Common Error Analysis of the Grade Six Pupils' Essays in English

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Abstract

The study aimed to determine and analyze the common errors committed by the grade six pupils in writing essays in English in accordance to Corder's linguistic levels namely; graphological, lexico-semantic and grammatical. It also aimed to determine the error density index of the pupils and the challenges they met in writing essay in English. It made use of a mixed method design and it utilized the corpus-based method where the primary sources of data were the essay compositions of the pupils. There were 79 pupils who participated in writing essay composition based on theme provided by the researchers. The findings of this study revealed that the frequency of errors committed by the grade six pupils in essays in English fell on the graphological level obtaining a total of 2, 177 error counts or 43% of the total number of errors. Grammatical level is second in rank obtaining 1, 974 counts or 39% of the total number of errors. While lexico-semantic level has obtained 911 counts or 18% of the total number of errors. For the level of Error Density Index (EDI), results revealed that majority of the grade six pupils' level is 'very problematic' which implied that the density of errors committed by the pupils is very alarming. As to the challenges met by the pupils in writing essay in English, pupils' lack of vocabulary, Mother tongue interference, lack of writing activities, and textbooks were identified. These factors have contributed to the grade six pupils' errors committed in writing essay in English as justified by the responses of the pupils and teachers in the interview. Thus, a Strategic Intervention Material (SIM) is designed by the researchers which may be used by teachers to improve the essay writing skills of their pupils.

Keywords: Error analysis, Error Density Index (EDI), graphological error, lexico-semantic error, grammatical error

Introduction

Written language is the most vulnerable to scrutiny; the fact that it is on-record as print material. It could be read and reread for purposes of analysis, comprehension, and evaluation. Not like the oral language which can be left unattended in terms of form and function, written language can be detected of its lapses. A written record of English language use will allow receivers to have more time of analyzing because it is on record as a written text (Vertudes, 2012).

According to Belkhir (2016), writing skill appears to be the most difficult language skill to be acquired by EFL learners and even by native speakers since it requires much time and effort. In a similar vein, English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners from other Asian countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh face the same challenge particularly in writing English essays. Sependi (2017) relayed that in Indonesia, students have been introduced

to grammar lessons since junior high school, and yet, writing has always seemed to be the most difficult part even when they are at the university level or a major of English education or English literature. Wee, et. al (2009) and Lalande (1982) both agreed that some students commit the same types of errors in their essays besides the fact that they have already studied English grammar in schools .

Filipino writers whose first language (L1) is not English are confronted with the same challenge as those of their Asian fellows. Aside from learning the mechanics and techniques in writing, they must also consider the conventions of language including grammar and syntax (Fulwiler and Hayakawa cited in Hunahunan, 2017). Mistakes and errors are inevitable in second language learning. Whether one likes them or not, their presence is to be expected and they are our age-old pedagogical concerns. These lapses according to Thyab (2016) should lead to improvement, progress, and not lead to frustration. As well, teachers should learn how and when to correct and even appreciate these errors. Thus, phit pen khruu (errors are our teachers) goes the Thai folk wisdom. That is to say, we learn by making mistakes. Therefore, it might prove fruitful to analyze typical mistakes and errors peculiar to second language learners of English because through them, the necessary and relevant data for formulating a psycholinguistic theory of second language learning will be extracted. According to Tizon (2009), teachers need to treat errors using appropriate strategies so they will not recur in the students' future written works. It is through applied error analysis that remedial courses could be organized and appropriate learning materials and teaching strategies could be devised based on the findings of the theoretical analysis.

It is an undeniable fact that the English language, as a universal language, brings out challenges and difficulties in its usage, especially by non-native learners. It is also worth mentioning that the English language is one of the most significant languages across the globe. So, a person needs to understand the English language to be competent in this language. Learning English as a foreign language is an essential tool for an individual to survive and flourish most particularly in the third world countries. Keeping in view this present scenario, it would not be an exaggeration to say that proficiency in the English language must be acquired to keep pace with the not be an exaggeration to say that proficiency in the English language must be acquired to keep pace with the changing world.

It was on these forgoing premises that this study is conceptualized. The researchers were interested in errors because they are believed to contain valuable information on the strategies that people use to acquire a language. This study is considered beneficial in moving the frontiers in the field of linguistics as its results would provide new evidence as to the nature of second language learning among pupils in the art of their written composition. This would also serve as baseline data in providing appropriate intervention to the pupils' errors in English essays.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to identify, categorize, and evaluate the errors of the grade six pupils' essays in English in the public elementary schools of Cagwait District 2 of Surigao del Sur Division.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following queries:

1. What are the common errors of the grade six pupils' essays in English in terms of the following categories:

    1.1. graphological;

1.2. lexico-semantic; and

1.3. grammatical?

2. What is the level of the error density index (EDI) of the grade six pupils in writing an essay in English?

3. What are the common problems met by the grade six pupils in writing essays in English? and

4. Based on the data gathered, what intervention material may be developed?

Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-method design. The qualitative data (taken from the interview) were gathered after the quantitative data collection to foster a deep understanding and meaningful interpretation of the results. Moreover, it used the content analysis technique requiring a thorough, careful, and exhaustive analysis in identifying and categorizing the errors in the English essay compositions of grade six pupils This is a corpus-based study adopting the Error Analysis procedures of Corder (1974) in choosing the corpus, identifying, classifying, and evaluating of errors of the pupils' essay compositions.

For the categorization of errors, the study adopted the three linguistic levels of Corder namely: graphological, lexico-semantic, and grammatical. The errors committed by the learners were analyzed using the major error categories designed by Ferris (2005). This includes the following: a.) verb errors covering errors in verb tense or form, including relevant subject-verb-agreement errors; b.) noun-ending errors which cover incorrect plural or possessive ending; c.) article-errors including incorrect, omitted, or unnecessary article or another determiner; d.) word wrong which includes all specific lexical errors in word choice or word form, including prepositions and pronoun errors; and e.) sentence structure which refers to the errors in sentence/ clause boundaries (run-ons, fragments, comma splices), word order, omitted words or phrases, or other unidiomatic sentence construction.

The study employed the simple random sampling method through the fishbowl technique, the researchers got the 79 participants as sample size. As a corpus-based study, the primary sources of data in this research were the essay compositions of the grade six pupils. Each pupil was asked to write an essay composition based on the theme/topic. To obtain data on the common errors in pupils' essays, the researchers analyzed the 79 essay compositions of the grade six pupils.

The essay compositions were evaluated in terms of graphological, lexico-semantic, and grammatical errors based on Corder's linguistic levels. These categories were further analyzed using Ferris' Model of Common Writing Errors.

In analyzing and marking the errors, the following codes were used:

Code	Description	Code	Description
01A	The number stands for the students' code while the letter is the school's code	Po	preposition error
P	Punctuation	Vt	verb tense
S	Spelling	Vf	verb form
C	Capitalization	Sva	subject-verb-agreement
Wc	word-choice	A	article/determiner
Wf	word form	Ne	noun endings (plural/ possessive)

Iu	informal usage	**F**	Fragment
Ie	idiom error	**Ro**	run-on sentence
Ce	conjunction error	**Ss**	sentence structure
Pe	pronoun error		

After each essay was analyzed, the errors were then classified and tallied using the tally sheet the researchers designed. The total number of clauses and erroneous clauses were also counted and recorded in the tally sheet which was used in the computation of the error density index (EDI) of each writer and overall EDI.

To get the responses with regards to the problems encountered in writing English essays, the researchers conducted an interview. The results of which aided in the deeper understanding of the data gathered.

The researchers tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted the data using frequency counts and percentages to categorize the errors of the pupils' essays. The error- density index (EDI) was also computed to determine the gravity of errors and to decide as to the level of tolerability of pupils' errors. EDI was computed by dividing the number of erroneous independent clauses by the total number of independent clauses. According to Malicsi (1995), the researcher or teacher has the discretion to determine whether or not the computed EDI of the students passed or failed his/her standard depending upon the objectives of his/her written exam. In the case of this study, the researchers chose not to use-the "passed" or "failed" standard as the objective of the study is not on judging the pupil's writing skills but on evaluating the frequency, gravity, and level of tolerability of the pupils' errors. Hence, in evaluating the magnitude of the level of tolerability of errors, the researchers used the scale designed by Hunahunan (2017) as reflected below:

Error Density Index (EDI)	**Verbal Description**
0% - 20%	not at all problematic
21%- 40%	slightly problematic
41%-60%	moderately problematic
61%-80%	very problematic
81%-100%	completely problematic

As seen in the above scale, a sort of a 5-point scale was adopted where each scale is bracketed in the 20s. As the EDI increases, the level of tolerability also decreases which means that the magnitude of error becomes more problematic.

Results and Discussion

The Common Errors of the Grade Six Pupils' Essays

The most common errors of the pupils' essay compositions in terms of Corder's graphological, lexico-semantic, and grammatical levels are presented in table 1. A sample of each common error based on the pupil's composition is also presented in the table.

Table 1. Common Errors Committed with Examples

Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage	Sample Errors	Correction of Errors
A. Graphological				
1. Capitalization	962	19%	do not touch your nose, eyes, or mouth.	Do not touch your nose, eyes, or mouth.
2. Spelling	658	13%	…deases, sneez, mashk, dissy…	…diseases, sneeze, mask, dizzy…
B. Lexico-Semantic				
1. Preposition	405	8%	Avoid going out and stay in home.	Avoid going out and stay at home.
2. Word Choice	253	5%	It is not easy if you get effected by the virus.	It is not easy if you get infected by the virus.
C. Grammatical				
1. Verb Tense	658	13%	The virus will infected the people after close contact.	The virus infected the people after close contact.
2. Verb Form	405	8%	The virus was already spread in different places.	The virus has already spread in different places.

As gleaned in table 1 specifically in the **graphological errors**, two of the most common errors in the graphological level are capitalization and spelling with 962 frequency counts or 19% and 658 counts or 13% respectively in the overall total number of errors.

One prevalent mistake in capitalization is that the pupils failed to capitalize the initial letter of the first word of a sentence as in the example: "do not touch your nose, eyes or mouth.", where the initial letter D in the word do which is the first word of a sentence is written in lowercase. In the case of spelling, some writers failed to use the correct spelling of words where it is entailed just like in the given example: "deseases (diseases), sneez (sneeze), mashk (mask), dissy (dizzy)".

Errors on capitalization are supported by the study of Sodelind (2008) who claimed that mistakes concerning capital letters were very common compared to other mistakes and that the writers seemed to have grasped some grammatical rules on the matter, but not all. On the other

hand, the problem with the spelling of the writers is an affirmation to the study of Samantha (2015) which claimed that spelling is a common error among students.

While on the lexico-semantic type of errors, the table presented the two most frequently committed errors which include the incorrect use of preposition and pronoun obtaining a frequency count of 405 or 8% for prepositions and 253 or 5% for word choice independently from the total number of errors. One frequent error in a preposition is that the pupils tend to use the wrong preposition in constructing a sentence as in the example: "Avoid going out and stay in home," where the preposition 'in' is inappropriately used and should be replaced by the preposition 'at'. In the case of word choice, the pupils used some words leading to errors as in the example: "It is not easy if you get effected by the virus," where the word 'effected' was used improperly instead of the correct word 'infected' as the verb of the sentence.

This result was affirmed by Suzanne (2017) who claimed that errors in the use of preposition in and at occurred more often than errors in the use of other prepositions. High error rates also occurred within the error category of verbs, with 658 errors or an error rate of 13% for verb tenses and with 405 errors or an error rate of 8% for verb forms. This finding may explain that the use of verbs was a major learning difficulty for all the grade six pupils. The use of verb tenses shows that the grade six pupils still find difficulty when and how to use the tense and the form of the verb. The tenses most commonly misused were the simple past tense, future tense, past perfect, and simple present.

Common Errors Committed by the Grade Six Pupils in English Essays Based on Corder's Linguistic Levels with Specifications

Figure 3 presents the frequency of errors committed by the grade six pupils in their essays in English analyzed based on Corder's Linguistic Levels: graphological, lexico-semantic, and grammatical.

As gleaned in the figure below, it shows that the pupils committed common errors most frequently on the graphological level obtaining a total of 2, 177 error counts, or 43% of the total number of errors. The grammatical level is second in rank obtaining 1, 924 counts, or 38% of the total number of errors. While the lexico-semantic level has obtained 962 counts or 19% of the total number of errors.
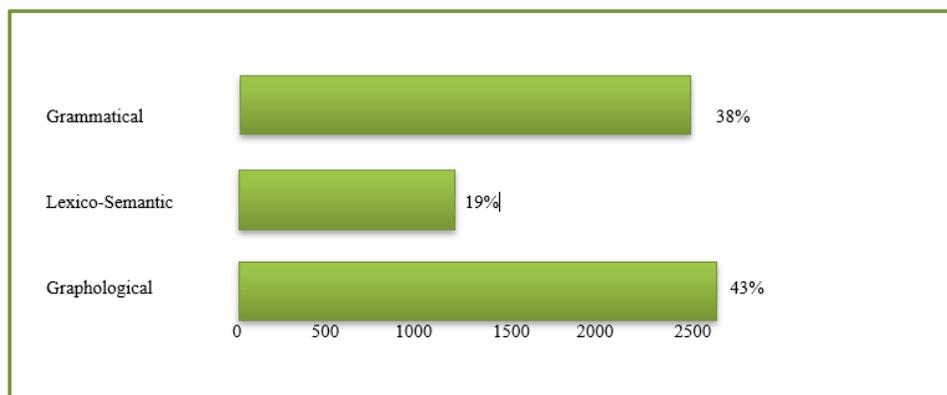

Figure 3. Frequency of Errors in Terms of Corder's Linguistic Levels

This result further reveals that grade six pupils have mostly found difficulties on the graphological level which consisted of capitalization, spelling, and punctuation.

The above claim was affirmed by Pokhrel (2016) in the study entitled "Bachelor Level Students' Proficiency in Free Writing." The study found that out of the 30 students, 10% of them committed errors in spelling, and 47% errors in the use of punctuation markers. This manifests that graphological error is a serious matter.

Frequency of Errors in terms of Graphological Linguistic Level

Figure 4 displays the frequency of errors in the grade six pupils' essays in English at the graphological level.
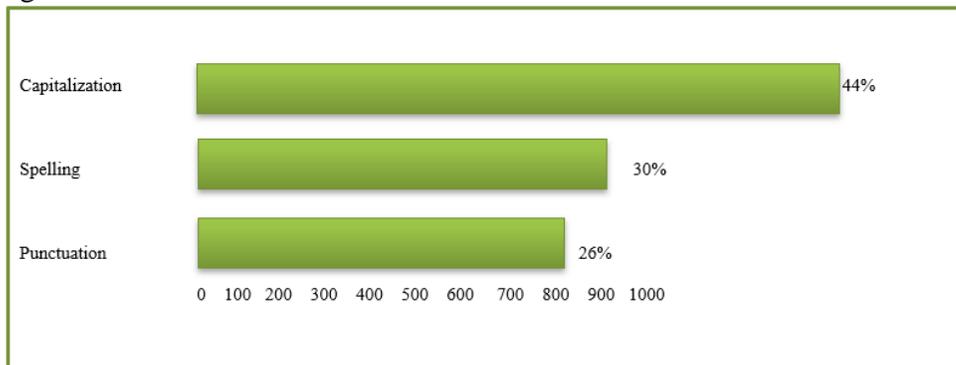

Figure 4. Frequency of Graphological Errors

The above figure shows that the pupils committed errors most frequently in capitalization having 962 error counts or 44%. This is followed by the spelling errors obtaining 658 error counts or 30%. Lastly, the punctuation securing 557 error counts or 26% of the total number of errors in the graphological level which has obtained the highest total percentage and ranked first among the three linguistic levels with the overall number of errors reaching up to 2, 177 error counts.

It is important to note that punctuation comes third in rank in the total number of errors having obtained 557 error counts or 11% from the total number of errors. The result above is almost in consonance with the outcome of the study of Shweba and Mujiyanto, (2017) in which they identified that capitalization error was the most committed error, followed by the punctuation error, and spelling error was the least error committed by the first-year English students. It was concluded that most of the respondents committed some errors because of their lack of knowledge, lack of balance in the curriculum, and the influence of the mother tongue.

Frequency of Errors in terms of Lexico-Semantic Linguistic Level

Figure 5 presents the frequency of errors in the grade six pupils' essays in English in the lexico-semantic level.
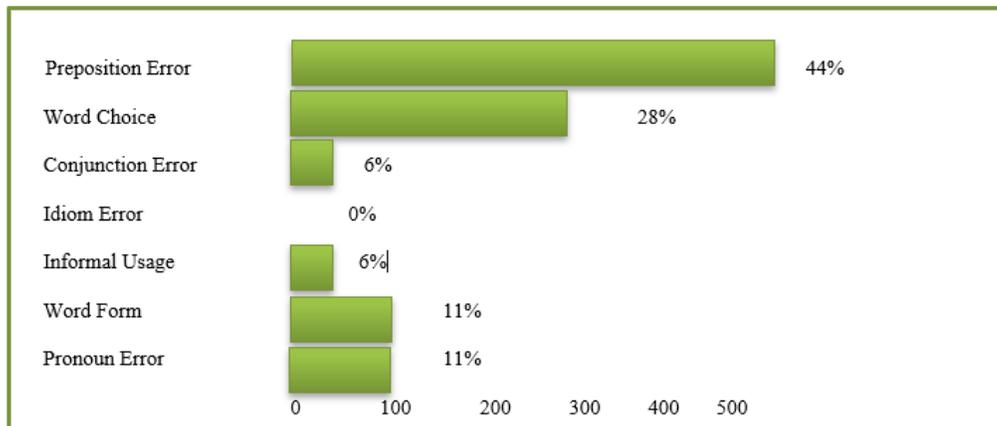
Figure 5. Frequency of Lexico-Semantic Errors

As revealed in the figure above, preposition comes first in rank having 44% of the total number of errors in the lexico-semantic level which obtained 405 error counts. Errors on word choice come next in rank obtaining 28% apparently from the total number of the lexico-semantic level reaching 253 error counts. Word form and pronoun has obtained 11% apparently with 101 error counts each. Conjunction and informal usage have obtained 6% with 51 error count individually, while idiom has obtained 0% errors due to the low occurrence in the pupils' essays. The result shows that among the lexico-semantic errors, the preposition is the most committed error among the grade six pupils in their essays in English.

The data above is supported by Jeptarus and Ngene (2016) whose study focused on the comments and results from the Keiyo District KCPE Analysis 2005-2008. The researchers found that the status in Kenyan districts for English is not good. The word-meaning errors could be causing poor results because fluency in all aspects of the English language enables the pupils to perform better in all other subjects. The result further manifests that lexico-semantics should be taught seriously by the language teachers to improve the pupils' competence in writing.

Frequency of Errors in terms of Grammatical Linguistic Level

Figure 6 presents the frequency of errors in the grade six pupils' essays in English at the grammatical level. As gleaned in figure 6, two of the most common errors in the grammatical level are the verb tenses and the verb forms. Verb tenses obtained 658 counts or 34% and verb forms with 405 counts or 21% from the total number of errors in the grammatical level.
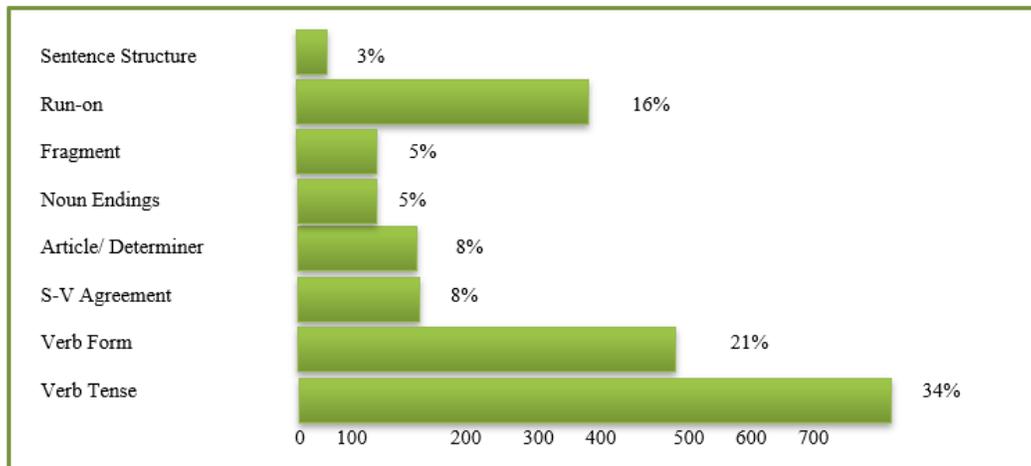
Figure 6. Frequency of Grammatical Errors

Furthermore, run-on errors have obtained 16% with total error counts of 354. The subject-verb agreement has obtained a total percentage of 8% or 203 error counts, determiner has 8% or 152 error counts, fragments and noun endings have 5% individually with 102 counts for fragments and 91 counts for noun endings, while errors on sentence structure have obtained 3% with 61 counts from the total number of errors in the grammatical level.

In consonance with the result above, Wornyo (2016) disclosed in his study that the students revealed during the focused group discussion that they were most of the time confused over the English grammar rules and were unable to decide which rule to apply. They all viewed the learning of grammar as a difficult task.

The Level of Error Density Index (EDI) of the Grade Six Pupils in English

Table 2 shows the result of the analysis of the level of Error Density Index (EDI) of the Grade Six Pupils in English.

Table 2. The Level of Error Density Index (EDI) of the Grade Six Pupils in English

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not at All Problematic	0	0
Slightly Problematic	2	3
Moderately Problematic	11	14
Very Problematic	31	39
Completely Problematic	35	44
Total	**79**	**100**

Scales: 0% - 20% (not at all problematic); 21%- 40% (slightly problematic); 41%-60% (moderately problematic); 61%-80% (very problematic); 81%-100% (completely problematic)

In the computed Error Density Index, the result shows that 35 or 44% of the 79 pupils have an EDI classified as 'completely problematic'. In fact, twelve of them have even incurred a 100% error-density index which means that all their clauses used in their respective essays are erroneous. Worth mentioning also is that none of the writers got an error-free essay composition. Results also revealed that the majority of the grade six pupils' level is 'very problematic' which implied that the density of errors committed by the pupils is very alarming.

This result signifies that error-making is indeed a natural phenomenon in the learning of all kinds (Robinson, 2008). Furthermore, Olasehinde's (2006) argument on the inevitability of error-making among learners is also fortified by this result. This shows that errors are unavoidable and necessary parts of learning. Furthermore, this magnitude of error as gleaned in the overall density index needs due consideration otherwise, the composition of high-quality essays will be affected.

The Common Challenges Encountered by the Grade Six Pupils in Writing Essays in English

As presented in the pupils' Error Density Index (EDI) in Problem 2, the density of errors committed by the pupils is very alarming. This demonstrates that the grade six pupils, being second language learners of English are quite struggling in expressing their ideas through writing using the second language. It is very important to determine the difficulties faced by the pupils in writing essays for assessment, feedback, and intervention. Thus, the following problems have surfaced and such issues were gathered by the researchers via interviews of pupils and teachers in the field. The results were consolidated and summarized into four (4) issues. They include the lack of vocabulary, mother tongue/ language interference, lack of writing activities, and textbooks.

For the lack of vocabulary, pupils believed that the limited knowledge of English words is always responsible for their weakness in English essay writing. This led them to write words incorrectly and inappropriately in their compositions which resulted in committing errors. Four (4) out of 7 teachers who have responded in an interview believed that lack of vocabulary is the main cause of the difficulty in writing essays as a result the pupils commit errors in their compositions.

Another factor which challenges the pupils in writing essays is the mother tongue interference. L1 interference or first language interference has been found to contribute to the difficulties of the writers in writing essays. Pupils believed that L1 interference always plays a role in their weakness in English writing skills. According to Hourani (2008), students make different types of errors, and most of these errors were due to mother tongue interference and/or intralingual transfer.

Lack of writing activities has also led to weakness in the writing skill of the grade six pupils as a result, a lot of errors in pupils' essays have occurred. Pupils believed that the lack of writing activities and homework is also responsible for their weakness in English writing skill.

A lot of teachers mentioned that the school textbook is to blame for the cause of pupils' errors in their writing. Teachers believed that the writing drills in the school curriculum are not satisfying and some said that their pupils seldom practice writing daily. Moreover, the majority of the teachers said that sometimes time constraints have affected the concentration on the writing skill in their classrooms. Teachers had made several comments about the issue.

The above-mentioned challenges are in parallel with the statement of Nyasim (2014) who asserted that students face difficulties in writing essays. He pointed out that most students have a limited vocabulary. Therefore, they repeat the same words continually. This is similar to Rifaat (2019) who mentioned that the lack of vocabulary, worry about being mistaken, have no idea to start writing, or have no good strategy to write are the common difficulties faced by students when they are asked to write a paragraph. Moreover, Nyasim (2014) elucidated that L1 interference is also one of the problems experienced by students in writing essays. Furthermore, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) in Lalam (2018) said that students do not know how to organize their notions. The majority of the pupils face difficulties in writing a coherent text, taking in the grammatical structure, using the coherent and connecting ideas logically due to lack of practice.

Conclusions

In writing essays in English, pupils tend to commit graphological errors. This means that the pupils have difficulties in learning capitalization, spelling, and punctuation in the English language. This indicates that pupils have not yet mastered the English competencies taught in school particularly those which pertain to English graphology.

It is also apparent in the Error Density Index (EDI) that the pupils committed several errors in the different linguistic levels. Thus, the errors were considered very problematic. The density of pupils' errors manifests a very alarming result. This proved that grade six pupils, being second language learners of English are struggling.

The challenges encountered by the pupils in writing essays were identified. Included were the lack of vocabulary, mother tongue interference, lack of writing activities, and the textbook. The aforementioned issues were considered as reasons behind the difficulties of the grade six pupils in writing essays in English. If these issues will not be properly addressed, pupils will continue to struggle in writing English essays or any other compositions. As a form of intervention, the researchers crafted a Strategic Intervention Material (SIM) which will hopefully address some of the aforesaid issues.

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