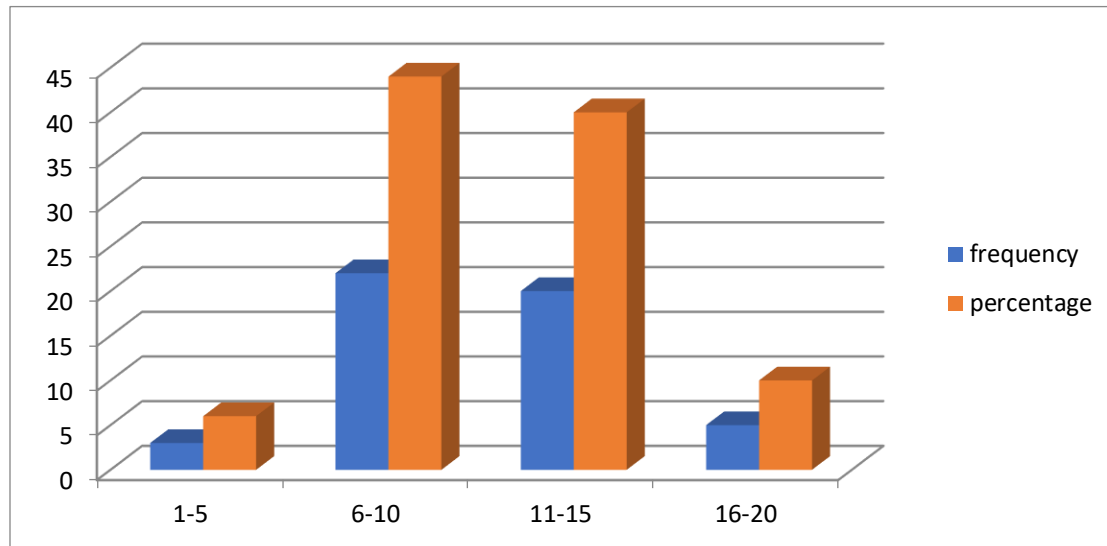
4.1 Wrong Word Choice Found in the Law Final Written Tests

Word choice is a selection of words by the writer that is Word choice refers to a writer's selection of words that is determined by other factors, including meaning (both denotative and connotative), specificity, level of diction, and tone. Word choice is an important constituent of style.

Table No:1

Wrong Word Choice

No of errors	Frequency	percentage
1-5	3	6%
6-10	22	44%
11-15	20	40%
16-20	5	10%
Total	50	100%



The table show that 6% of respondents who committed wrong word choice errors are 3 students and their quantity of error is from 1-5, 44% of respondents who committed wrong word choice error are 22 students and their quantity of errors lie between 6-10, 40% of respondents who committed wrong word choice errors are 20 students and their quantity of errors is from 11-15, 10% of respondents who committed wrong word choice errors are 5 students and their quantity of error is from 16-20. Law students of the University of Lahore committed a number of errors in word choice while writing answers in English language in their final exams of law subjects. Being non-native speakers of English, law students found it hard to express concepts in English and made a lot of errors.

The sentence "Person who's attendance delay". Here, it should be "whose" instead of "who's" because who's is a contracted form of "who is" whereas "whose" is a reflexive pronoun and it is to reflect the subject "person".

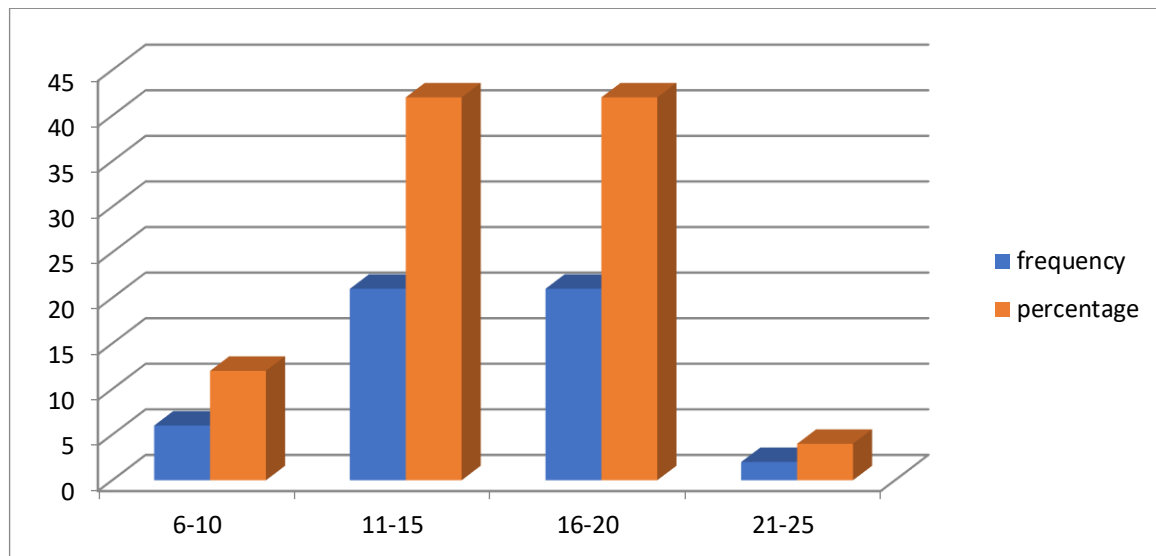
4.2. Subject-verb Error in Law Written Tests

To define the "Subject-Verb Agreement Rules" it is to say that if the subject is singular, the singular verb will be used with it and if subject is plural the plural verb will be used with it. There are number of rules of subject verb agreement in English grammar. For example, if two different subject are connected with the help of "and", the verb will be plural. If two different words used at the place of subject indicating the same person, the verb will be singular in this case.

Table No: 2

Subject Verb Agreement

No of Errors	Frequency	percentage
6-10	6	12%
11-15	21	42%
16-20	21	42%
21-25	2	4%
Total	50	100%



12% of respondents who committed errors in subject verb agreement are 6 students and the quantity of error is from 6-10, 42% of respondents who made subject verb agreement errors are 21 students and number of errors are from 11-15, 42% of respondents who committed errors in subject verb agreement are 21 students and their quantity of errors is from 16-20, 4% of respondents who committed errors in subject verb agreement are 2 students whose number of errors is ranging from 21-25.

Richards (1974) has classified errors into two major categories in accordance the causes of errors. First category is inter-lingual errors and second is intra-lingual or developmental errors. First kind of error is the result of the interference of first language in the learning of second language. Second kind of error occurs when learners have not fully

acquired the knowledge of second language. Moreover, the cause of errors is the difficulty in the learning of second language on part of learners. While examining law students' final exams sheets, students were found with plethora of errors in subject verb relationship. Law students made number of errors in subject verb relationship and it was observed that this error occurred due to their inadequate knowledge of English language.

4.3 Errors of Tenses Found in Law Written Tests

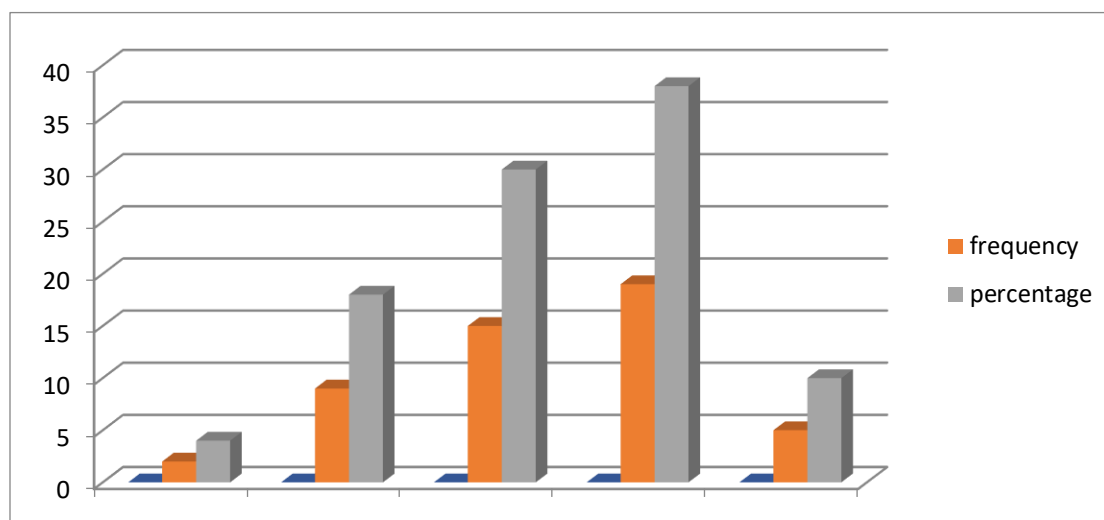
In English, the use of tense has a great significance. Tenses are used in order to relate the sentence with the timeline. By using correct forms of verb and auxiliaries, correct grammatical sentences are produced. So a learner should be clear about the use of form of

verbs and auxiliaries according to tenses. Sentences are written in three tenses: present, past, and future. So, there are particular rules defined by grammarians in order to write in a particular tense. For example, in present indefinite tense, there is an addition of "s" and

"es" in the verb when subject is singular "He, she, it and third person singular" but when students being learners of English are unable to get command over the use of tenses and they make errors in the use of tenses.

Table No: 3

Tenses		
No of errors	Frequency	percentage
1-5	2	4%
6-10	9	18%
11-15	15	30%
16-20	19	38%
21-25	5	10%
Total	50	100%



4% of respondents who committed errors in tenses are 2 students and their quantity of error in the use of tense is from 1-5, 18% of respondents who made errors in tenses are 9 students and their quantity of errors is from 6-10, 30% of respondents who made errors in the use of tense are 15 students and number of errors is from 11-15, 38% of respondents who made errors in tenses are 19 students and number of errors are from 16-20, 10% of respondents who committed errors in tenses

are 5 students and the quantity of errors is from 21-25.

In the sentence "The minor has gain the maturity age", student committed mistake in the use of present perfect tense. To use "the past participle form of verb" with "has" is the rule of present perfect tense. So this rule has been violated by the student who being learner of second language have not yet developed the capability of using present perfect tense and it shows the lack of the knowledge on part of learner.

"The minor's parents are gave credit to many people", In present continuous tense, the helping verbs "is, am, are " are used with present participle form of verb, but in this sentence the student did not use present participle form of verb so it leads towards the distortion of the tense. In the sentence, verb phrase can be either "are giving" in case of present perfect tense or "give" while using present indefinite tense.

"When a guardian is not proper take care of his ward", student made error in the use of present continuous tense because he did not use the present participle form of verb. It should be "taking care" instead of "take care".

In the sentence "These customs pays important role in the law making of any state", student committed error by adding "s" in the main verb with the plural subject. It is the rule of present indefinite tense that there is no addition of "s" or "es" in the verb while using with plural subject. It should be "these customs pay" instead of "these customs pays".

Modal verbs are used for the possibilities, probabilities and uncertainties in English and it is the rule in English that double modal verbs are not used in a single sentence. In the sentence "Opinion of an expert may can be consider if the foreign laws relates the fact in issue", students made mistakes in the use of modal verbs while using double modal verbs in the sentence. Moreover, it is a complex

sentence and first clause 'construction is passive but student made mistake by not using past participle form of verb. It should be "may be considered" or "can be considered" instead of "may can be consider". In the second clause of sentence, there is again an error by the learner in the use of present indefinite tense "foreign laws relates". Student made error by adding "s" in the main verb with the plural subject. It should be "foreign laws relate" instead of "foreign laws relates".

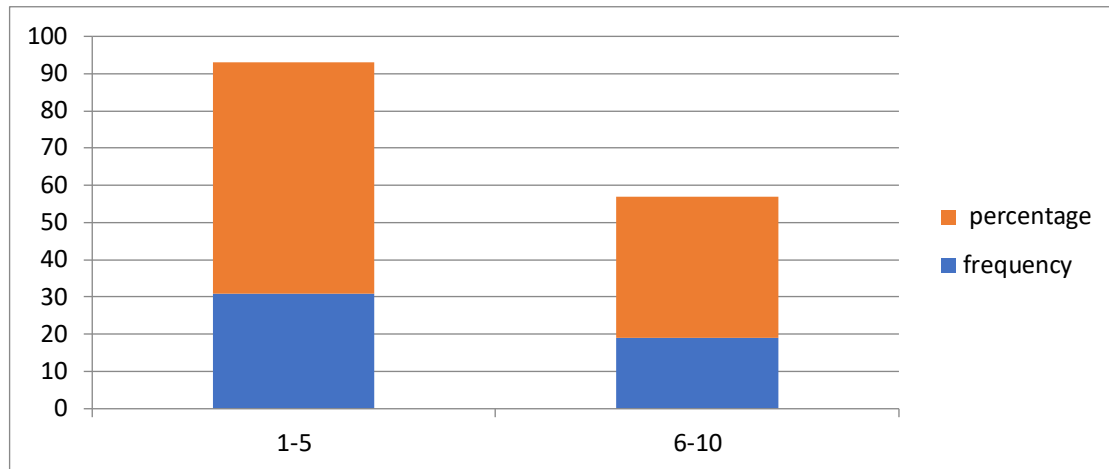
4.4 Errors of Punctuation Found in Law Exams Sheets

Punctuation is the system of symbols which is used to indicate the reader that how a sentence has been produced and how it should be read by the reader. Sentence is the basic unit of conveying a complete thought and they make complete statements. Punctuation is helpful in clarifying the meaning of a sentence.

Punctuations marks are important in a sense to give intended meaning to the language. If a sentence is wrongly punctuated, it changes the meaning of the sentence and sometimes to deteriorate the sense of a sentence. For example, comma is used in a sentence in order to show a pause and if a student is not marking comma at that place in a sentence where it is required, making an error in the sentence and changing or distorting the sense of the sentence.

Table No:4

Punctuation		
No of errors	Frequency	percentage
1-5	31	62%
6-10	19	38%
Total	50	100%



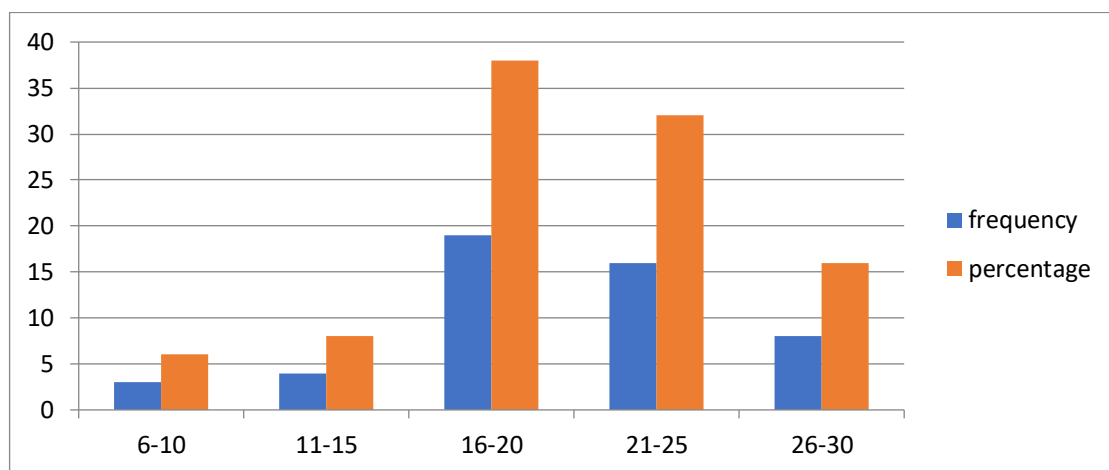
62% of respondents who committed errors in punctuation are 31 students and their quantity of error of punctuation is from 1-5, 32% of respondents who made errors in punctuations are 19 students and their number of error of punctuation is from 6-10.

4.5 Misspelling Errors Found in Law Written Tests

When a person is intended to use a certain word according to the requirement and style of the sentence but is ended up by using a different one through a spelling mishap, then it becomes a grammar mistake.

Table No: 5

Misspellings		
No of errors	Frequency	Percentage
6-10	3	6%
11-15	4	8%
16-20	19	38%
21-25	16	32%
26-30	8	16%
Total	50	100%



6% of respondents who committed error in spellings are 3 students and their quantity of misspelling error is from 6-10, 8% of respondents who made errors in spellings are 4 students and their number of this error ranges from 11-15, 38% of respondents who committed misspelling errors are 19 students and their quantity of the error is from 16-20, 32% of respondents who committed misspelling errors are 16 students and their quantity of error is from 21-25, 16% of respondents who committed errors in spellings are 8 students and their number of error ranges from 26-30.

It has been shown that frequency of students is high in committing misspelling errors in their English writing. Being second language learners students found it difficult to learn spellings of the words in English. Being native speakers students found it difficult to learn and to arrange alphabets in proper order to avoid errors.

In another sentence "Justice and equity passed the decision to solve the problem", the student made error in the spellings of "decision" and becoming the cause of deformation of the sentence. "Family laws are used to resolve the family disputes", in this sentence, there is an error in the spells of the word "disputes", Student being nonnative speakers of English face difficulties in the composition of words while using vowels in the words. In this sentence while writing "Disputes" student wrote "dispute", it shows the student's confusion in the use of vowels in the words. In the other sentences "The plaintiff may object on the discretion of court", "Opinion of an expert is permissible in following matter", "An expert is a person who is professionally acquainted with practice". In the sentences students made errors in the spellings of "Discretion", "permissible", "acquainted". It is obvious from the above mentioned examples that students made frequent errors in the spellings. "Muslim law is derived from Holy Quran", in this sentence the student did not commit only spelling mistake but this kind of mistake is

considered to be grammatical mistake because the word "drive" has a defined meaning in English which means to control the direction or speed. The student used this word at the place of "derive" which means "to obtain something" and it is according to the demand or requirement of the sentence.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing the data, it was found that the frequency of students is high regarding the quantity of errors of misspellings, errors in the use of tenses and errors in the subject-verb agreement .i.e. 8 students whose quantity of errors of misspelling varies from 26-30, and 16 students whose quantity of errors of misspelling is from 21-25. There are 5 students who commit errors in tenses and their quantity of error ranges from 21-25, and frequency of students is 19 whose quantity of errors varies from 16-20. In subject verb agreement errors, 2 students commit mistake in subject verb-agreement whose quantity of error is from 21-25, the frequency of students is 21 whose quantity of errors is from 16-20. These results show that law students made number of errors in the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement and misspellings as compare to wrong word choice and punctuation. It was found that major sources behind these errors were intra-lingual errors and inter-lingual errors. Errors occur in the process of second language learning when students are in learning phase and are not aware of the rules and regulations of second language. So they make developmental errors with overgeneralization, omission and addition.

Different kind of errors have been observed in the English language writing of midlands state university students: omission, misinformation and overgeneralization. In order to make learning or acquisition process an effective one at university, it has been instructed or suggested to help learners through the error correction in their speaking and writing. A random sample of 100 students has been selected out of six hundred and forty five students. Mixed method research approach has

been used in the study while catering quantitative data through the administration of questionnaires and qualitative data through observation. Error analysis has been employed as theoretical framework of this study. Error analysis hypothesis is significant in this study in a respect that teacher has to find out the nature and cause of errors in order to give apt error correction which is to enable the learners to get identification of errors and to make them able to correct them on their own part.

The present study was aimed at identifying the five syntactical errors by applying the Gass and Selinker (2008) model of error analysis. This study is compatible to the aforesaid study in dealing with the errors of second language learners of English language. But the new dimension of this study in the field of error analysis is to find out the errors in the English writing of law students. In previous studies, error analysis has been employed in the English writing compositions or writings of second language learners of English. In this study, errors were identified in the writing of law students while using English as a medium of instruction. The rationale of the present study was to examine the errors in the exams sheets of law subjects by applying the Gass and Selinker (2008) model of error analysis. The concern of the present study was to identify five syntactical errors (subject-verb agreement, punctuation, misspellings, tenses, wrong word choice). After identifying or classifying the syntactical errors, errors were quantified by using SPSS and then sources of these errors were detected. The rationale of the present study was quantitative approach.

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