

Systematic Literature Review of Error Analysis in Foreign Language Essay Writing at the Secondary Level (Sorotan Literatur Bersistematik Analisis Kesalahan dalam Penulisan Karangan Bahasa Asing Peringkat Menengah)

MUSHIR AHMAD, *NIK MOHD RAHIMI NIK YUSOFF, HARUN BAHARUDIN & HAFIZHAH ZULKIFLI

ABSTRACT

The structural disparities between the Malay and foreign languages, along with insufficient proficiency in grammar, contribute to students' errors in essay composition. Nevertheless, there has been a limited number of scholarly endeavours focused on the systematic compilation and comprehensive examination of literature pertaining to this particular matter. In order to address this research gap, the primary objective of this paper is to undertake a systematic literature review of existing literature pertaining to the study of errors in foreign language essay writing at the secondary level. The procedure employed in the composition of this systematic literature review adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) guidelines for writing. A total of 6 articles were selected between 2018 until 2023 through identification, screening and eligibility process. In order to identify articles and sources for the purpose of this literature review, The study uses three primary databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and an additional supplementary database known as the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC). The thematic analysis undertaken in this SLR has identified two themes. 1) Categories of Errors in Essay Writing and 2) Factors Contributing to Errors in Essay Writing. A strong command of vocabulary and comprehensive understanding of grammar are essential to minimizing errors in essay writing. These errors when analyzed can serve as indicator tools for teachers in assessing the language proficiency levels of their students.

Keywords: Systematic literature review, Error Analysis, Foreign Language Essay Writing, Language Learning.

ABSTRAK

Perbezaan struktur antara bahasa Melayu dan bahasa asing serta kelemahan penguasaan tatabahasa menjadi faktor utama yang menyumbang kepada kesalahan pelajar dalam penulisan karangan. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian yang berfokus kepada pengumpulan secara sistematik dan analisis menyeluruh terhadap literatur berkaitan isu ini masih terhad. Bagi mengatasi jurang kajian ini, objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menjalankan sorotan literatur bersistematik terhadap kajian yang berkaitan dengan kesalahan dalam penulisan karangan bahasa asing dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah. Prosedur pelaksanaan ulasan literatur bersistematik ini berlandaskan garis panduan PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis). Sebanyak 6 artikel telah dipilih antara tahun 2018 hingga 2023 melalui proses pengenalpastian, saringan dan kelayakan. Artikel dan sumber untuk sorotan literatur bersistematik ini dikenal pasti melalui penggunaan tiga pangkalan data utama: Web of Science, Scopus, dan pangkalan data tambahan, iaitu Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC). Melalui analisis tematik yang dijalankan, dua tema utama telah dikenal pasti, iaitu 1) Kategori Kesalahan dalam Penulisan Karangan dan 2) Faktor yang Menyebabkan Kesalahan dalam Penulisan Karangan. Penguasaan kosa kata dan pemahaman yang mendalam terhadap tatabahasa merupakan asas untuk mengelakkan kesalahan dalam penulisan karangan. Guru juga boleh memanfaatkan kesalahan-kesalahan ini untuk menilai tahap penguasaan bahasa dalam kalangan pelajar mereka.

Kata kunci: Sorotan literatur bersistematik, Analisis Kesalahan, Penulisan Karangan, Pembelajaran Bahasa.

INTRODUCTION

In general, the primary aim of Foreign Language (FL) instruction is to enable students to achieve proficiency in four skills areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, writing is considered to be of utmost importance, as it is specifically assessed in the SPM examination. Writing skills encompass a combination of various linguistic abilities that prove challenging for learners, particularly those acquiring a second or foreign language. Consequently, specific methodologies must be employed in order to facilitate the development of these skills (Ahmad Fuad Che Daud et al., 2022; Shobehah Abd Karim et al., 2021). This necessity arises from the fact that achieving proficiency in writing necessitates extensive practice and refinement, beginning with mastery of individual letters, words, and sentences, and culminating in the construction of coherent articles (Mohamad Rofian Ismail et al., 2018). As a result, students often commit errors when writing, particularly when composing essays (Nor Asree Mohd Noh & Ab Halim Mohamad, 2018; Sulaiman Ismai et al., 2021). This viewpoint is supported by numerous experts who assert that students still struggle with writing, thereby impeding their overall foreign language proficiency (Shobehah Abd Karim et al., 2021). When individuals undertake essay writing, they occasionally encounter challenges related to grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and word selection (Azlan Shaiful Baharum & Mohamad Hazwan Abdul Rahman, 2020). Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the specific types of errors made by students when composing essays in foreign language, as well as the underlying causes of these errors (Azlan Shaiful Baharum et al., 2021).

At the secondary level, it is imperative to examine the errors made by students in their essays in order to assess their proficiency in foreign languages and their writing skills. Previous language studies conducted by Al-sobhi et al. (2018), Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah (2019), Ang Leng Hong et al. (2021), and others have focused on error analysis. To comprehensively comprehend and synthesize the findings of these studies, a systematic literature review (SLR) is indispensable. Although there is a necessity for an SLR, the existing reviews are limited in number and scope. Some studies have investigated the errors committed by university students in foreign language, such as Arabic essay writing. However, the research conducted by Azlan Shaiful Baharum et al. (2021) and Azlan Shaiful Baharumi & Mohammad Loqman Ibrahim (2020) primarily concentrated on university and high school students, but lacked in-depth analysis. Standard literature reviews suffer from various shortcomings, including lack of transparency, author biases, selection biases, and publication biases. Hence, conducting an SLR becomes crucial. An SLR offers

a comprehensive, lucid, organized, and systematic approach to studying the literature.

This SLR is grounded on the primary research questions: What types of errors do students make in foreign language essay writing? and What are the causes of these errors? The primary objective of this SLR is to conduct a meticulous and well-structured literature review of previous studies on error analysis in foreign language essay writing. This study holds significance both in practical and scholarly realms. Stakeholders such as educators and researchers can glean insights from this SLR to adopt diverse pedagogical approaches in the classroom, while researchers can further enhance their knowledge by expanding the scope of this study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this SLR is to conduct systematic, comprehensive, and regular literature reviews of recent research on error analysis in foreign language essay writing at the secondary level.

METHODS

The author used PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis) to make this SLR. PRISMA is a standard for publishing that is used a lot in the medical and public health fields. Even though this SLR is in the social sciences, it is still useful to look at PRISMA because it aids in establishing clear research questions and makes it possible to conduct organised searches. Furthermore, PRISMA reduces different types of bias and helps the author put together a good summary of the studies (Buckley et al., 2019).

Research questions are constructed using mnemonics or RQDT (Research Questions Development Tool) such as PICO, PICO, PICOM, PICOT, and SPIDER. The first stage in developing this SLR is to formulate an appropriate research question. The researchers stated, based on the focus of this SLR, which relates to the error analysis in foreign language essay writing at the secondary level:

- 1) What are the types of writing errors in foreign language essay writing?
- 2) What are the causes contributing to writing errors in foreign language essay writing ?

IDENTIFICATIONS

Identification is the procedure of locating and utilizing distinct terms to seek out documents and citations for an SLR. Keywords play a pivotal role in the search process

and have the potential to enhance the precision of the articles and references retrieved for the SLR. In line with the previously mentioned research inquiry, three primary keywords have been selected: error analysis, foreign language essays writing, and secondary school students. In order to broaden the scope of applicable keywords, synonyms and alternative iterations of the core keywords have been sought. This exploration was undertaken through the utilization of online thesauruses, examination of keywords employed in prior studies, utilization of the Scopus database, and solicitation of expert opinions. The outcomes of this identification procedure are listed in Table 1:

Table 1. Search string

Database	Search string
WoS (n=19)	TS= ((“error analysis” OR “error types” OR “problem analysis” OR “mistakes”) AND (“compos*” OR “writing” OR “essay “) AND (“secondary school”))
Scopus (n=45)	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((“error analysis” OR “error types” OR “problem analysis” OR “mistakes”) AND (“compos*” OR “writing” OR “essay “) AND (“secondary school”))
ERIC (n=45)	((“error analysis” OR “error types” OR “problem analysis” OR “mistakes”) AND (“composition” OR “writing” OR “essay “) AND (“secondary school”))

Using the identified keywords, an extensive search was conducted for articles and references in three prominent databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIC. The selection of these databases was based on their distinct advantages. According to Gusenbauer and Haddaway’s (2020) study, databases like Web of Science and Scopus offer superior search capabilities, stable search outcomes, and more advanced search tools compared to other databases. Martin-Martin et al. (2018) also emphasized the benefits of Web of Science and Scopus in terms of quality control and well-organized indexing. Furthermore, ERIC was included as a search source in this systematic literature review. Haddaway et al. (2015) highlighted some of ERIC’s strengths, such as its extensive collection of articles and coverage of various languages and study areas. These strengths make ERIC a valuable supporting database. To retrieve relevant articles and references from Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIC, advanced search techniques employing fundamental functions such as Boolean Operators (AND, OR), phrase searching, deletion, wildcards, and field codes were employed (Table 1). Additionally, manual techniques such as handpicking and snowballing were employed to supplement the aforementioned methods.

Based on the chosen keywords, databases, and search methods, a total of 45 articles from Scopus, 19 articles from Web of Science, and 45 articles from ERIC were identified. All of these articles and references will proceed to the subsequent step of the systematic search strategy, namely screening.

SCREENING

Screening encompasses the process of determining the relevance and significance of the identified articles and references for the systematic literature review, based on predefined selection criteria. This phase requires meticulous attention to specific criteria. The initial criterion examined in this systematic literature review pertains to the publication year. Only works published within the last six years (2018 to 2023) were considered. Several justifications support this time frame. Firstly, it aligns with Kraus et al.’s (2020) concept of study maturity, which suggests that numerous crucial articles have emerged during this period. Additionally, extensive searches within the most influential sources have revealed a substantial increase in publications addressing error analysis in essay writing since 2019. Moreover, to ensure high quality, this systematic literature review exclusively includes journal papers. Furthermore, only articles written in Malay and English were chosen to facilitate comprehension. Additionally, the review exclusively incorporates articles that present real-world data on the subject matter. As a result, review articles are excluded since the primary objective of this systematic literature review is not to recapitulate past studies, but rather to extract their findings. Another criterion for inclusion is the discovery of findings. In order for certain articles to be selected, the findings must pertain to language errors. If an article claims that the study focuses on writing styles, writing anxiety, teaching collocations, or communicative learning, it will not be considered. This holds significance in ensuring that all chosen articles encompass pertinent results for the systematic literature review (refer to Table 2). Throughout the identification process, a total of 109 items were identified. Following the screening process, 43 articles were excluded due to failure in meeting the established criteria. Consequently, this resulted in 11 articles remaining for the subsequent stage of the process.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studied conducted between 2018 until 2023	Studied conducted before 2018

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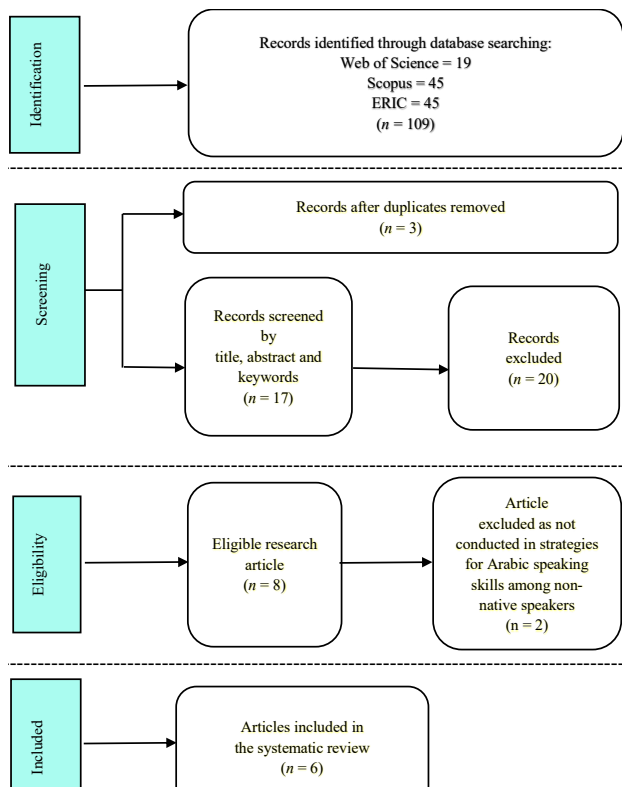
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Articles from journal	Review paper, proceeding paper, book chapter, editorial material, meeting abstract
The text written in Malay And English	The text not written in English
Related to Errors Analysis in FL Essay Writing At Secondary Level	Not related to Errors Analysis in FL Essay Writing At Secondary Level

ELIGIBILITY

All of the selected articles will go through a second round of screening, called eligibility screening. This step makes sure that the articles picked are really relevant and good choices for this SLR. This is done by looking at the names and abstracts of the articles that were chosen. If it's still not clear whether the chosen article is important or not after reading the title and abstract, the article's methodology, results, and discussion sections will be looked at. In this process, 3 articles were thrown out because they didn't focus on error analysis but on teachers corrective feedback, duplicated records, the studies were done at universities instead of high schools, and one article was a scoping review. Using this method, 8 articles were chosen to move on to the next step, which is quality appraisal.

Table 3. Flow diagram for systematic reviews which included searches of databases and registers only



EVALUATION OF THE ARTICLES' OR REFERENCES' QUALITY

Before they are included, the selected articles/references must be evaluated for quality. This is critical for reducing bias and identifying studies with methodological flaws (Edward et al., 2019). For this evaluation, two experts were chosen from the pool of researchers. Because the SLR includes articles/references from diverse study designs (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods), the experts used the MMAT (Mixed Method Appraisal Tools) to aid in their evaluation process (Hong et al., 2018). Each article/reference will be evaluated using two fundamental criteria and five particular criteria (depending on the article/reference's study methodology). The first stage in this process is to evaluate the article's quality using two essential criteria: Is the research question expressed clearly? Is the data acquired relevant to the research question? Articles must meet both of these requirements before moving on to the next step, where they will be classified depending on their study design (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed techniques) and then evaluated using the five specified criteria.

Experts will have three options for each criterion: Yes, No, or Can't Tell if you're unsure or confused by the assessment outcome. To evaluate each article, the experts must establish a consensus on each assessment. A second opinion will be sought if an agreement cannot be achieved. Only articles/references that match at least three of the five criteria can be deemed of high quality and included in the SLR (see Table 4). Six of the original eight examined articles met the minimum three requirements and were included in this SLR. Two articles, by Manegre (2019) and Adnan & Sayadi (2021), were eliminated because they did not match the minimum criterion.

Table 4. Quality evaluation of qualitative articles

Basic Criteria	Ang Leng Hong et al. (2021)	Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah (2019)	Manegre (2019)	Maria-Lourdes & Nassaji, (2020)
Are the research question stated clearly?	Y	Y	N	Y
Can the obtained data answer the stated research question?	Y	Y	N	Y
Qualitative Criteria				

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Is the qualitative approach used appropriate to answer the RQ?	Y	Y	N	Y
Is the sampling strategy used relevant to answer the research question?	Y	Y	N	Y
Are the findings obtained from the data sufficient?	Y	Y	N	Y
Can the interpretation of finding be supported by the data?	Y	Y	N	Y
Is there any relationship between the sources, collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data?	Y	Y	N	Y
Results	Valid	Valid	Rejected	Valid

Table 5. Quality evaluation of quantitative articles

Basic Criteria	Al-sobhi et al. (2018)	Adnan & Sayadi (2021)
Are the research question stated clearly?	Y	Y
Can the obtained data answer the stated research question?	Y	Y
Quantitative Criteria		
Is the sampling strategy used relevant to answer the research question?	Y	N
Is the selected sample representative of the studied population?	Y	N
Is the measurement used appropriate?	Y	N
Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	Y	N
Is the stastical analysis used appropriate to answer the RQ?	Y	N
Results	Valid	Rejected

Table 6. Quality evaluation of mixed method articles

Basic Criteria	Mailula & Ngoepe (2022)	Thi & Phuong (2022)
Are the research question stated clearly?	Y	Y
Can the obtained data answer the stated research question?	Y	Y
Mix Method Criteria		
Is there reasons tu used mix method approach?	Y	Y
Can these different study component be effectively integrated?	Y	Y
Is the data obtained through qualitative & quantitative interpreted?	Y	Y
Is there differences & nonconsistent element between qualitative and quantitative data?	Y	Y
Do the different research component adhere to quality criteria for each involved research design?	Y	Y
Results	Valid	Valid

DATA EXTRACTION AND ANALYSIS

Next is the extraction of data from the evaluated articles. Two researchers conduct this research. Since the purpose of this SLR is to examine findings from previous research on Error Analysis in FL Essay Writing, the data extraction process will concentrate primarily on the abstract, findings of the study and research discussions. If necessary, additional sections of the articles containing pertinent information will be read. A table is created to facilitate the subsequent analysis of the extracted data. Following the extraction of pertinent data, the next stage is data analysis. The most appropriate approach of analysis for this SLR is quantitative synthesis since it incorporates a variety of study designs (quantitative + qualitative + mixed methodologies) and takes the form of an integrative review (Whitemore & Knalfl, 2006). According to Flemmings et al. (2018), thematic analysis is one of the best techniques for analysing findings from diverse research designs in quaitative synthesis, which employs a variety of analysis techniques. The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify patterns in previous studies based on similarities or relationships between extracted findings.

To identify appropriate themes, each extracted findings is individually examined. If there are similarities or connections between the findings, they are grounded together. Then appropriate themes are designated to these groups. Two themes have been identified throughout this process ; 1) Types of writing errors, 2) Causes of writing errors. Subsequently, all of these topics have been validated by experts in the field of Language education. The consensus of the experts is that all of the formulated principal themes are suitable and pertinent to the predetermined research questions.

FINDINGS

This section will concentrate on the background of the selected articles/references in the SLR before analysing the major findings. One article/reference was published in 2018, one in 2019, one in 2020, one in 2021, and two in 2022. In addition, one of the six articles/references is from The Southern Asian Journal of English Language Studies, one is from Per Linguam, one is from Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction, one is from TESL Canada Journal, one is from Dinamika Ilmu, and one is from Sage Open. Here are the findings of the study based on the articles listed above:

Table 7. Findings of the study based on the articles

What are the causes of writing errors in Foreign language (FL) essay writing?

Aspects	Examples
Weak knowledge	Learners were incompetent in using English as foreign language. (Ang Leng Hong et al., 2021)
	Due to a lack of knowledge (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022)
	Inadequate knowledge of the writing in the target language (Al-sobhi et al., 2018)
Mother tongue Influence	Transfer between languages, different from their mother tongue (Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019)
	Learners spell words in their mother tongue (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022)

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Incompetence Teacher	Did not have the relevant qualifications to teach EFAL (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022)
	Inability to accurately recognize students' errors (Maria-Lourdes & Nassaji, 2020)
Lack of interest and Unmotivated To Write	Demotivation and restriction of creativity (Do Thi Vu Phuong, 2022), Creativity in writing is the least (Al-sobhi et al., 2018).

DISCUSSION

Writing proficiency is not a readily acquired skill. As a consequence, students frequently commit writing errors (Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019). In general, the errors that students make in their essays are not significant deficiencies; however, teachers can use this information to understand students' developmental stages and recommend appropriate intervention actions (Ang Leng Hong et al., 2021; Al-sobhi et al., 2018).

Several common categories of essay writing errors are frequently committed by secondary school students. The errors were grammar-related errors (Do Thi Vu Phuong, 2022; Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022; Maria-Lourdes Lira-Gonzales & Nassaji, 2020; Sita Ratnaningsih and Azizah, 2019), incomplete sentences (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022; Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019), spelling errors (Maria-Lourdes Lira-Gonzales & Nassaji, 2020; Do Thi Vu Phuong, 2022; Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019), misuse of words (Ang Leng Hong et al., 2021), and technical errors such as capitalization, punctuation, commas, discourse markers, and conjunctions (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022; Lindström & Lubińska, 2022 ;Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019).

Students' knowledge of the types of essay writing errors must be addressed expeditiously by identifying the underlying causes of these errors. Students who struggle to comprehend the grammar of a foreign language have difficulty writing effectively (Ang Leng Hong et al., 2021; Maria-Lourdes Lira-Gonzales & Nassaji, 2020). This involves problems with word selection and inappropriate vocabulary usage (Do Thi Vu Phuong, 2022; Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022; Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019). Another factor is the incorporation of native language elements into foreign language sentences, which leads to errors (Sitnaningsih & Azizah, 2019). Interlingual errors occur when sentence structures from the native language are negatively transmitted into the writing of foreign language

(Sita Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019; Al-sobhi et al., 2018). In addition, Mailula and Ngoepe (2002) mention a lack of competent instruction by teachers as a cause of frequent errors in student writing. Teachers struggle to identify students' writing weaknesses due to excessive workloads (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022; Maria-Lourdes Lira-Gonzales & Nassaji, 2020). This can cause students to lose their motivation to write, lose interest, and lack creativity in their writing (Do Thi Vu Phuong, 2021; Schwartz et al., 2022).

Errors in essay or composition writing are perceived as positive indicators of a student's proficiency and level of development in a foreign language (Sulaiman Ismai et al., 2021). It has been posited by Ang Leng Hong et al. (2021) and Al-sobhi et al. (2018; cited in Ang Leng Hong et al., 2021) that the analysis of errors made by students in essay writing equips educators with valuable information to enhance instruction and devise subsequent measures. The present study focuses on various categories of errors, encompassing grammatical errors, sentence structure errors, spelling errors, word usage errors, and technical errors (punctuation). As per (Kholod Naser Olimat & Dina A. H. Al-Jamal, 2022), Interlingual and Intralingual errors are the most prevalent categories of errors encountered in foreign language writing. During the early stages of a student's learning process, the interference of old habits (native language) impedes the formation of new habits (foreign language), resulting in interlingual errors (Lindström & Lubińska, 2022; Nor Asree Mohd Noh & Ab Halim Mohamad, 2018). These errors primarily manifest in sentence structure and vocabulary utilization. Conversely, intralingual errors arise from students' lack of comprehension regarding the grammar of the foreign language, leading to errors in verb usage, noun usage, adjective usage, and other lexical errors (Lindström & Lubińska, 2022; Sitnaningsih & Azizah, 2019).

The second theme emanating from this study is the causes of errors. This theme suggests that the students contribute to the occurrence of writing errors due to their limited knowledge of the grammatical aspects of the language they are learning, the influence of their native language, and their lack of motivation and inclination to write. Furthermore, instructors play a role in identifying the frequent errors made by the students and adapting their teaching strategies to minimize these errors (Shobehah Abd Karim et al., 2021). The cultivation of students' interest and motivation to write must be nurtured through practice, easily comprehensible techniques, and an emphasis on mastering vocabulary to facilitate the selection of words and the construction of correct sentences (Nor Effendy Ahmad Sokri & Mohamad Rofian Ismail, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this systematic review has deliberated upon the research pertaining to the causes and classifications of errors in foreign language essay writing among students. Based on the conducted inclusion and exclusion criteria, three databases, namely WoS, Scopus, and ERIC, were utilized, leading to the selection of six articles for the final review. The ultimate findings have identified five factors associated with the classifications of errors in essay writing, as well as four factors linked to their causes. These findings are of great assistance to instructors in evaluating the language proficiency levels of students by means of error analysis in writing, and in devising subsequent measures to prevent their recurrence.

Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of attaining mastery over vocabulary and exhibiting a comprehensive understanding of grammar, as a means to aid students in reducing writing errors. Additionally, teachers can play a pivotal role as facilitators, by encouraging and motivating students to cultivate an enthusiasm for mastering the foreign language, particularly through essay writing activities.

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Mushir Ahmad
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Emel: p113508@siswa.ukm.edu.my

*Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Emel: nik@ukm.edu.my

Harun Baharudin
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Emel: harunbaharudin@ukm.edu.my

Hafizhah Zulkifli
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Emel: hafizhah_zulkifli@ukm.edu.my

*Corresponding Author: nik@ukm.edu.my
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