

Investigating Sudanese Secondary School Students' Writing Performance in English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract:

This paper investigated the written performance of the Sudanese EFL students at secondary schools. The problem of the study is that Sudanese secondary school students are generally very poor at English language writing activities. This study is significant because it identifies the reasons behind the poor performance of Sudanese secondary school students in writing English as a foreign language. The study aimed to analyze the written work produced by the students in order to identify the types of English language problems. The researchers adopted descriptive method to analyze and discuss data. The subjects of the study consisted of (100) third year secondary school students in the academic year (2013- 2014) in Omdurman Locality. A test issued for data collection. The statistical results of the study revealed those Sudanese EFL students made four common errors; tense (395), spelling (236), articles (63), and prepositions (44) errors rates. This study arrived at some findings: There are significant grammatical and spelling errors made by Sudanese EFL students at secondary schools. The difference between English and Arabic language system lead to negative interference. The study suggested that the students need to be equipped with extra materials such as reading books in order to improve writing skill. The help of native speakers should be sought to work at the Sudanese secondary schools.

Key words: writing, performance, investigating, skill

INTRODUCTION

According to the development and innovations in all aspects of life, the world has become a global village. Consequently, people need to be able to communicate via one common language. There is therefore a need to learn a second language, and the most preferred language is English because it has a huge number of speakers and learners worldwide. It also has been a lingua franca for many years.

Many countries have realized the importance of English language as a means of communication. Therefore, a lot of changes have been made, to bring the teaching of English language in to academic learning at an early stage.

Sudan is one of these countries that teach English as a foreign language, and developing students' written performance is one of its priority programs. The students are not only taught to think and speak well in English, but also to write correctly. So, the policy of the country is to produce good students with better writing and speaking skills. However, the students face difficulties in both these productive skills.

It is true that learning English as a foreign language is not an easy task for non-native learners. According to Brown (2000), in order to master the English language, learners have to be adequately exposed to all of the four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. English Language teaching in Sudan is currently focusing on teaching and learning the four language skills. Nevertheless, the standard of English language among Sudanese secondary school students is on the decline, despite learning English for several years. Sudanese secondary school students are still weak in English, especially in their academic writing. They still seem to make errors in all aspects of language, especially in the grammar and the spelling.

There is no doubt that one of the major difficulties with writing in English lies in the grammar of the language. This has been found to be a major source of writing errors. Therefore, the researcher in this study tries to investigate the causes of these errors, and how to overcome them. There are more than a few ways of thinking about errors in writing. Linguists know about second language acquisition and we recognize how texts, context and the writing process interact with one another. The students' academic writing in a second language usually contains varying degrees of grammatical and spelling errors. These kinds of errors are especially common among second language learners who do not have enough language skills to express what they want to say or write in a comprehensible way. Norrish (1983); stated that to non-native speakers, writing is not an easy task, and in some ways is more difficult than speaking. Writing is more complex in that it tests a person's ability to use a language and the ability to express ideas. As a result, a person needs to write not only coherently but correctly, which requires more time and effort. This difficulty of writing leads students to be more disposed to producing errors.

Finally, the researcher in this study tries to investigate Sudanese students' writing performance through examining the grammatical and spelling errors. The researcher believes that if students have good grammar and no spelling mistakes, they will be good at writing.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study attempts to:

1. identify the types of English language problems that Sudanese secondary school students encounter when writing, and find the pedagogical implications to overcome these problems.

2. recognize the frequency at which these writing problems occur among Sudanese secondary school students.
3. find out the main reasons behind these writing problems that face Sudanese students at secondary schools.
4. manage and develop secondary school students' composition writing skillfully.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects

The subjects of the study were the third year students. The sample of the students in this study was four Sudanese secondary schools. The students of these schools were studying English as a foreign language and as a compulsory subject with other subjects during the academic year 2013/ 2014. They were studying only one curriculum which is SPINE series. They were about 18 years old. They have never been exposed to an English – environment. Therefore, they did not get the chance to enhance their language. They have never been taught by native teachers before, too. They were only taught by Sudanese teachers of English language who also they suffered from the same situation i.e. not being taught by native teachers. The researcher decided to investigate their writing by giving them a composition in order to see the problems they face in writing.

The number of secondary schools in Sudan, Khartoum State is very large. Therefore, the researcher has selected only four secondary schools randomly. The following schools were selected as sample:

School 1: Mosa Al-Daw Hajooj Governmental Model Secondary School third year students (Boys).

School 2: Wadi Saidena Governmental Public Secondary School third year students (Boys).

School 3: Asmaa AbdulRahim Governmental Model Secondary School third year students (Girls).

School 4: Omdurman Governmental Public Secondary School third year students (Girls).

The researcher selected (100) students from the above four schools. These schools were governmental and private schools were not included in this study. The number of boys and girls was similar (25) from each school.

Instruments

A composition is adopted as a tool for collecting data for the purpose of the main study. The composition was carefully constructed to the third year students.

The analysis of the data was carried out through the following:

1. Graphical figures.
2. Frequency distribution.
3. Person correlation coefficient.
4. Median.

In order to obtain accurate results, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. In addition, to design the graphical figures, which are needed for the study, the computer program (Excel) was also used. The analysis, investigation, evaluation and interpretation of the collected data will be presented in the discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Educational System in Sudan

Jambi (2002, p.2) reports that “during the colonization era, the educational system was 4-4-4 years system and the English language periods were about 8 periods per week with a duration of 8 years. These periods were distributed as follows:

- Grammar 2 periods
- Composition 2 periods
- Comprehension 2 periods

Literature One period

Literary book reading One period”

According to Jambi, translation period was not ignored. This arrangement provided the students with plenty of opportunity to use English Language reasonably.

AbdElsalam (1999, p.2) states that “the education system was changed in the 1970s to 6-3-3 year system, and the number of periods was reduced to 6 periods per week with a duration of six years. In the year 1993, this system was also changed to 8-3 year system in which English language was taught for 7 years, with 4 to 6 periods per week”.

These constant changes in system of education in Sudan, and the continuous reduction of the English language periods, has had negative impact on the students' English language standard. This is because the only golden chance to practice English language is inside the classrooms. As well as, the new syllabus is not accompanied with literature, and as it has been stated that any foreign language cannot be taught apart from its literature. Therefore, the standard of the students' English Language declined due to these changes.

The SPINE Series Textbooks

The word SPINE is abbreviations of Sudan Practical Integrated National English. It consists of six textbooks. It is a great effort of the Sudanese instructors and experts of English Language. It is hoped to satisfy the needs of both Sudanese students and Sudanese instructors of English Language.

Basic School Level Textbooks (1-3)

Alfaki (2012,p.15) states that “according to Cuthbert and Ismail (1995,p.4), the aims of teaching the SPINE Series at the Basic Level are to expose pupils:

1. Listening and Speaking: to enable pupils to listen to and understand spoken or recorded dialogues and to participate in similar situation as listeners or speakers.
2. Reading: to read simple text such as essays, stories and selected supplementary readers using effective reading strategies.
3. Writing: to enable the pupils to construct accurate sentences and paragraphs.
4. To enable the pupils to express their ideas in speaking and conversation”.

Secondary School Level Textbooks (4-6)

Al Faki (1997,p.5) explains that “by the end of six years, students should have:

1. Recycled and reinforced their previously learned English Language.
2. Developed further the four language skills with special emphasis on reading and writing.
3. The ability to understand and use English language which is relevant to their needs and which will help them to communicate with adequate, accuracy and fluency in all situations”.

The Main Features of SPINE Textbooks

According to Cuthbert and Ismail (1995,p.5) the main features of the SPINE Series can be summarized as follows:

1. It is designed to be accessible to teachers, pupils and parents who can give support to their sons and daughters.
2. It encourages teachers and pupils to be creative and actively involved in the process of learning and communication.
3. It views language learning as fun, and therefore motivates pupils to learn.

4. It is a national syllabus addressing itself to all Sudanese pupils. It is based on the learner's environment while opening windows to the world especially to the English speaking world.

5. It contributes to making the pupils good Sudanese citizens.

6. It is based on spiral graduation which recycles language items in order to foster linguistic competence.

The New Educational Hierarchy in Sudan

This syllabus was designed and written by Sudanese English language experts and old teachers. The SPINE book series were intended to make English language learning easier and comprehended by both teachers and learners. Spine (4) is divided into six units, and each unit is divided into twelve lessons. Each lesson then has comprehension text, which consists of some questions, giving short answers and grammar items. Spine (4) lesson ten, focuses on the organs of speech, as an introduction into the aspect of phonetic (phonology). Spine (5) is divided into twelve chapters, each chapter consisting of some sections. Each section is designed to develop reading sub-skill techniques such as skimming, scanning, and also to tackle main aspects such as semantics, syntaxes and morphology. In addition to that, it neglects main areas such as phonology. There is a big gap between Spine 4 and Spine 5, which makes students unmotivated and unable to appreciate the English language. Spine (6) is written in a standard format or shape, which stays the same throughout the book. Spine (6) is divided into ten chapters, and each chapter is divided into five sections. These sections are accompanied with some questions such as:

1. Fill in the gaps.
2. Complete the spaces.
3. Give short answers.
4. Match (A) with (B).
5. True and false.

The activities are to assist the students to develop vocabulary understanding and cohesion in text. These series textbooks focus on vocabulary, grammar and phonology and ignores the writing. It has been observed that the three series textbooks (4,5,6) concentrated on comprehension of text which is designed to develop the following sub-skills such as skimming, and scanning. These main sub – skills are:

- 1- To read for gist.
- 2- To read for detailed information.
- 3- To read for specific information.
- 4- Reading for note – taking.
- 5- Reading for reinforcement of specific information.

Some Theories on Writing Skills

As far as the study concerns with writing skill in EFL in general and specifically with Sudanese students' writing performance, it is very important to illustrate the linguists' opinions about writing skill. This is used to consider what the accurate definition of writing is. Here are some linguists' opinions about writing:

Heaton (1988) explained that the writing skill is complex and sometimes difficult to teach, requiring mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also of conceptual and judgmental elements. He added that there are analysis attempts to group the many and varied skills necessary for writing good prose into five general components or main areas. They are: (1) language use – the ability to write correct and appropriate sentences; (2) mechanical skills – the ability to use punctuation and spelling correctly; (3) treatment of content – the ability to think creatively and develop thoughts; (4) stylistic skills – the ability to manipulate sentences and paragraphs and use language effectively, and (5) judgment skills – the ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular purpose with particular audience in mind, together

with an ability to select, organize and order relevant information.

Tribble (1996) concluded that in term of the writing assessment, a text is not assessed in a single dimension but is viewed as being the result of a complex of different skills and knowledge, each of which make a significant contribution to the development of the whole. The five major aspects of a piece of written work (content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics) are evaluated and each of these aspects is accompanied by explicit descriptors of what is meant by band-scale. A range of possible scores is given for each band. These scores can be converted into an overall grade.

Based on what the linguists has stated above, it can be seen that writing skill requires mastery of grammatical rules and rhetorical devices as well. In conclusion, before doing the writing activity, the students must have the ability or prior knowledge in mastering the components of writing to increase their writing ability. The writing components should be mastered by students are: (1) grammatical ability – the ability to write English in grammatically correct sentence, (2) lexical abilities – the ability to choose words that are correct and used appropriately, (3) mechanical ability – the ability to correctly use punctuation-spelling-capitalization etc, (4) stylistic skills – the ability to use sentences and paragraphs appropriately, and (5) organizational skills – the ability to organize written work according to the conventions of English, including the order and selection of materials. The students should master in writing components before doing the writing process because writing is complex and needs a lot of skills and knowledge. Hopefully, they can give the appropriate solutions in students' writing problems. These above writing components are also similar to the writing components (content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics) that are stated by

Tribble. As the reason, these components are also more appropriate with the L2 students.

Teaching and Learning Writing

There are three main integrated issues to be discussed:

Methods of Teaching Writing

There are many different approaches for teaching writing; for example, The Controlled-to-Free Approach, The Free-Writing Approach, The Paragraph-Pattern Approach, The Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach, The Communicative Approach, The Process Approach (Raimes,1983), Genre-Based Writing Instruction (Johns, 1995, 1997, 2002) and the Sydney School- a loose grouping of pedagogical approaches that originated in the work of Australia's Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP) (Feez, 2002).

It should be clear here that there is no one answer to the question of how to teach writing in EFL classes. Surveying the related literature proved that there are as many answers as there are teachers and teaching methods and styles as well as learners and learning styles.

Many EFL programs use a process approach to writing instruction, and some regularly publish collections of learners writing (for an overview see Peyton, 1991). Process writing - as distinguished from "Product Writing"- (White, 1988) is playing a large role in ESL classes. In order to respond to purely formal views of writing, proponents borrowed the techniques and theories of cognitive psychology and First Language composition to refine the ways we understand and teach writing. Emig (1971) looked at what professional writers and students did when they wrote. It was found that good writers concentrated on ideas rather than on correctness. Then process writing gradually developed from this research and from teacher practice. Writing is seen as a communicative act with

an intended purpose and audience. The teacher and other learners help the writer find a topic and revise drafts of a written piece until it conveys the intended meaning. While working to make their meanings clear, learners are assumed to acquire competence using the style, syntax, and grammar and surface features of the language. During the writing process, students engage in pre-writing, planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Learners, however, do not necessarily engage in these activities in that order because the writing process is recursive in nature. The process approach then “breaks the writing act into manageable parts and puts oral language, reading and writing at the service of the student’s communication goals.

Correcting Students' Writing and Teacher' Feedback

The learner's motivation is very important. Lile (2002,p.1) asserts that “If students aren’t given a reward or credit for their efforts, and no feedback is given to the student, then most students’ intrinsic motivation would begin to decrease”. EFL students should be always encouraged to write and express themselves on subjects of their interest. The students need to know that the writing process is difficult. Only through practice can students make the inevitable errors and learn to engage in the process of negotiating meaning through different stages. Involving students in their own writing assessment would be motivating for them and will increase learner involvement in aspects of the learning experience which is highly beneficial. As Cimcoz confirms that “Teachers who want to help their students gain confidence in writing should try to follow a writing process that takes the student from insecurity to success” (Cimcoz, 1999,p.1).

As the researchers mentioned before that grammar teaching can be conducted by means of corrective feedback on learner errors when these arise in the context of performing

some writing task. However, correcting students' writing takes long time. Therefore, some EFL teachers hate correcting students' writing. They also seem to be very lazy to give feedback to the students after or during the lesson. The aim of writing classes, nevertheless, is to improve students' performance in writing accurately across different genres. This requires clear instruction on many items such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, and structure. Tennant (2001,p.27) used two methods for editing/correcting students writing: (1) to write corrections on the paper, using a red pen to make them clearly visible; (2) and "more effective method" to write lengthy comments explaining grammar points, rising questions concerning meaning and logical development, suggesting alternative wording, and reorganizing text. However some teachers do not like such work and immediately they react against it. On the other hand, the results are good because students can learn better. For instance, students can be reminded of a earlier studied grammar rule through explaining its applicability in a specific instance. So it is always helpful for EFL teachers to move beyond simple correction to providing explanations for changes suggested.

Testing Writing

Writing is definitely difficult. Assessing and evaluating writing in ELT has a long history with various procedures and scoring criteria being revised and adapted to meet the needs of administrators, EFL teachers and students (Bacha 2002). Recent approaches to academic writing instruction have necessitated testing procedures that deal with both the process and the product of writing (Upshur and Turner, 1995). When testing writing ability directly, there are some considerations to take into account:

- 1) The writing tasks should be properly representative of the population of tasks that should expect the students to be able to perform.
- 2) The tasks should elicit samples of writing which truly represent the students' ability.
- 3) It is essential that the samples of writing can and will be scored reliably. (Hughes, 1989,p.75).

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of Students' Composition

This part presents and discusses the students' free composition test. The following grammatical and spelling errors are discussed: tenses, spelling, articles and prepositions errors. A comparison of errors made by each school is also indicated. The aim is to determine the type and frequency of errors made by each student. The grammar and spelling errors in the composition have been analyzed in terms of frequencies, mean, median, standard deviation and coefficient variation .The results from the composition have finally tabulated and discussed. This part displays and discusses findings on:

1. Types and number of errors made by each school;
2. Frequency of error types made by each school; and
3. Examples and comparison of errors made by each school.

The following categories will be used for all the tables and graphs in this study.

1. Tenses
2. Spelling
3. Articles
4. Prepositions

Types of Errors Recorded from Schools

An analysis of each student's writing indicated several grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. Writing 1 and Writing 2 were both studied and the four categories where the greatest number of errors occurred in this study were: tenses, articles, prepositions and spelling errors see the table below.

Table (1): Classification of error types

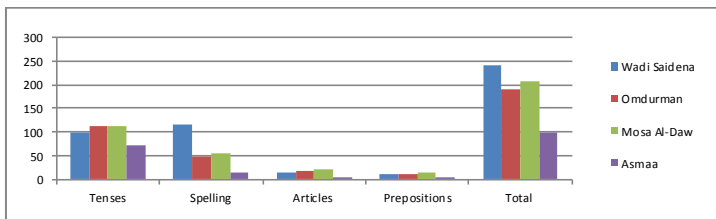
Definition of error type	Example of error found
Tenses	
Wrong usage of present simple	Anybody <u>have</u> a chance to be ..
Overgenrise of irregular verbs	Education <u>made</u> people know more abote all things rond them.
Wrong usage present simple	It <u>develop</u> our society.. it <u>improve</u> the understanding.
Wrong usage present continues	The formal education <u>is go</u> to school .
Wrong usage present simple	Education <u>mean</u> people can write and read.
Wrong usage present simple	Education <u>have</u> many advantages ...
Wrong usage of past participle	We visited Almahadi and we had <u>saw</u> the tomb.
Wrong usage of irregular verbs	The journey to visit Almahdi's tomb <u>costed</u> little money
Wrong usage of present continuous	Education <u>getting</u> knowledge and skills that mean how
Wrong usage of present perfect	Also we have <u>get</u> more money.
The usage of present simple instead of the past simple.	In 1943 He <u>start</u> His life with His brother..
Wrong usage present continuous tense.	He is <u>study</u> in many khalwa...
Using present simple instead of past simple.	Almahadi <u>is</u> very famous ...
Omission of verb to be	Education ^ important
Using past simple instead of present simple.	It <u>was gave</u> good skills to anybody..
Spelling	
Misspelled word	The third <u>tuyv</u> self taught
Misspelled word	Education is very <u>inbortant</u>
Misspelled word	It is help <u>bild</u>
Misspelled words	Education help <u>peples</u> to living <u>helthy</u> .
Misspelled words	In 1976 he <u>becam</u> a <u>tranalator</u> ...
Misspelled word	I am <u>apuple</u> .
Misspelled word	<u>Faienaly</u> add other information..
Articles	
Un necessary insertion of "the"	<u>The</u> education is very important
Un necessary insertion of "an"	<u>An</u> education men getting knowledge
Un necessary insertion of "the"	It <u>the</u> very important issue in the world.
Prepositions	
Omission of preposition	It is help ^ bild to society
Insertion of preposition	Education <u>to</u> help with develop..
Omission of preposition	I live ^ Ombada.

The table below indicates the total number of errors made by each school students for each task. Each error made by student has been identified and indicated under its error type. If the same error reappeared in one student's work, it was only counted once. The table below displays the total number of errors made by all the four schools in both tasks.

Table (2): Sudanese secondary school students' errors types recorded.

Schools	Types of Error				Total
	Tenses	Spelling	Articles	Prepositions	
Wadi Saidena	100	117	14	10	241
Omdurman	111	47	20	13	191
Mosa Al.Daw	111	56	23	16	206
Asmaa	73	16	6	5	100
Total	395	236	63	44	738

Figure (1): Sudanese secondary school students' errors types recorded.



In the data, the researcher found many cases indicating to the wrong usage of verb tenses and forms in English language. Sudanese students at secondary schools suffered a lot in order to choose the appropriate verb form. Tense and form errors were due to the replacement of one tense/ form for another. These errors may have resulted from negative transfer from Arabic language which has completely different concepts of time. In Arabic language, there are only the perfect and the imperfect (past and non-past). Progressive and perfect forms are especially difficult for Arab students of English. Arabic verbs show two indicative conjugations for form: the imperfect (morphologically marked by prefixes) and the perfect (marked

by suffixes) which may indicate whether the action is viewed as uncompleted or completed, respectively. In the absence of any further temporal specification the imperfect helps to indicate an action which is regarded as in progress at the present time or repeated action or with future time adverbials.

Examples of Tense Errors

There are many examples of tense errors investigated in this study, namely, wrong verb form where the correct tense was used but the verb form was wrong and using present tense instead of past tense. Omission or addition of verb to be is also investigated. Lack of subject/ verb agreement (omission of the 3rd person singular), continuous versus simple present verb tense, present /past perfect versus simple/ present past, modal auxiliaries and countable and uncountable nouns .In English language, some verbs have certain identical forms for the categories of past tense and past participle, for example, talk – talked – talked. These verbs are called regular verbs. Because the regular verbs pattern can be applied to most of the verbs, Sudanese students at secondary schools use this rule to other types of verbs, that is, irregular verbs, for example, make – made – made. For non native speakers these verbs patten have to be memorized, but unfortunately most of the students do not do keep by heart these verb. Consequently, they expected to make errors in regular and irregular verbs patterns. Here are different ways in which errors occur. Firstly, according to what has been found by Carson (2001) that some EFL learners tend to over generalize the rule for stylistic features when acquiring new discourse structure. Table (1) shows one example which indicates this type of error when students got confused regular and irregular verbs. One of the students has substituted the past tense of make (made) with (maked). Another example of this error is (had seen), one student wrote (had saw). This student has used the verb (saw) which is the past tense instead

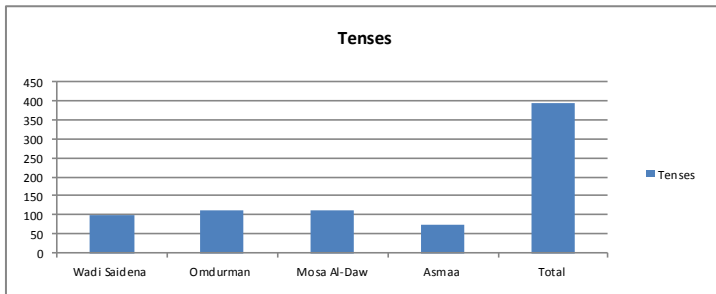
of using the correct verb form (seen) which is the past participle of the verb (see). Secondly, Carson (2001,p.191-200) and Kutz et al. (1993,p.879-903) suggest that EFL learners may try out what they assume is a legitimate structure of the target language. A good example of this error is displayed in table (1) the word cost is an irregular verb. The past tense and past participle of (cost) is just (cost – cost). However, this word (cost) has got another irregular form (cost – costed – costed) that is only used in a certain sense. This irregular form can be used to express the action of “calculating the total price of something or deciding how much the price of something should be” (Longman Exams Dictionary, 2006,p.335). For example, “The journey to visit Almahdi’s tomb costed little money”. Therefore, costed in that sentence is considered an error in that context. The correct form should be cost. Lastly, Carson (2001,p191-200) and Kutz et al. (1993,p.879-903) maintain that EFL learners are often unsure of what they want to express which would cause them to make mistakes in any language. The present study identifies this type of error as displayed in table (1) that reads “Education getting knowledge and skills that mean how”. This sentence is erroneous in the context that it was used. The student here did not know the right rule to apply it. There are other tense errors recorded in this category occur in the usage of present tense instead of past tense. Students seemed not to have a clear understanding of when to use the two tenses, present tense and past tense, as illustrated in table (1) one example is “Almahadi is very famous ...”.The students seemed to be aware that the event or story that happened in the past has to be told in past tense, hence one verb, especially the first verbs in the sentences, were expressed in past tense. But the students were not consistent with the usage of past tense, so the second verb or other verbs in the same sentence were expressed in present tense. This is considered to be a grammatical error in the usage of tenses because it causes confusion to the reader. Another

error recorded is what Ellis (1996,p.710) explains as “false concepts hypothesised”. False concepts hypothesised occur when learners do not completely understand a distinction in the target language. This example is illustrated in “He is study in many khalwa....” The usage of verb to be with simple present tense (is study), in this sentence is erroneous if the event described was a thing of the past, since the student indicated to write story which happened in the past. So, instead of using the simple present tense (is study) the student was supposed to use the simple past tense (studied). Last examples of errors recorded in the study were: omission or addition of verb to be. Some students omitted verb to be in some sentences such as “Education ^ important”. Some of the students added verb to be where was unnecessary such as “It was gave good skills to anybody..”. Lack of subject/ verb agreement (omission of the 3rd person singular was also found such as “Education mean people can write and read”.

Comparison of Tense Errors

Inappropriate use of tenses is the highest error category in this study for all four school students. Omdurman which is governmental public school, is expected to record less errors comparing to Mosa Al Daw, which is governmental model school, recorded the same number of (111) tense errors as Omdurman. It well known that governmental model schools are better that governmental public schools. The students are accepted according to their high scores in model schools while in public schools students are accepted with no high cores. Wadi Saidena, which is governmental public school recorded (100) tense errors, while Asmaa, which is one of the best governmental model schools recorded the lowest number of (73) tense errors (see figure 2). This part of discussion answer the second of this study.

Figure (2): Frequency of tenses error types recorded



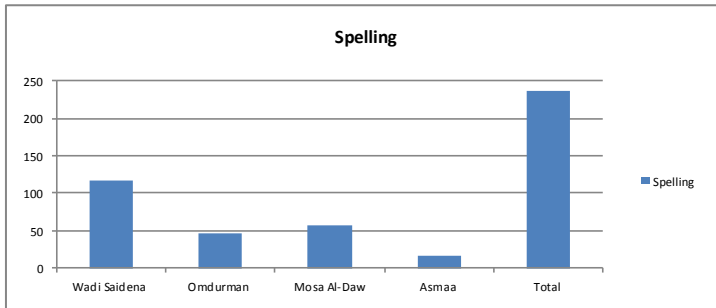
Examples of Spelling Errors

Table (1) displays the spelling errors for all four schools. These are examples of spelling errors that were found in the compositions of each school . The second error rates in this study occurred within the error category of spelling for all schools. Table (1) shows some examples of the commonly misspelled words found in the compositions of each school. In their studies, Nunan (2001,p.87-92) and Kaplan (1966,p.1-20) reflect that EFL learners' errors were systematic, rather than random, and learners tend to commit the same kinds of errors during a certain stage of language learning. The findings highlighted in Table (1) shows that all the four schools encounter difficulties in spelling. Wadi Saidena school committed the most serious errors in this area, followed by Mosa Al Daw and then Omdurman and Asmaa respectively .

Comparison of Spelling Errors

Data reveal that the highest total number of (117) spelling errors was recorded from Wai Saidena school. Mosa Al Daw and Omdurman schools recorded the total number of (56) and (47) errors respectively while Asmaa school recorded (16) errors (see figure 3).

Figure (3): Frequency of spelling error types recorded



Examples of Article Errors

EFL Sudanese students at secondary schools had difficulty deciding if a definite article is needed for a noun in a particular context. In some cases the students overcorrected themselves by using articles in unnecessary positions; they also omitted them to simplify their tasks or replaced them with each other. This showed that the students still had difficulty in understanding the concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness of articles. In Arabic language the use of the definite article differs from that of English. Definiteness is expressed by the prefix (the) affixed to the nouns and adjectives. There is no indefinite article. Without the definite article, the noun is usually indefinite Al-Buainain (1988,p.219). Thus, although articles are among the most frequently occurring morphemes, they are among the last elements of syntax to be acquired by Arabs. Mastering their usage correlates with high proficiency in other language skills. According to Corder (1974,p.227), errors fall into four main categories: omission of some required elements; addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element; selection of an incorrect element; and misordering of elements. The present study indicates various errors the students made in the use of articles. Following Corder's identification of error types, two rules of grammar usage that were most problematic for the Sudanese students in this study are discussed in the

following two sub-sections relating to error types: wrong substitution and unnecessary insertion.

1. Wrong Substitution

Wrong substitution refers to situations in which, for example, “a” was used instead of “the”, or vice versa. Table (1) shows some examples of such errors. English language has 3 articles: the definite article *the* and the indefinite articles *a* and *an*. The usage of both the indefinite and definite articles depends on the nature of the words that follow. The indefinite article “a” is used before a word beginning with a consonant, for example, “a plane” or a vowel with a consonant sound, for example “a university” and “an” is used before words beginning with a vowel, for example “an angle” and words beginning with mute “h”, for example, “an hour”. The definite article “the” occurs in the position where a person or thing or something already referred to.

2. Unnecessary Insertion

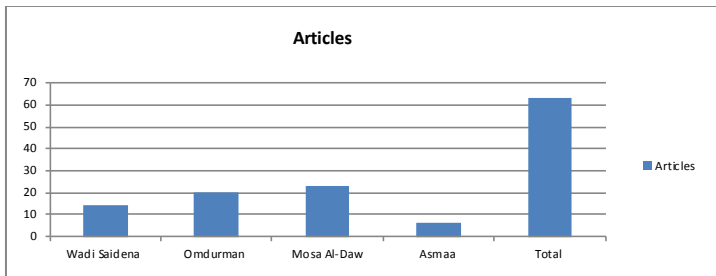
Unnecessary insertion indicates articles which were placed where they were not needed. Sometimes nouns in English language are used without an article, and this is known as zero article. Table (1) illustrates some examples of zero article errors which is unnecessary insertion of the when students wrote a date and a month as in the following example (The education is very important.)

Comparison of Article Errors

The frequency of article error types is displayed in Table (1) It is noteworthy that all the article errors recorded were indefinite articles “a” and “an”. The highest number of 23 article errors was recorded from Mosa Al Daw school. Omdurman school recorded the second highest number of 20 errors. The least

number of 14 and 6 errors were recorded from Wadi Saidena And Asmaa schools respectively. (see the figure 4)

Figure (4): Frequency of articles error types recorded



Examples of Preposition Errors

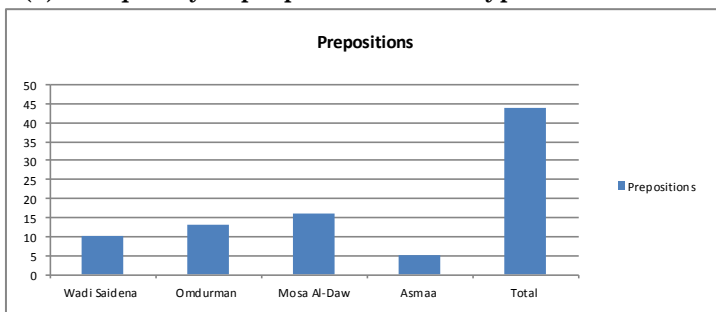
A preposition is a type of a word or group of words often placed before nouns, pronouns or gerunds to link them grammatically to other words. Prepositions may express meanings such as direction (*for example from school*), place (*for example in the room*), possession (*for example the capital city of Sudan*) and time (*for example after seconds*) (Richards & Schmidt, 2002,p.414). Following Corder's identification of error types, preposition errors found in the students' composition are classified into the following three categories: wrong substitution, unnecessary insertion, and omission. Wrong substitution occurs when the wrong selection of preposition was made ,where prepositions were wrongly used. One example identified in the composition is "help with develop...". While unnecessary insertion happens when students used preposition where no need for them such as "Education to help with develop.." The last type of preposition error is the omission where the students omitted the prepositions such as "I live ^ Ombada". There are some words that should always be used with certain prepositions to form phrases that express specific meanings. The word *interest* is always used with the preposition "in" if it is to express the interest in something or someone when you want to know or learn more about them

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005,p.778-779). The word *interest*, for example, can be used with many different prepositions to express different meanings. Now it becomes clear that the choice of preposition is very crucial and needs to be carefully made in order to convey precise messages in expressions.

Comparison of Preposition Errors

The graph below displays the frequency of error types recorded on the preposition error types. Figure 5) reveals that Mosa Al Daw had the highest number of frequency of error type that is (16) cases, while (13) , (10) and (5) cases were recorded from Omdurman, Wadi Saidena and Asmaa schools respectively.

Figure (5): Frequency of prepositions error types recorded



Summary

According to the present study, the general findings indicated that EFL students from the four schools Wadi Saidena, Omdurman, Mosa Al Daw and Asmaa presented similar problems with most of the types of errors investigated in this study. Table (2) displays a summary of total number of errors recorded and their frequency of occurrence. Firstly, the highest number of errors made was within the error category of tenses, with a total of (395) errors. Mosa Al Daw school, which is governmental model school , is unlike Omdurman school ,which is governmental public school , the students made the highest

tense errors, with the same rates of (111), followed by Wadi Saiedena, which is governmental public school students who had (100) tense errors. Asmaa school students had the least tense errors, because it is one of the best governmental model schools that is, (73) (see Table 1). The statistic calculation of the average shows that tense errors have a very high score average which is (98.75). The standard deviation (17.93) shows that there is a big differences in tense errors among the four schools. The coefficient variation which is (18.16) indicates that there is a big deviation from the mean (see Table 2). Secondly, the results of the present study revealed that spelling errors which found in the students' written work, with the total of (236) errors recorded (see Table 2). The analysis of occurrence of this type of error explained that poor spelling arose in all four schools students' work. The students made almost similar errors in their writing. Wadi Saiedena school students had a total of (117) spelling errors, which was the highest rate in comparison to Mosa Al Daw and Omdurman schools students who made almost the same number of error in this category, (56) , (47) spelling errors respectively . Asmaa school scored (16) errors only (see Table 2). The calculated average (59) shows that there is a big difference between the schools errors. The standard deviation which is (42.29) tells that there is also big difference between the errors scored by each school. The coefficient variation (71.68) indicates the big variation from the mean (see Table 2). These findings may suggest that poor spelling was a major learning difficulty for all four schools. However, some spelling errors appear to be the result of carelessness in writing rather than lack of knowledge. This part of discussion of tenses and spelling errors answer the second question of this study "How frequent do grammatical and spelling errors occur in Sudanese secondary school students' written work?". Also, it supports the second hypothesis of this study "Grammatical errors and spelling mistakes significantly

affect the students' writing performance in English as a foreign language in Sudanese secondary schools". Thirdly, article errors are the third error category in the work of all the subjects in this study. The rate of (63) was recorded for this error category. Mosa Al-Daw school students in this case recorded the highest error rate of (23), while Omdurman, Wadi Saidena and Asmaa school students recorded (20), (14) and (6) cases respectively (see Table 1). (Hakuta, 1976,p.321-351; Keiko, 2003,p.59-60) found that the English article system is considered one of the most difficult obstacles that face foreign language learners, especially when it comes to those learners whose first language (L1) does not have a similar article system. Arabic language does not employ definite and indefinite articles' system such as English, and the results show article system to be one of the most problematic error categories identified. Based on that most of the students made different types of errors in articles. The statistic calculation of the average (15.75) shows that there is a big differences between the rates of errors made by each school. The standard deviation which is (7.50) confirms that there is a big deviation from the average. Coefficient variation which is (47.62) explains the ratio between the standard deviation and the mean, which is very big (see Table 3).

Table (3): The distribution according to the mean, standard deviation and coefficient variation

Statistical Tool	Tenses	Spelling	Articles	Prepositions	Total
Mean	98.75	59	15.75	11	184.5
Standard Deviation	17.93	42.29	7.50	4.69	60.10
Coefficient Variation	18.16	71.68	47.62	42.64	32.58

Finally, prepositions are the fourth error category in this study, with total of (44) errors. Mosa Al-Daw school students recorded the highest total number of errors which is (16), which is unexpected because it is one of the best governmental model schools. Omdurman school students recorded the second highest number of (13), Although Wadi Saidena school is

governmental public school, students recorded (10), comparing to Mosa Al-Daw. While Asmaa school students recorded the lowest rate (5) again because it is one of the best schools (see Table 2). The statistical calculation of the average is (11). This shows that the difference between the errors scored by each school is close. Consequently, the standard deviation becomes small (4), therefore, the errors rates considered to be closed. The coefficient variation which is (42.64). This tells that the variation between the errors scored by the schools is big (see Table 1).

FINDINGS:

This study has arrived at some findings:

1. There are some grammatical and spelling errors made by Sudanese secondary school students of English as a foreign language. These errors should not be found in the written work because at this level all students are expected to master the grammatical rules up to their level. They should also keep by heart all related vocabulary in order to avoid making spelling mistakes.
2. The difference between English and Arabic language system which lead to negative interference. Therefore, the researcher would like to recommend that Sudanese EFL teachers should train the students not to think and translate into Arabic. The researcher found out that EFL teachers must always use English to explain the meaning of difficult words in English.
3. At Sudanese secondary schools, grammar errors rates amongst EFL students are higher than spelling errors.
4. Spelling errors amongst EFL students could be attributed to the carelessness of the students.

5. Most of the grammar errors among Sudanese secondary school EFL students are due to wrong formation of verbs.

6. Most of Sudanese secondary school EFL students use present tense instead of past tense when they write.

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