

An Analysis of Verb Tense Errors in Palestinian Undergraduate Students' Essay Writing

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Abstract

This study examines verb tense errors in essays written by Palestinian undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language. The study addresses three questions: what types of verb tense errors appear in students' essays, which error type is most dominant, and what linguistic and pedagogical challenges may explain the observed patterns. Using a qualitative descriptive design supported by error analysis, students' essays were examined and coded according to the surface strategy taxonomy of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The analysis identified 60 verb-tense-related errors. Misformation was the most frequent category, accounting for 28 errors (46.7%), followed by omission with 15 errors (25.0%), addition with 10 errors (16.7%), and misordering with 7 errors (11.7%). The findings indicate that the major difficulty was not merely knowing the names of English tenses, but selecting contextually appropriate verb forms, maintaining tense consistency across clauses, and controlling subject-verb agreement in extended writing. The discussion relates these findings to interlanguage theory, Arabic-English cross-linguistic influence, overgeneralization, limited automatization of inflectional morphology, and the instructional separation of grammar practice from authentic writing tasks. Pedagogically, the study argues for form-focused writing instruction, explicit attention to tense-aspect meaning, guided noticing activities, focused written corrective feedback, and repeated revision cycles. The study contributes to EFL writing research by offering a tense-focused account of Palestinian undergraduate writing and by translating error analysis results into practical implications for grammar-informed academic writing pedagogy.

Keywords: error analysis, verb tense errors, EFL writing, Palestinian undergraduate students, Arabic-English transfer, academic writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a central component of academic literacy because it requires learners to transform ideas into organized, coherent, and linguistically accurate texts. In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, writing is also one of the most demanding skills because it involves simultaneous control over content, vocabulary, grammar, coherence, cohesion, genre conventions, punctuation, and rhetorical organization. Second language writing research emphasizes that writing development is not simply a matter of producing longer texts, but of learning how grammatical choices support meaning and disciplinary communication (Hyland, 2019; Hinkel, 2004). For undergraduate learners, this demand becomes more complex because academic writing requires accuracy at the clause level while also requiring argumentation, description, explanation, and textual progression. A grammatically inaccurate text may still communicate a general message, but recurring grammatical errors can obscure meaning, weaken reader confidence, and reduce the perceived academic quality of the writing. Consequently, the analysis of learners' written errors remains relevant for language teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers who seek to understand how EFL learners develop written accuracy.

Among the grammatical features that strongly influence the clarity of English writing, verb tense is especially important. English tense and aspect systems allow writers to locate events in time, distinguish habitual and completed actions, indicate ongoing situations, and organize the temporal relationship between ideas (Biber et al., 2002; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Tense choices are not only formal grammatical choices; they also perform discourse functions. For instance, the simple present is commonly used to describe general facts, routines, and stable characteristics, while the simple past is used to narrate completed events. In academic prose, tense consistency helps readers follow the writer's logic, especially when a text shifts from background information to findings, from general claims to specific events, or from description to interpretation. When learners use an incorrect verb form, omit an obligatory inflection, add an unnecessary auxiliary, or shift tense without a semantic reason, the sentence may become ambiguous or ungrammatical. This makes verb tense errors a valuable focus for error analysis in EFL writing.

The difficulty of English tense use is intensified for Arabic-speaking learners because English and Arabic organize time, aspect, and verb morphology differently. Arabic has rich verbal morphology and makes aspectual distinctions that do not map neatly onto the English tense-aspect system. English, by contrast, relies on combinations of tense marking, auxiliary verbs, agreement, participles, and context-dependent temporal

interpretation. Previous work on Arabic-speaking EFL learners shows that differences between Arabic and English may contribute to errors in tense, subject-verb agreement, article use, word order, and verb formation (Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000; Swan & Smith, 2001; Aljohani, 2019). Research on Arab EFL learners has also shown that learners often experience difficulty with simple present and simple past forms, particularly when they must supply third-person singular -s, select irregular past forms, or distinguish the present perfect from the simple past (Muftah, 2023; Jubran & Khrais, 2023; Kanwal, 2025). These findings suggest that verb tense errors should be understood as the result of multiple interacting factors rather than as isolated mistakes.

Error analysis provides a systematic framework for examining such learner difficulties. Corder (1967) argued that learner errors are significant because they reveal the learner's developing language system and provide evidence for both researchers and teachers. Selinker (1972) later conceptualized this developing system as interlanguage, a rule-governed transitional linguistic system influenced by the first language, the target language, and learners' own developmental strategies. Within this perspective, errors are not merely failures; they are indicators of how learners hypothesize, test, and restructure grammatical rules. James (1998) further explained that error analysis can describe errors, classify their surface forms, and interpret their possible sources. The surface strategy taxonomy commonly associated with Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) is particularly useful for written grammar analysis because it categorizes errors according to observable structural changes: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. These categories make it possible to identify not only how often learners make errors, but also what kind of grammatical operation is problematic.

The present study uses this error analysis orientation to examine verb tense errors in Palestinian undergraduate students' essay writing. This focus is important for two reasons. First, Palestinian EFL learners study English within complex educational and sociolinguistic conditions in which English is needed for academic mobility, international communication, digital resources, and professional opportunities, but exposure to English outside formal instruction may vary considerably. Second, although studies on Arab EFL writing have identified recurrent grammatical challenges, tense-focused studies on Palestinian undergraduate essay writing remain comparatively limited. Many existing studies examine broad grammatical error categories, secondary school populations, or mixed Arab learner groups. A more focused investigation of verb tense errors can provide a sharper pedagogical diagnosis for English writing classes at the undergraduate level.

The research gap addressed in this study lies in the need for a tense-specific, pedagogically oriented account of Palestinian undergraduate EFL writing. Studies such as Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000), Aljohani (2019), Muftah (2023), and Kanwal (2025) show that Arab learners frequently experience problems with English morphology, tense marking, and agreement, but these studies do not fully explain how such patterns appear in the essay writing of Palestinian undergraduates in a descriptive writing context. In addition, some classroom studies report error frequencies but do not sufficiently connect the results to instructional implications. This study therefore contributes by identifying the distribution of verb tense errors, interpreting the most salient error patterns, and linking the findings to grammar-informed writing pedagogy.

Based on this background, the study is guided by three research questions. First, what types of verb tense errors are found in Palestinian undergraduate students' essay writing? Second, which type of verb tense error is most dominant in the students' essays? Third, what linguistic and pedagogical challenges may explain the students' difficulties in using English verb tenses? The objectives of the study are to classify verb tense errors in students' essays, determine the dominant error type, and discuss the implications of these errors for EFL writing instruction. The findings are expected to help teachers design more responsive grammar instruction, help students become more aware of tense-related accuracy, and support future research on Arabic-speaking learners' written English development.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design supported by an error analysis procedure. A qualitative descriptive design was appropriate because the study aimed to identify, classify, and interpret naturally occurring errors in students' written texts rather than to test a causal hypothesis. Qualitative description allows researchers to present a close account of a phenomenon in its actual educational context while retaining analytical transparency (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the occurrence of verb tense errors in essays written by Palestinian undergraduate EFL students. The error analysis approach was selected because it provides a systematic procedure for describing learner language and identifying recurring grammatical difficulties (Corder, 1967; James, 1998). The analysis also included descriptive frequency counts to show the distribution of error types; however, the primary orientation remained interpretive because the study sought to explain what the errors suggested about learners' tense control and writing development.

The participants were Palestinian undergraduate students enrolled in an English course. They were selected purposively because they were actively engaged in classroom writing activities and were learning English as a foreign language. Purposive selection is appropriate in qualitative research when participants are chosen because they can provide relevant data for the research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data source consisted of students' descriptive essays produced as part of classroom writing exercises. Descriptive essays were relevant to

the research purpose because they typically require frequent use of simple present tense for general description, present habitual meaning, and subject-verb agreement. This genre therefore provided an appropriate context for identifying tense errors, especially errors involving third-person singular verbs, auxiliary selection, and tense consistency.

The primary instrument of the study was documentation of students' written texts. The essays were collected and examined for verb-tense-related errors. Errors in vocabulary choice, punctuation, spelling, organization, and content development were excluded unless they directly affected the identification of a verb tense form. This delimitation was necessary to keep the analysis focused and to avoid merging tense errors with broader grammatical or discourse-level problems. The analysis focused on present, past, and future tense forms, including auxiliary use, verb inflection, agreement marking, and the consistency of tense choices within sentences and short passages. Grammarly software was used only as a supporting tool to flag possible grammatical problems. Final classification was conducted through human judgment based on English grammar rules and the error taxonomy used in the study. This distinction is important because automated grammar tools can assist detection, but they cannot replace contextual interpretation in learner-language analysis.

The coding procedure followed four stages. First, the students' essays were read several times to obtain a general sense of their content and grammatical patterns. Second, sentences containing verb-tense-related problems were identified and extracted. Third, the errors were classified into four categories adapted from the surface strategy taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering/disordering (Dulay et al., 1982; James, 1998). Omission referred to the absence of an obligatory tense or agreement marker, such as the missing -s in the sentence *She go to school*. Addition referred to the unnecessary insertion of an auxiliary or tense marker, such as *I am study English*. Misformation referred to the use of an incorrect verb form, such as *He writted a letter* instead of *He wrote a letter*. Misordering or disordering referred to incorrect ordering of grammatical elements affecting tense or verbal structure. Fourth, the frequency and percentage of each category were calculated and interpreted in relation to possible linguistic and pedagogical causes.

To enhance trustworthiness, the analysis was grounded in explicit coding categories and representative examples were provided for each error type. The use of established error-analysis categories helped reduce arbitrary classification and made the coding procedure more transparent (Corder, 1967; James, 1998). In addition, the interpretation of findings was compared with previous research on Arab EFL learners and L2 writing pedagogy. This comparison helped situate the findings within broader evidence on cross-linguistic influence, interlanguage development, written corrective feedback, and grammar instruction (Selinker, 1972; Odlin, 1989; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Muftah, 2023). Ethical consideration was addressed by treating the students' essays as academic data and by focusing the analysis on patterns of language learning rather than on individual deficiencies. The study did not evaluate students personally; instead, it used their writing to identify areas where instruction could better support tense accuracy in academic writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Types and Distribution of Verb Tense Errors

The analysis identified 60 verb tense errors in the students' essays. These errors were distributed across the four categories of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering/disordering. The overall pattern indicates that the students had some awareness of English sentence formation, but still experienced substantial difficulty when they had to select the correct verb form in context. Misformation was the dominant category, suggesting that many students attempted to supply a verb but selected an inaccurate form. This pattern is pedagogically important because it shows that the main problem was not always the complete absence of a verb marker; rather, the students often knew that a verb was required but had not fully internalized the morphological, tense, or agreement constraints governing the appropriate form.

Table 1. Frequency of Verb Tense Errors

No.	Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage
1	Omission	15	25.0%
2	Addition	10	16.7%
3	Misformation	28	46.7%
4	Misordering/Disordering	7	11.7%
Total		60	100%

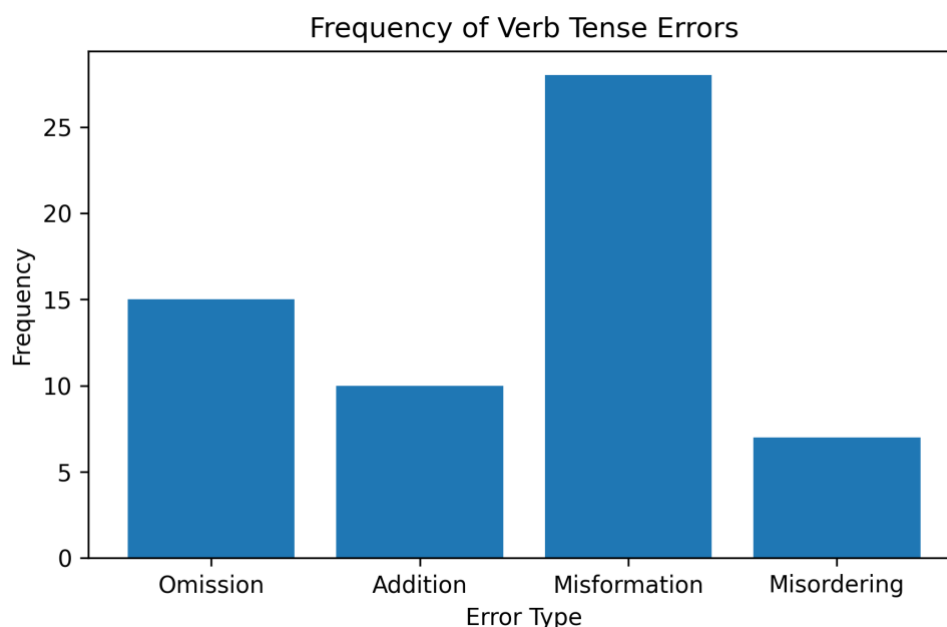


Figure 1. Distribution of verb tense error categories

2. Omission Errors

Omission errors occurred when students left out an obligatory grammatical element needed to mark tense or agreement. The analysis found 15 omission errors, representing 25.0% of the total error count. A typical example is *She go to school*, where the required third-person singular -s marker is absent from the verb goes. Although the sentence is understandable, the missing marker violates the simple present tense agreement rule. This type of error is common among EFL learners because English uses relatively small inflectional morphemes to encode important grammatical information. These morphemes may be perceptually less salient in input and may therefore be omitted in production, particularly when learners concentrate on expressing meaning rather than monitoring form (Ellis, 2015; Ortega, 2009).

For Arabic-speaking learners, omission of third-person singular -s may also be influenced by cross-linguistic differences in how agreement is realized. Arabic has rich agreement morphology, but the mapping between Arabic verbal agreement and English third-person singular marking is not direct. Learners may understand the subject and the action, but fail to attach the English agreement marker because it is a small and semantically light form. Studies of Arab EFL writing have repeatedly identified difficulties with English inflectional morphology, including third-person singular present tense markers and past tense endings (Aljohani, 2019; Muftah, 2023; Kanwal, 2025). In the present study, omission errors suggest that learners need more repeated practice in noticing and producing obligatory tense/agreement markers in meaningful writing contexts.

3. Addition Errors

Addition errors occurred when students inserted unnecessary grammatical elements into a sentence. The analysis found 10 addition errors, accounting for 16.7% of the total. A representative example is *I am study English*, where the auxiliary *am* is inserted before a main verb in the simple present tense. The correct sentence is *I study English*. This error indicates that the learner may have overgeneralized the use of *be* as a general marker of present time or as a required element in English sentences. From an interlanguage perspective, such an error reflects a developing hypothesis that English predicates require an auxiliary, even when the simple present form does not require one (Selinker, 1972; Ellis, 2015).

Addition errors are pedagogically significant because they show that learners are not merely careless; they may be applying a rule too broadly. The overuse of *be* is commonly observed when learners confuse simple present structures with present progressive structures. In English, *I am studying English* is grammatical because *studying* is a present participle and the auxiliary *be* marks progressive aspect. However, *I am study English* is ungrammatical because the base verb *study* cannot follow *be* in this construction. This suggests that instruction should not teach tense forms as isolated labels only; it should also clarify the relationship among auxiliary verbs, main verbs, participles, and meaning. Learners need opportunities to compare pairs such as *I study*, *I am studying*, and *I studied* so that they can understand how form changes meaning.

4. Misformation Errors

Misformation was the most frequent error category, with 28 occurrences or 46.7% of the total. Misformation occurs when a learner supplies a grammatical form, but the selected form is incorrect. The example He writted a letter illustrates this pattern. The learner attempted to mark past time by adding -ed, but the correct past form is wrote. This error reflects overgeneralization of the regular past tense rule to an irregular verb. Similar problems may occur when learners use the base form after a third-person singular subject, select an incorrect past participle, or mix present and past verb forms within one descriptive passage. The dominance of misformation suggests that the students' main challenge involved choosing the correct verb form, not simply remembering that verbs require tense marking.

Misformation errors are consistent with broader research on second language acquisition. Learners often generalize productive rules before acquiring exceptions and context-sensitive constraints (Ellis, 2015; Ortega, 2009). In the case of English tense, the regular -ed rule is highly productive, so learners may extend it to irregular verbs such as write, go, come, and eat. This developmental strategy is understandable, but it becomes problematic in academic writing if it persists without feedback and revision. For Arabic-speaking learners, misformation may also be intensified by the structural distance between Arabic and English tense-aspect systems (Odlin, 1989; Swan & Smith, 2001; Aljohani, 2019). English irregular verb forms, the third-person singular marker, and auxiliary-based tense/aspect constructions require repeated exposure and meaningful practice before they become automatic.

The dominance of misformation in this study aligns with previous findings on Arab EFL learners. Muftah (2023) reported that Arab undergraduate learners made frequent errors in present and past tense forms, while Kanwal (2025) found that Arabic-speaking EFL learners encountered substantial difficulty with inflectional morphemes, especially third-person singular present tense and past tense forms. Jubran and Khrais (2023) also showed that Arab learners often substitute the simple past for the present perfect, indicating difficulty in selecting forms that match temporal meaning. These studies support the interpretation that tense errors should not be treated only as mechanical mistakes. They reflect a deeper challenge in connecting English verb morphology, tense-aspect meaning, and sentence-level grammar.

5. Misordering/Disordering Errors

Misordering or disordering errors were the least frequent category, with 7 cases or 11.7% of the total. This category involved incorrect arrangement of grammatical elements in ways that affected verb-tense accuracy or sentence structure. The original example I am someone who lovees cats terribly illustrates a mixed problem because the main issue is the incorrect verb form lovees, but it also signals broader difficulty in controlling the grammatical relationship between a relative clause and its verb. The correct form is I am someone who loves cats terribly. Although the total number of misordering cases was small, their presence indicates that tense errors may intersect with clause complexity. When students produce longer sentences, they must manage subjects, relative pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and agreement relations across clauses. This increases the cognitive load of writing.

The relatively low frequency of misordering may suggest that the students' primary difficulty was morphological rather than syntactic. In other words, the students were more likely to choose an incorrect verb form than to arrange sentence elements in an entirely incorrect order. However, this does not mean that syntax is unimportant. Research on learner English shows that word order, clause construction, and verb formation often interact, especially when learners transfer patterns from their first language or simplify structures under production pressure (Odlin, 1989; Swan & Smith, 2001). Therefore, teachers should address tense errors not only through sentence-level drills but also through guided construction of complex sentences in descriptive and academic paragraphs.

Table 2. Representative Examples of Verb Tense Errors

Error Type	Student Sentence	Correct Form	Main Issue
Omission	She go to school.	She goes to school.	Missing third-person singular -s.
Addition	I am study English.	I study English.	Unnecessary auxiliary be in simple present.
Misformation	He writted a letter.	He wrote a letter.	Incorrect irregular past tense form.
Misordering/Disordering	I am someone who lovees cats terribly.	I am someone who loves cats terribly.	Incorrect verb form in a clause structure.

Shadh

I have a cat named simsim, and I love him very much because he is (such) a ~~Cat~~ so cute cat and lovely animal. He has a small body covered with soft fur, beautiful eyes, and along (a long) tail. His fur color is nice and makes him look very attractive

Simsim is asmart (a smart) and clean cat. He likes to play and run around the house. Sometimes he plays with a ball or chases small things. He also likes to sleep in warm and quiet places, especially when he feels comfortable and safe

For me, Simsim is the best pet because his pesence (presence) makes me happy. Taking care of him is fun, and he helps me feel less lonely. That is why I love Simsim so much.

Doaa

I really love the sea because it is a beautiful and relaxing place. When I go to the sea, I feel comfortable and happy. The blue color of the water and the sound of the waves make me feel calm. The fresh air also helps me breathe deeply and enjoy my time.

At the sea, I like to sit on the sand and watch the sunset. The view of the sun slowly going down on the horizon is very beautiful. I also enjoy walking alony (alone) (on) the beach and collecting small shells. Sometimes I take photos because the scenery is amazing.

For me, the sea is a place to rest and relax. when I fell (feel) tired, I go to the sea to refresh my mind. That is my (why) i love the sea so much and hope to visit it again and again.

Sara

Hello, me (my) name is Sarah. I am someone who lovees (loves) cats terribly. For example, when Iam (I am) going somewhere and I happen to see one, I stop and sit down to play with it.

Her appearance is gentle end (and) beautiful. Cats prefer to play with a kind person, note (not) ahارش (a harsh) one. Cats are very cate (cute) creatures.

Figure 2. Example of Students' Verb Tense Errors in Essay Writing

Discussion

The frequency distribution confirms that misformation was the most dominant verb tense error in the corpus. The pattern can be interpreted as follows: students frequently attempted to use English tense markers, but they had difficulty selecting the correct morphological form. Omission and addition, while less frequent, reveal complementary problems. Omission suggests insufficient control of obligatory markers, especially agreement and tense endings. Addition suggests overgeneralization of auxiliary use or confusion between simple and progressive constructions. Misordering/disordering suggests difficulty in maintaining grammatical relations in more complex sentence structures. Taken together, these categories show that tense errors are multidimensional and cannot be solved through memorization of tense names alone.

The findings also indicate that the simple present tense was especially problematic. This is pedagogically unsurprising because descriptive essays frequently require simple present forms, particularly when describing people, routines, places, characteristics, and general truths. However, the simple present is deceptively difficult for EFL learners because it requires learners to distinguish between base verb forms and third-person singular forms, between simple present and present progressive meanings, and between stative and dynamic uses. The sentence *She go to school* illustrates how a small omitted marker can produce a visible grammatical error. The sentence *I am study English* illustrates how confusion between the simple present and progressive structures can produce an addition error. These patterns suggest that the simple present should be taught not as an elementary topic that learners automatically master early, but as a recurring form that must be revisited in writing instruction.

From an interlanguage perspective, the students' errors can be interpreted as evidence of a developing linguistic system. The learners appear to have partial knowledge of English verb tense rules, but this knowledge has not yet become stable enough for accurate use in extended writing. Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972) emphasize that learner errors reveal the system that learners are constructing. In this study, the system appears to include productive but incomplete rules: add -ed for past time, use be with present actions, use base verbs after most subjects, and rely on meaning rather than morphology to signal time. These rules are not random; they are understandable developmental strategies. However, without targeted feedback and practice, they may become fossilized patterns that continue into more advanced writing (Selinker, 1972; Ellis, 2015).

First language influence is one possible factor behind the error patterns. Arabic and English differ in their tense-aspect structures, agreement systems, and auxiliary constructions. Arabic-speaking learners may transfer expectations from Arabic into English, especially when constructing sentences under time pressure. At the same time, not all errors should be attributed to Arabic interference. Some errors, such as *writted*, clearly reflect

intralingual overgeneralization within English rather than direct transfer from Arabic. This distinction is important because pedagogical responses differ. Interlingual errors may require contrastive explanation between Arabic and English, while intralingual errors may require rule refinement, exception practice, and corrective feedback. Therefore, teachers should avoid assuming that every error is caused by the first language; instead, they should examine whether an error reflects transfer, overgeneralization, incomplete learning, or performance pressure (Richards, 1971; Odlin, 1989; James, 1998).

Another important factor is the relationship between grammar knowledge and writing practice. Students may be able to identify tense rules in isolated exercises but fail to apply them in essay writing. This gap occurs because controlled grammar tasks and authentic writing tasks require different levels of processing. In a grammar exercise, learners may focus entirely on selecting a tense form. In essay writing, they must generate ideas, organize content, maintain coherence, select vocabulary, and monitor grammar at the same time. If tense control has not become automatic, errors are likely to appear. Hyland (2019) argues that writing instruction should connect language form with communicative purpose. Similarly, Hinkel (2004) emphasizes that academic writing pedagogy should integrate grammar, vocabulary, and discourse rather than treating grammar as separate from writing.

The findings therefore have several instructional implications. First, teachers should integrate form-focused instruction into writing lessons. This means that tense should be taught through sentences and paragraphs that students actually write, not only through decontextualized drills. Second, teachers should use noticing activities that ask learners to compare incorrect and corrected sentences, identify why a form is wrong, and explain the meaning difference between tense options. Third, teachers should provide focused written corrective feedback. Research on written corrective feedback indicates that feedback can support accuracy when it is clear, targeted, and connected to revision (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Chandler, 2003; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). In this study, the dominance of misinformation suggests that feedback should prioritize verb form selection, irregular verbs, third-person singular agreement, and auxiliary-main verb combinations.

Fourth, students should be given opportunities for revision. Error analysis is pedagogically useful only if learners use feedback to improve subsequent writing. A revision cycle might involve drafting a descriptive paragraph, receiving focused feedback on verb tense, revising the paragraph, and then writing a new paragraph using the same tense focus. This process encourages learners to move from noticing an error to self-editing and finally to more independent production. Chandler (2003) found that requiring students to correct their errors can improve accuracy in L2 writing. Therefore, teachers should not only mark errors; they should require students to engage with the correction process. Self-editing checklists can also help students monitor tense consistency by asking questions such as: What time frame does this paragraph describe? Does each subject agree with its verb? Did I use *be* only when the structure requires it? Did I check irregular past forms?

Fifth, instruction should distinguish tense form from tense meaning. Many learners memorize tense formulas but do not understand when each form is appropriate. For example, learners may memorize that the present progressive uses *am/is/are + verb-ing*, but still produce *I am study* because they have not understood that the auxiliary *be* requires a participle in this construction. Similarly, learners may know that *-ed* marks past time, but still produce *writted* because they have not acquired irregular verb forms. Tense instruction should therefore include timelines, contrastive examples, corpus-based noticing, and short writing tasks that require meaningful choices among tense forms. This approach can help learners connect grammatical form to communicative function.

The study also has implications for curriculum design. English courses for Palestinian undergraduates should not assume that verb tense belongs only to beginner grammar. Instead, tense accuracy should be embedded across academic writing courses, especially in descriptive, narrative, reflective, and research-based writing. Curriculum designers can include a recurring sequence: diagnostic writing, error analysis, focused mini-lessons, guided practice, peer review, revision, and reflective grammar logs. Such a sequence would help learners see tense accuracy as part of writing development rather than as a separate grammar topic. It would also help instructors identify which tense features require repeated attention across the semester.

Despite its contribution, the study has limitations. The data were drawn from classroom essays and focused only on verb tense errors. Other grammatical features such as articles, prepositions, sentence fragments, punctuation, and cohesion were not analyzed. The study also used a descriptive error-analysis approach, so it cannot establish causal relationships among first language influence, instructional background, and error frequency. In addition, the analysis would be strengthened in future research by including a larger corpus, reporting students' proficiency levels, comparing multiple writing genres, and using multiple coders to establish coding reliability. Future studies may also investigate whether focused corrective feedback reduces verb tense errors over time through a pre-test/post-test or longitudinal design.

Overall, the findings show that Palestinian undergraduate EFL learners require sustained support in controlling English tense forms in writing. The dominance of misinformation reveals that learners often attempt to use tense marking but select incorrect forms. Omission, addition, and misordering further demonstrate that tense accuracy depends on several grammatical operations: supplying required markers, avoiding unnecessary auxiliaries, choosing correct verb forms, and arranging grammatical elements coherently. These results reinforce

the importance of connecting error analysis with classroom intervention. By identifying the specific tense errors learners make, teachers can design writing instruction that is more targeted, evidence-based, and responsive to the needs of Arabic-speaking EFL students.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed verb tense errors in essays written by Palestinian undergraduate EFL students. The analysis identified four categories of errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering/disordering. Among 60 identified errors, misformation was the most frequent category with 28 errors (46.7%), followed by omission with 15 errors (25.0%), addition with 10 errors (16.7%), and misordering/disordering with 7 errors (11.7%). The findings indicate that the students' most serious difficulty was selecting the correct verb form in context, particularly in the simple present tense and in constructions requiring agreement, auxiliary control, or irregular verb forms.

The findings suggest that verb tense errors should be interpreted as evidence of interlanguage development rather than as random mistakes. Students appeared to rely on incomplete rules, overgeneralization, and partial knowledge of English tense-aspect structures. Arabic-English cross-linguistic differences may have contributed to the errors, but intralingual factors such as overgeneralization and limited automatization also played an important role. Therefore, teaching should address both contrastive awareness and internal English rule refinement. Grammar instruction should be integrated into writing practice so that students learn to apply tense rules while developing meaningful essays.

Pedagogically, the study recommends focused and repeated instruction on tense use in authentic writing tasks. Teachers should provide explicit explanations of verb form and tense meaning, use sentence comparison activities, give targeted written corrective feedback, and require students to revise their drafts. Students should also be trained to use self-editing strategies that help them check subject-verb agreement, auxiliary use, irregular past forms, and tense consistency. These instructional practices can help learners move from rule recognition to accurate and independent use of English verb tenses in academic writing.

Future research should examine larger samples of Palestinian undergraduate writing, compare tense errors across genres and proficiency levels, and evaluate the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback interventions. Further studies may also combine error analysis with student interviews to investigate learners' perceptions of tense difficulty and their strategies for editing grammatical errors. Such research would deepen understanding of Palestinian EFL writing development and provide stronger empirical foundations for grammar-informed writing pedagogy.

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