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RESEARCH PAPER

Practicing Error Analysis Techniques to Enhance Academic Essay Writing Skills

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
*Corresponding Author: adnantahirqureshi@gmail.com	English language teachers are trying different teaching methods, approaches and techniques to improve language skills of ESL and EFL learners, and this study focused on practicing error analysis teaching techniques to enhance academic essay writing skills. This action research was conducted in order to explore the effectiveness of practicing error analysis techniques to enhance academic writing skills of intermediate level learners. A pre-test, a post-test and a feedback questionnaire were used to collect data, and it was analyzed by mixed methods. The students' results of tests, their performance during practice activities in the class and responses to the feedback questionnaire demonstrated that error analysis teaching techniques were proved very effective and successful in improving academic essay writing. Learners' experience in this class improved their knowledge, understanding and performance in error analysis and academic writing as well as increased their level of motivation and self-confidence. That was why, the learners performed well during the practice error analysis activities in the class and in the final test. All these results and responses showed better learning outcomes through practicing error analysis teaching techniques to enhance academic essay writing of the learners at intermediate level

Introduction

The learners of English language study English for different needs and purposes (Long & Doughty, 2009), and the experts make efforts to innovate different teaching and learning techniques to enhance L2 language skills, but as quoted by Reader's Digest (1998), the learning of language skills creates many difficulties for the learners especially in learning academic writing skills. Thus, there is always a pressing need for good teaching materials and effective teaching techniques for successful learning, and errors analysis teaching techniques do help the students in effective and successful learning. Though learning does not happen in perfection, we can make it more effective and successful by applying different teaching techniques. There are many areas of difficulties, misunderstanding, wrong applications of patterns, analogies and rules, and there are different causes of such problems including the defective textbooks, wrong and faulty

teaching system, L1 interference, structure differences of L1 and L2, as stated by Ferguson (1965), and deficiency in essential English grammar that push the students towards complication and failure in learning academic writing skills, but error analysis techniques do help the teachers and the learners in all these areas to resolve their problems. Errors and mistakes spoil the language performance and create a bad impression about the users. The sound knowledge of English grammar, common errors and mistakes in English can lead the learners towards a world of correction and perfection in writing. Many researchers including Ellis (1995), Keshavarz (2003, 2006) and Darus (2009), Jabeen (2015) and Zafar (2017) have contributed towards the importance and effectiveness of errors analysis in language learning. The learners commit errors and make mistakes during their language learning process. Corder (1974) drew a clear line between errors and mistakes that leads towards better understanding and performance in errors analysis. He states that errors are the results of incomplete and ineffective learning and learners' linguistic incompetence that cannot be self-corrected, but mistakes are the ineffective and poor performance in using the language that can be due to many physical and psychological reasons including carelessness, slip of tongue and fatigue, and the mistakes can be self-corrected. Some of the researchers, as the behaviorists believe and support, hold the opinion that errors and mistakes should be a welcome symptom of weakness in learning, course material and teaching techniques while others take them as a positive sign of learning as supported by the mentalists. The numbers of errors and mistakes have been increased in L2 writing because writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer tries to demonstrate his control over content, format, vocabulary, sentence structures, punctuation and spellings (Nunan, 1989). Keeping in mind all these teaching and learning aspects of errors analysis and teaching of academic writing, this study made efforts to fill the gap in teaching essay writing by practicing error analysis techniques (EAT) in an action research class because nothing has yet been done in this particular area of research study at intermediate level.

Literature Review

Error analysis (EA) was known as the *darling* of the 1970s (Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1977) that kept developing systematically because of its importance and effectiveness. Most of the experts focus on the innovations in ELT methodology because they are directly related to effective teaching and learning, better learning outcomes and motivation. Despite all the serious efforts by the experts, the learners always commit errors and make mistakes in their learning. Errors in speaking can be ignored and excusable to some extent because they give no harm except a bad impression about the speaker, but the errors in academic writing are neither excusable nor harmless because they cause failure and low grades in exams, so it is very important to get rid of them as soon as possible. Error analysis is a very complicated problem, so language teachers should have theoretical foundations to do well (XIE and JIANG, 2007). It is also important to understand our attitude towards errors and mistakes. Who is responsible for errors in learning – the students or the teachers? Teachers are blamed for causing errors by sloppy and careless teaching and planning, and the students are blamed for errors because of their lack of motivation, self-discipline and general intelligence, but the intelligent and motivated students do make mistakes. Some teachers correct the errors at once because they believe that the students should not be let unchecked and let them not make it their strong and wrong habit; otherwise, it will be very difficult to get rid of them. Some

teachers hold the opinion that we should not do so because it can affect the learners' performance. According to Brooks (1964), like sin, error is to be avoided..., but according to Hendrickson (1978), the teacher should take a constructive view of learners' errors and permit rather than correct them. Ellis (1995), Keshavarz (2003, 2006) and many others think that the major causes of errors are: overgeneralization, simplification, underuse, fossilization, lack of knowledge of rules and L1 interference that can be classified into four categories, and they are: addition, omission, selection and ordering (Corder, 1967, 1971, 1974). Richards (1971) classified errors as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules and false hypothesis. Whatever the causes of errors are there in learning a target language, they always provide a strong support to remedial work (Sharma, 1980).

Errors are the systematic deviations from the norms...(Ridha, 2012). Burst and Kiparsky (1974) and Lengo (1995) also distinguished between global and local errors as quoted by Ridha (2012). Error analysis is described as a set of procedures to identify, describe and explain learners' errors (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). It seems that error analysis is associated with a rich and complex psycholinguistic view of the learners as stated by (XIE and JIANG, 2007). Some experts take errors as a failure, others take them as positive aids to learning. There are different types of errors; for example, errors of competence, errors of performance, inter-lingual errors that are crop up when the L1 acts upon L2 imposing its structure and mode of expressions as the case is with Pakistani students. Intra-lingual errors are because of irregularities and ambiguities of English grammar. According to Pit Corder (1982), there are three major causes of errors which are labeled as 'transfer error' caused by mother tongue interference, 'analogies' caused by overgeneralization and 'teaching-induced error' that are encouraged by teaching material and method...error analysis also helps to make decisions in drawing up a curriculum for learners and understanding the effective teaching. There are two well-known approaches towards errors analysis, and they are the errors analysis that includes location of errors, explanation of errors, assessing the errors and classification of errors, and the contrastive analysis includes systematic comparison of specific linguistic characteristics of two or more languages at phonological, grammatical, lexical and cultural level, and Fries (1945) established it as an integral component of foreign language teaching. Keshavarz (2003, 2006) also mentioned the two branches of error analysis – theoretical analysis of errors and applied error analysis.

Errors and mistakes provide important feedback, inform the teachers about the effectiveness of teaching material and techniques, and they talk about what the learners have been learnt and taught. They help to decide the next teaching and learning steps and plans including the revision of previous lessons, starting new lessons and the selection of different syllabus or course contents. Correction can be defined as feedback on error that should be positive to motivate the learners. Hendrickson (1978), listed five fundamental questions regarding error correction, and they are: (i) Should error be corrected? (ii) If so, when the errors should be corrected? (iii) Which errors should be corrected? (iv) How should these errors be corrected? (v) Who should correct the errors? James (1998) also suggested three principles of errors correction as quoted by (XIE and JIANG, 2007). According to Brumfit (1977), a teacher can underline the error and diagnose it by writing the appropriate symbol in the margin, can underline the error without diagnosing it, can diagnose the error without showing where it is in the line, and he can put a cross in the margin for each error. Teachers can also choose some major errors and mistakes, make a

list and discuss with the students. Practicing such language activities help learners to write correct English because of a positive reinforcement, as stated by Zafar (2017), and the learners may gradually *unlearn* the incorrect structures and learn the correct ones, and practicing these techniques can help the learners improve their academic writing skills. Many studies were conducted to analyze learners' errors in learning English, but this study focused on practicing the error analysis techniques followed by class discussions and question-answer sessions to enhance the learners' academic writing skills at intermediate level. A superficial study of things will not reveal their real worth and understanding, and we cannot learn the value of things by making a cursory examination, so we should think time and again and go deeper for better errors analysis as rightly suggested by John Dryden (1677).

Errors, like straw, upon the surface flow;

He who would search for pearls must dive below.

Material and Methods

The following details about the participants and the methodology can help to understand the context and perspectives of this action research study.

Participants

The researchers designed a well-defined plan and collected data using a pre-test, a post-test and a questionnaire after error analysis treatment. The study focused on enhancing essay writing skills of intermediate level Pakistani learners through error analysis techniques. The study was delimited as mentioned below:

a) Only twenty intermediate level learners from public colleges were taken.

b) These male learners were about 18 – 22 years.

c) These learners were taught academic essay writing skills through task-based language teaching and error analysis techniques.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The research participants were given a handout and were asked to correct and rewrite the essay, as a pre-test, on 'My Aim in Life.' It was a five-paragraph essay of 670 words having 50 errors and mistakes about the use of appropriate word choices, sentence structures, articles, punctuation marks, prepositions, capitalization, verb forms, singular and plural forms, subject-verb agreements, possessive cases, active and passive sentence structures, direct and indirect narrations, time phrases, place phrases, conditional sentences as well as model verbs as also discussed by Tizazu (2014). There was also incorrect use of topic sentence, hook, thesis statement, concluding sentence, counter-argument and refutation. The students were given 90 minutes to rewrite the given essay on the answer sheet after correction. After reading the answer sheets of the learners' word by word and sentence by sentence, the errors and mistakes were counted and categorized to collect data, and these errors and mistakes were the focus during the

teaching treatment through error analysis techniques. In every class, the teacher wrote some incorrect sentences on the board, and the teacher and the students work on them one by one. After the discussion and analysis of these 50 selected sentences, the learners were given two handouts each to practice error analysis again in the class and at home, discuss the sentences in pairs and in groups and then ask questions about them. There were twenty-five sentences in each handout, and after each sentence, the learners had to follow the instructions such as: (i) Underline the error in the sentence above (ii) Why do you think it is an error? (iii) Correct and rewrite the sentence on the lines. The learners tried to correct the sentences individually, and then they were asked to discuss their sentences again in pairs and in groups, but they were not allowed to have a pen or pencil in their hands until they finish. After the discussion and oral correction, they were asked to make changes or re-correct the sentences for the final. In the end of that teaching treatment session of four weeks (36 hours), the learners were given the same essay again to correct and rewrite, as a post-test, to collect final data for analysis. After the error analysis treatment, a feedback questionnaire was also distributed to collect data from the students about the effectiveness of these teaching techniques. A Linkert scale feedback questionnaire was created to measure different areas of language learning. It consisted of three sections focusing on five questions about learning motivation, seven questions about class participation and performance and three questions about the error analysis teaching techniques. The learners' responses were tabulated and analyzed by using SPSS and MS Excel, and it was presented in the frequency tables and bar graphs.

Data Analysis

A pre-test, a post-test and a learners' feedback questionnaire were used to collect data, and the qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to analyze the learners' test results and feedback on practicing error analysis techniques to improve academic writing skills. There were 50 errors and mistakes in the pre-test of correct and rewrite the given essay that focused on different language learning areas as mentioned in 3.2, and there were only 15 questions in the feedback questionnaire which were divided into three sections to measure and record the learners' responses to different ELT areas. The researchers focused on collecting data from the learners to highlight the teaching impacts of practicing errors analysis treatment in an academic writing class. The following results of the pre-test, the post-test and the analysis of the learners' feedback questionnaire proved the positive impacts of practicing error analysis techniques on teaching academic essay writing skills.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
The results of the pre-test and the post-test.

The Pre-test				The Post-test			
S/N	Participants	Marks-50	Percentage	S/N	Participants	Marks-50	Percentage
1	Learner:1	26	52%	1	Learner:1	41	82%
2	Learner: 2	32	64%	2	Learner: 2	43	86%
3	Learner: 3	18	36%	3	Learner: 3	34	68%
4	Learner: 4	19	38%	4	Learner: 4	39	78%
5	Learner: 5	22	44%	5	Learner: 5	41	82%

6	Learner: 6	16	32%	6	Learner: 6	31	62%
7	Learner: 7	22	44%	7	Learner: 7	37	74%
8	Learner: 8	24	48%	8	Learner: 8	42	84%
9	Learner: 9	26	52%	9	Learner: 9	45	90%
10	Learner:10	23	46%	10	Learner:10	36	72%
11	Learner:11	21	42%	11	Learner:11	39	78%
12	Learner:12	15	30%	12	Learner:12	32	64%
13	Learner:13	24	48%	13	Learner:13	38	76%
14	Learner:14	25	50%	14	Learner:14	37	74%
15	Learner:15	22	44%	15	Learner:15	31	62%
16	Learner:16	14	28%	16	Learner:16	29	58%
17	Learner:17	16	32%	17	Learner:17	33	66%
18	Learner:18	19	38%	18	Learner:18	36	72%
19	Learner:19	26	52%	19	Learner:19	44	88%
20	Learner: 20	12	24%	20	Learner: 20	36	72%
	Mean	21.1			Mean	37.2	
	Median	26			Median	36	
	Mode	22			Mode	37	

The Table 1 shows the results of the pre-test and the post-test. It describes the scores of the pre-test as the mean (21.1) the median (26) and the mode (22), but the mean (37.2), the median (36) and the mode (37) of the post-test, and these numbers show a great difference. These results describe the effectiveness of practicing error analysis teaching techniques because the research participants answered the questions in the post-test that they were not able to answer in the pre-test. It was all because they did not study this subject, and they knew nothing about the error analysis and its effectiveness in language learning. They learnt everything up to the intermediate level through traditional teaching methods in large classes in public schools and colleges.

Figure 1. Graphic Representation of the Results of the Pre-test and the Post-test

In the Figure 1, the small bar on the left shows the result of the learners' pre-test, and the large bar on the right describes the result of their post-test after the error analysis treatment. The results prove a big difference in the learners' knowledge, understanding and performance. They were able to answer most of the questions in the post-test which

they could not answer in their pre-test. The result of the pre-test is 21%, and the result of the post-test is 37%, and it proves the effectiveness of practicing error analysis teaching techniques to enhance academic essay writing.
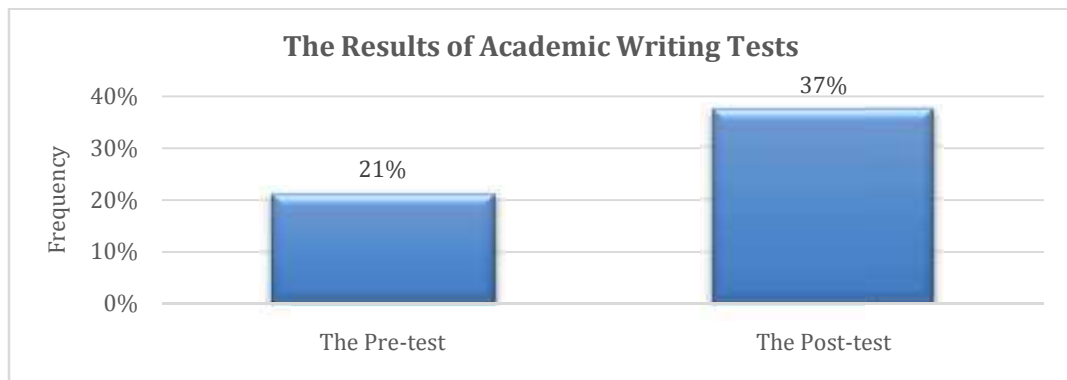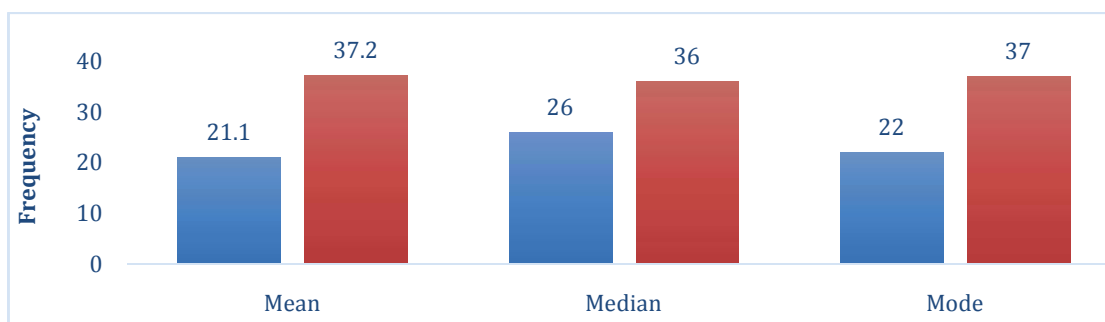

Figure 2. Graphic Representation of the Results of the Pre-test and the Post-test

In the Figure 2, the small bars on the left show the results of the learners' pre-test and the large bars on the right describe the results of their post-test after the error analysis teaching treatment. The mean, median and mode scores of the results show a big difference as already stated in Table 1, and it describes the substantial improvement in learners' understanding and performance in analyzing and correcting errors and mistakes as well as in a given academic essay for correction. The learners were able to answer most of the questions in the post-test which they could not answer in their pre-test, and it proves the effectiveness of error analysis teaching techniques in an academic essay writing class.

A Scale of Learning Motivation

This section had only five questions which were asked to measure the learners' motivation in this error analysis and academic writing class. The following responses of the learners' proved that the students liked learning essay writing through error analysis teaching techniques and found it more effective and interesting than the traditional teaching. They liked the class activities and discussions, friendly learning environment and freedom to ask questions in the class during and after the error analysis activities in pairs and in groups that motivated them to be regular and punctual in the classes. The error analysis teaching techniques also increased their understanding and interest in learning English.

Table 2
Responses to the learning motivation statements

Q.1: Do you think it was an interesting experience to learn through task-based and error analysis techniques in this writing class?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	15	75	75	75

Strongly Agree	5	25	25	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.2: Do you think task-based and error analysis techniques motivated you better than the traditional teaching?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	4	20	20	20
Agree	10	50	50	70
Strongly Agree	6	30	30	100
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Q.3: Were the discussions and activities on task-based writing and error analysis interesting and motivating?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	4	20	20	20
Strongly Agree	16	80	80	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.4: Did the freedom to ask questions in the class motivate you to ask more questions for better understanding?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	3	15	15	15
Agree	7	35	35	50
Strongly Agree	10	50	50	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.5: Did the task-based activities and error analysis techniques increase your understanding and interest in learning English?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	5	25	25	25
Strongly Agree	15	75	75	100
Total	20	100	100	

A Scale of Class Participation and Performance

This section had only seven questions which were asked to measure the learners' class participation and performance. Their responses showed that the students liked learning essay writing through oral and written error analysis activities because these activities helped them understand and perform better in tenses, possessive cases, capitalization, active and passive sentences, direct and indirect narrations, correct use of

time phrases and place phrases, prepositions, conditional sentences and model verbs etc. They also liked the class discussions on these topics during and after the analysis of common errors and mistakes. All these activities increased their understanding that led them to active class participation, and the result was their better performance in the post-test. They liked the friendly learning environment in the class and question-answer sessions during and after the analysis of the given errors and mistakes in pair and in group activities. The learners' responses show the positive impacts of practicing error analysis techniques to enhance academic essay writing skills and proved that it was an interesting and successful teaching experiment at intermediate level.

Table 3
Responses to the statements about class participation and performance

Q.6: Do you think asking questions during and after error analysis activities increased your class participation and performance?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	4	20	20	20
Strongly Agree	16	80	80	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.7: Did the practice of error analysis increase you class participation and performance?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	7	35	35	35
Strongly Agree	13	65	65	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.8: Did you find the error analysis class activities helpful to enhance your writing performance?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	8	40	40	40
Strongly Agree	12	60	60	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.9: Were the error analysis class activities and discussions helpful to learn grammar rules to enhance essay writing?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	12	60	60	60
Strongly Agree	8	40	40	100

Total	20	100	100	

Q.10: Was it effective and interesting to do error analysis class activities in pairs and in groups?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	4	20	20	20
Strongly Agree	16	80	80	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.11: Did the error analysis class activities helpful to understand and memorize grammar rules?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	15	75	75	75
Strongly Agree	5	25	25	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.12: Did the error analysis techniques help you correct and rewrite the given essay?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	9	45	45	45
Strongly Agree	11	55	55	100
Total	20	100	100	

A Scale of Teaching Techniques

This section had only three questions about the teaching and learning impacts of practicing error analysis techniques. The learners' responses proved that they liked the teaching techniques through oral and written error analysis class activities and question-answer sessions because these activities helped them understand the true nature of common errors and mistakes and enabled them perform better in different areas of grammar and essay writing skills. They also liked the error analysis handouts, sentence to sentence analysis and class discussions. All these class activities increased their understanding of grammar and writing skills. Error analysis teaching techniques satisfied the learners' needs for friendly and motivating learning environment in the class and question-answer sessions during and after the error analysis activities in pairs and in groups. The responses of the learners proved that practicing error analysis techniques to enhance academic writing skills was an interesting, motivating and successful teaching experiment at intermediate level.

Table 4
Responses to the statements about teaching techniques

Q.13: Do you think error analysis teaching techniques are very effective to enhance your academic essay writing skills?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	1	5	5	5
Agree	7	35	35	40
Strongly Agree	12	60	60	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.14: Do you think these teaching techniques helped you construct correct and better sentences for your academic essay writing?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Neither	-	-	-	-
Agree	5	25	25	25
Strongly Agree	15	75	75	100
Total	20	100	100	

Q.15: Do you think error analysis class activities in pairs and in groups promote socialization?

Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	2	10	10	10
Neither	1	5	5	15
Agree	5	25	25	40
Strongly Agree	12	60	60	100
Total	20	100	100	

The results of pre-test, post-test and learners' responses to questions in the feedback questionnaire focused on measuring the learners' knowledge and ability in error analysis and essay writing skills, their level of motivation, their class participation and performance, and their opinion about the error analysis teaching techniques. The learners' responses help us understand the different aspects of practicing error analysis techniques to enhance academic essay writing. The learners' responses proved that practicing error analysis techniques in this writing class was an effective teaching experiment at intermediate level through action research that enabled the learners perform well and answered the questions in the post-test that they were unable answer in the pre-test.

Findings

This study focused on answering two specific questions through the analysis of the pre-test and the post-test results and the learners' responses collected through the questionnaire and reached the following findings:

a) The research participants were the students at different public colleges where they were taught through traditional teaching methods, and using L1 and L2 translation activities were the focus to develop writing skills, so they make many mistakes in their writing.

b) They knew nothing about the error analysis and how to correct them.

c) The result of the tests proved the positive impacts of practicing error analysis techniques to enhance academic essay writing skills. Learning academic writing through error analysis teaching techniques enabled the learners to understand the common errors in English, their causes and how to correct them.

d) The error analysis teaching techniques systematically increased the learners' level of motivation and their class performance because they understood the process of correcting errors and mistakes. That was why, they confirmed their positive attitude and satisfaction about practicing error analysis techniques to enhance their academic essay writing.

e) The findings also suggest that teaching of L2 academic essay writing through practicing error analysis teaching techniques is very effective, but only the qualified and experienced language teachers can do it successfully. Moreover, practicing error analysis techniques inspired the learners' confidence, and they could do better in their classes.

f) The learners' results and the responses proved that it was an effective and successful action research to enhance academic essay writing skills through error analysis teaching techniques at intermediate level.

Conclusion

The research participants were from the public colleges where they were taught academic writing through L1 and L2 translation activities. The students knew nothing about common errors and mistakes in English and how to correct them, so they make many mistakes in their writing. This study focused on the results of the pre-test that is 21%, the post-test that is 37% and the responses to questionnaire about the effectiveness of practicing error analysis techniques to improve academic essay writing. Teaching through task-based language teaching and error analysis teaching techniques, practice of correcting common errors and mistakes, class discussions on common errors and mistakes and question-answer sessions did inspire the learners as well as increase their understanding and performance. That was why, they could perform better by successfully answering the questions in the post-test. A considerable improvement in their understanding and performance moved them from 21% of the pre-test to 37% of the post-test. The feedback questionnaire focused on learning motivational, learners' class participation and performance and the effectiveness of practicing task-based language teaching and errors analysis treatment. Their responses proved that the learners liked task-based and error analysis teaching techniques through which they developed their knowledge, understanding and performance systematically. The learners' results and

responses proved that it was an effective and successful action research to teach an academic essay writing class through task-based language teaching and error analysis techniques at intermediate level.

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