

Perceptions of Error Gravity among JNV PGTs: Challenging the Uniformity of Assessment in Diversified Rural Classrooms

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Abstract

In the unique residential setting of JNVs in Gujarat, English teachers and students often locate themselves on different linguistic pages. This study explores the ‘Error Gravity’ perceptions of PGT English teachers across nine JNVs, examining how they rank 13 types of morpho-syntactic and mechanical errors committed by Class XII students in their English essays. By evaluating these errors through the lenses of comprehensibility, frequency, and acceptability using a 5-point Likert scale, a clear ‘hierarchy of errors’ emerged. However, the data reveals a startling ‘gravity gap’ between what teachers prioritize and what students actually struggle with. While teachers remain focused on high-level issues like tenses, subject-verb agreement, and word order, a student’s real challenge lies elsewhere. Rural ESL learners face significant foundational linguistic obstacles: spelling (driven by the phonological complexity of English); article usage (missing in many Indian languages); noun pluralization (educators often use the GTM to teach singular and plural nouns, but it inadequately prepares students to apply plural forms with appropriate determiners when writing about multiple subjects); and limited vocabulary arising from the tendency to memorize words in isolation, which is decontextualized and limits their capacity to use words correctly across different scenarios. These divergences suggest that our current teacher-centric assessment models often ignore the ‘interlanguage’ development of the individual learner. JNVs are a cultural melting pot; therefore, a rigid, ‘one-size-fits-all’ hierarchy fails to account for the diverse linguistic backgrounds of rural students. The paper argues for a paradigm shift: moving away from standardized checklists and toward individualized linguistic profiles. A learner-centred approach to EG, supported by differentiated instruction, allows educators to prioritize core linguistic mechanisms over unattainable academic benchmarks. This can facilitate targeted interventions to address the foundational linguistic constraints affecting rural learners’ language development.

Keywords: Error Gravity, JNV, Rural ELT, Grammatical Errors, Individualized Linguistic Profiles

Introduction

Errors in the written texts often indicate a continuous language learning process, but this doesn't imply that we should ignore them. On the contrary, timely and thoughtful EC plays a crucial role in strengthening L2 writing skills (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2002; Shirazizadeh & Amirfazlian, 2019; Nushi & Khazaei, 2024). EC supposedly helps the learner to induce or "figure out" the right form of a rule. If, for example, an ESL learner says, "I goes to school every day," and the teacher corrects him or her by repeating the utterance correctly, the learner is supposed to realize that the /s/ ending goes with the third person and not the first person and alter his or her conscious mental representation of the rule (Fanselow, 1977; Long, 1977; Krashen, 1982).

There exists a lack of agreement among teachers regarding errors; numerous educators may not be cognizant of the advantages associated with various evaluation methods, nor have they undergone targeted training in error assessment. This deficiency in knowledge has led to varying perceptions among different evaluators concerning the assessment of distinct types of errors (Maharjan, 1970). In general, error gravity "is characterized by the attempt to identify those errors which are perceived to be most serious and/or distracting to readers and/or listeners, together with the factors that tend to influence such judgements." (Endley, 2016; Nushi & Khazaei, 2024).

One of the key difficulties teachers face in evaluating learner errors lies in the lack of well-defined guidelines or criteria to help them judge the relative EG of the errors (Grobe & Renkl, 2007; Nushi et al., 2023). It is widely acknowledged that NS and non-NS teachers differ consistently in how they assess and mark students' written work (James, 1977). Evaluating learner errors, therefore, necessitates clear guidelines to determine their relative seriousness or gravity. In the absence of such guidelines, it can be reasonably assumed that individual ESL teachers - irrespective of their linguistic background - tend to interpret and prioritize errors or error types in different ways (Sheorey, 1986; Maharjan, 2024).

Hendrickson (1978) posed a question regarding which errors ought to be corrected. In response, Ellis (2013) states, "The (teacher) guides offer little advice, however, on which errors teachers should correct and which ones they should ignore." The challenges educators encounter in distinguishing between errors and mistakes, as well as in identifying whether a deviation is global or local, are not addressed. Keshavarz (2023) proposes that, "...learners' errors should not be corrected indiscriminately, and since no teacher has time to adequately address all the errors made by the students, a **hierarchy** should be established for the correction of errors according to their nature and pedagogical significance."

SP Publications

International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor: 8.337 (SJIF)**

ISSN: 2581-8333 | Volume 8, Special Issue-1; 2026

Objective of the Study

It is a common practice to assess the EG through acceptability tests conducted by the NSs, which are inherently subjective, as noted by Tran-Thi-Chau (1975). Corder (1967) suggests that “we may learn to adapt ourselves to his (learner’s) needs rather than impose upon him... what he ought to learn.” A hierarchy of errors can be established to address the communicative requirements of Indian language learners, taking into account the perspectives of their instructors.

The current study on EG is significantly influenced by the Error Analysis (EA) conducted by Sarkar (2025) on a substantial corpus of over 90,000 words—comprising 423 written English essays from Class XII studying in 09 JNVs across Gujarat. The investigation pivots to the JNV educators’ perspective, measuring how nine PGT-English teachers perceive the ‘gravity’ of 41 specific morphosyntactic and mechanical errors extracted from their students’ work. Using James’ (1998) framework—evaluating grammaticality, acceptability, correctness, and infelicity—the research identifies a striking ‘gravity gap’: a divergence between the errors that occur most frequently in student writing and those that teachers find most disruptive or unacceptable. To explore this ‘gravity gap’, the study addresses the following research questions:

- a. Which specific grammatical errors do JNV evaluators categorize as most unacceptable?
- b. How do these perceptions of ‘unacceptability’ contrast with the actual frequency, percentage, and ranking of errors found within the student population?
- c. What are the pedagogical implications of this divergence between student performance and teacher evaluation?

Methodology

Data collection was initiated by providing the teacher-evaluators with a comprehensive briefing via email, which included a formal cover letter and a secure Google Form link containing the questionnaire. This briefing articulated the study’s objectives and the specific criteria for assessing EG using a 5-point Likert scale (Table 2). To ensure the integrity of the results, evaluators were instructed to maintain strict confidentiality and avoid disseminating the assessment tools through social media platforms. Participant anonymity was rigorously protected through a systematic coding process. The assessment instrument featured 41 incorrect phrases and sentences—systematically sampled from the broader EA study—encompassing a wide range of orthographic and morpho-syntactic categories, including spelling, tense, subject-verb agreement, nouns, verbs, modals, prepositions, conjunctions, articles, distributive determiners, possessive determiners, word order, and word choice.

3.1 The Evaluators

The mean age of the 09 educators, who served/are serving as postgraduate teachers at JNVs, was 44.33 years, with the oldest participant being 50 years old and the youngest at 36 years. The average teaching experience of the evaluators is 17.77, with a minimum of 6 years and a maximum of 25 years. Among these evaluators, 3 were females and the remaining 6 were males. Since all these teachers were instructing class XII students during the data collection period, the selection of the evaluators was not random. All the evaluators willingly came forward to participate in the error gravity assessment.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics and scores given by the 09 Evaluators

JNV	Teachers' Code	Gender	Age in Years	Teaching Experience in Years	Error Gravity Scores out of 164
AHMEDABAD	E01	Male	50	23	143
ANAND	E02	Female	38	15	47
BANASKANTHA	E03	Male	36	6	103
GANDHINAGAR	E04	Female	37	7	137
KHEDA	E05	Male	46	15	122
MEHSANA	E06	Male	49	25	78
NAVSARI	E07	Male	47	23	153
PATAN	E08	Female	44	23	128
VADODARA	E09	Male	52	23	120

An example was given to the teachers where they were shown how to assess the severity of an erroneous phrase using a 5-point Likert scale. It was emphasized that the example provided was solely for illustration purposes and should not be generalized. This provided the teachers with a comprehensive understanding of how to evaluate the erroneous sentences/ phrases based on their frequency, severity, acceptability and comprehensibility.

Example: “When teacher are teaching in the classrooms...”

Correct use - "When **teachers are** teaching in the classrooms..."

In this sentence, the subject ‘teacher’ does not agree with the verb ‘are’; thus, the error is in subject-verb agreement. “Teacher” should be pluralized to “teachers” to match the plural verb “are”. This error is not acceptable in my view. Therefore, I have marked the fourth option.

Table 2: A framework for assessing the severity of unacceptable errors

0	Absolutely acceptable	No	✗
1	Fairly acceptable	No	✗
2	May be acceptable	No	✗
3	May not be acceptable	No	✗

4	Not acceptable	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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The 5-point Likert includes the values 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4, which correspond to the following meaning: 0 for absolutely incorrect, 1 for may not be acceptable, 2 for maybe acceptable, 3 for fairly acceptable, and 4 for absolutely correct. This approach aimed to reduce the evaluators' awareness of error grading in comparison to the numerical scale method. An evaluator regarded the score they assigned to each sentence as a deduction from the total score of four marks. The responses were subsequently tabulated (Fig. 1).

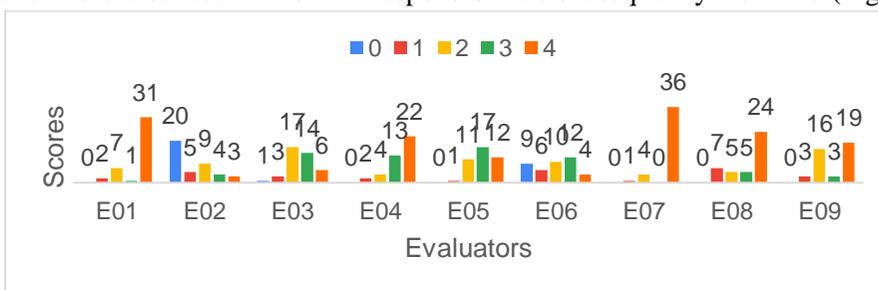


Fig. 1: Score Distribution by Evaluators

1. Findings of the Survey

Table 3: Mean score and Hierarchy of errors

Rank	Type of Error	Sentence/ question No.	Mean value
1	Tense	1 and 5	3.33
2	Subject-Verb agreement	23, 26, and 27	3.18
3	Word order	24	3.11
4	Spelling	17, 21, 41	3.003
5	Preposition	4, 15, 19, 30, 34, and 39	2.88
6	Modal auxiliaries	31	2.78
7	Word choice	7, 10, 28, 32, 35, and 37	2.78
8	Verb	8, 11, and 14	2.77
9	Noun	12, 13, 16, 33, and 38	2.75
10	Conjunction	2	2.44
11	Distributive	40	2.44
12	Articles usage	3, 6, 9, 18, 20, 22, 25, and 29	2.41
13	Possessive	36	2.22

The 41 incorrect phrases/sentences identified from the sample essays exhibit the grammatical errors under examination. Table 3 illustrates that the average EG score for tense errors across two examples is 3.33, indicating the highest level of severity, followed

closely by subject-verb concord errors at 3.18 and word order errors at 3.11. Spelling errors are identified as the fourth most severe, with an average score of 3. Fig. 2 presents a Pareto chart that illustrates the distribution of errors according to their severity ratings, which highlight the most frequent and impactful error types.

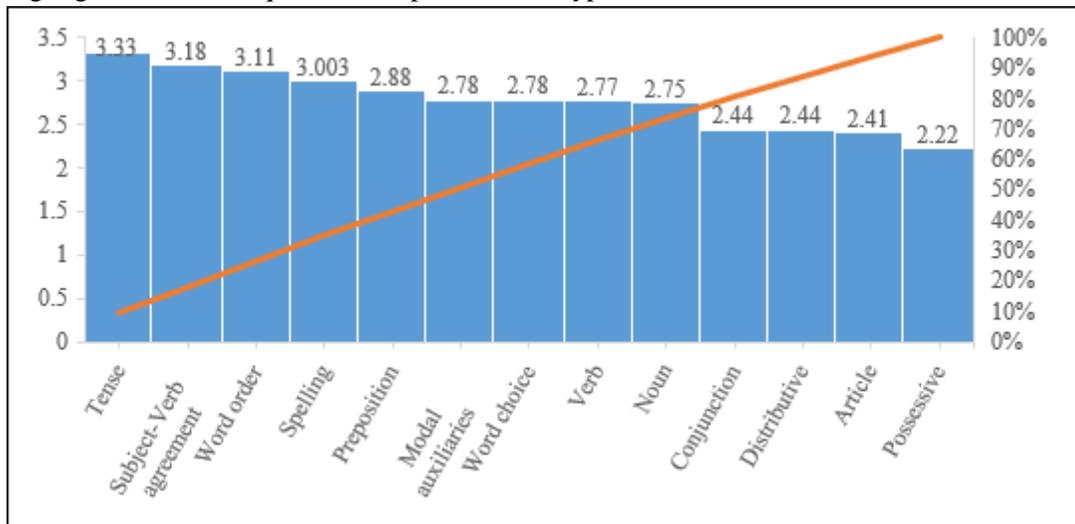


Fig. 2: A Pareto chart Depicting the Distribution of Error gravity ratings

4.1 Measure of central tendencies for all the 41 errors

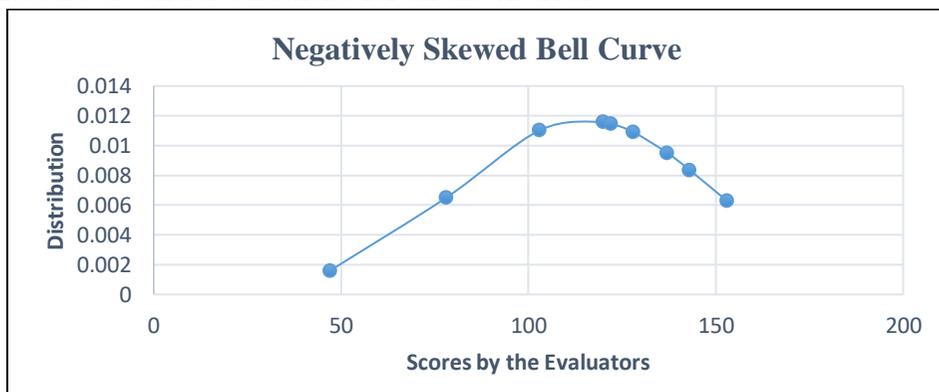


Fig. 3: Measure of Central Tendency of the error evaluation

The survey result assessing the EG scores for 41 erroneous phrases/sentences indicate a median score of 122, a mean score of 114.56, and a mode score of 153, with an SD of 33.71. When we analyse the evaluation scores of the nine PGT English teachers, we observed a negatively skewed distribution (Fig. 3). This suggests that the teachers deemed

the grammatical errors significant enough to warrant correction; this indicates a high level of EG for the identified grammatical errors in the written texts.

2. The “Perception vs. Reality” Gap

To analyse the perceptions of ‘unacceptability’ in contrast with the actual frequency, percentage, and ranking of errors found within the student population, we have to compare the rank of errors for the entire data set with the ‘hierarchy of errors’ developed based on the EG survey. The dataset consists of 127 essays (30% of the total population of 423). Sample essays were selected using the stratified random sampling method. Students were instructed to compose a descriptive essay on one of the following topics within a prescribed word limit of 150–200 words:

- a. The Importance of Discipline in a Student’s Life
- b. If I Were the Principal of My School for a Day
- c. Online Shopping

Table 4 displays the frequency, percentage, and rank of the grammatical errors identified and classified as observed in the sample essays.

Table 4: Frequency, percentage, mean, and average of overall Error types

Rank	ERROR TYPE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN	AVERAGE
1	Spelling	566	21.246	62.889	4.46
2	Article	363	13.626	40.333	2.86
3	Noun	277	10.398	30.778	2.18
4	Word choice	271	10.173	30.111	2.13
5	Preposition	229	8.596	25.444	1.8
6	Modal auxiliary	225	8.446	25.000	1.77
7	Verb	223	8.371	24.778	1.76
8	Sub-Verb Agreement	176	6.607	19.556	1.39
9	Tense	115	4.317	12.778	0.91
10	Pronoun	52	1.952	5.778	0.41
11	Conjunction	44	1.652	4.889	0.35
12	Word order	35	1.314	3.889	0.28
13	Demonstrative	27	1.014	3.000	0.21
14	Possessive	26	0.976	2.889	0.2
15	Adjective	21	0.788	2.333	0.17
16	Quantifiers	12	0.450	1.333	0.09

17	Distributive	2	0.075	0.222	0.02
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Table 5: Comparative Table: Student Error Frequency vs. Teacher Perceived Gravity

Rank (Frequency)	Error Type	Frequency Mean (Mf)	Rank (Gravity)	Gravity Mean (Mg)	Pedagogical Implication
1	Spelling	62.89	4	3.00	High-frequency; Moderate concern
2	Article	40.33	12	2.41	Significant Oversight: High frequency vs. Low concern
3	Noun	30.78	9	2.75	Frequent student slip; Low teacher priority
4	Word Choice	30.11	7	2.78	Balanced student/teacher awareness
5	Preposition	25.44	5	2.88	Ideal Alignment: Shared recognition
6	Modal Auxiliary	25.00	6	2.78	Consistent ranking across both groups
7	Verb	24.78	8	2.77	Moderate student struggle and concern
8	Sub-Verb Agreement	19.56	2	3.18	High Gravity Gap: Rare but “unacceptable”
9	Tense	12.78	1	3.33	Critical Gravity Gap: Rare but most severe
11	Conjunction	4.89	10	2.44	Low frequency; Low pedagogical weight
12	Word Order	3.89	3	3.11	Severe Structural Error: High penalty
14	Possessive	2.89	13	2.22	Marginalized in both usage and correction
17	Distributive	0.22	11	2.44	Rare usage; Moderate penalty when seen

A comparative analysis of the gravity survey (Table 3) and the error frequency (Table 4) reveals a significant misalignment between linguistic occurrence and pedagogical concern as mentioned in Table 5 and elaborated in detail as follows:

- a. Spelling as a “Marginalized” Error: Spelling errors are the most pervasive—accounting for 566 out of 2,664 total errors with a high mean frequency—but they are only ranked fourth in terms of severity by evaluators.

- b. **The Tense Paradox:** While tense errors do not dominate the corpus frequency, they occupy the top rank in the gravity hierarchy. This suggests that for JNV educators, a mastery of temporal markers is the ultimate litmus test for ‘correct’ English.
- c. **Syntactic Integrity:** Subject-verb agreement and word order are viewed with much greater scrutiny. Despite ranking eighth and twelfth in frequency, respectively, educators identified them as the second and third most unacceptable errors. This suggests that instructors prioritize structural and syntactic integrity over mechanical accuracy.
- d. **Lexical Tolerance:** The moderate ranking of word choice errors reflects a pragmatic approach by teachers; they seem to prioritize the structural ‘skeleton’ of the sentence (word order and S-V agreement) over the specific ‘vocabulary’ used to fill it.
- e. **Blind Spot:** Interestingly, article usage appears to be a ‘blind spot’ in evaluation; despite being the second most prevalent student error, 363 out of 2664 total errors, evaluators assigned it a low gravity score ($M = 2.41$), suggesting they may view article omissions as less disruptive to communication.
- f. **The Determiner Buffer:** Errors in distributive and possessive determiners appear at the bottom of both lists. This alignment indicates that these categories are neither a major hurdle for students nor a significant point of irritation for evaluators, making them lower-priority areas for immediate pedagogical intervention.
- g. **Shared Ranking Outcome:** Prepositional errors provided the only point of consensus, ranking fifth in both frequency ($M = 25.44$) and perceived gravity ($M = 2.88$).

3. Pedagogical Recommendations: Bridging the Gravity Gap

The divergence between error frequency and perceived EG in this study suggests a need for a strategic shift in how JNV educators approach English writing instruction. To optimize student outcomes, the following recommendations are proposed.

6.1 Implementing a Tiered Feedback Model

Rather than treating all errors equally, educators should adopt a tiered feedback model that differentiates feedback based on EG and frequency.

- a. Tier 1 targets global, high-gravity errors (e.g., tense, word order, subject–verb agreement) which, though less frequent, significantly obscure meaning and therefore require explicit instruction and prioritized CF using strategies such as minimal marking.

- b. Tier 2 addresses local, high-frequency errors (e.g., spelling and articles) through automated tools or peer review, allowing teachers to conserve CF for complex, meaning-level issues while still ensuring accuracy.

6.2 Strategic Re-alignment of Article Instruction

The pedagogical “blind spot” concerning article usage—characterized by high student error frequency ($M = 40.33$) despite low teacher intervention—requires urgent redress. Rather than teaching articles as isolated rules, JNV curriculum designers should implement corpus-informed exercises that address definite and indefinite usage within authentic contexts to resolve this systemic lack of conceptual clarity.

6.3 Utilizing Learner Corpora for Self-Reflexivity

The JNV student corpus (Sarkar, 2025) is an important teaching tool for helping students become more aware of their own interlanguage development.

serves as a vital pedagogical resource for fostering linguistic self-awareness. By utilizing the “hierarchy of errors”, students can engage in targeted “error-hunting” within their own drafts, focusing specifically on high-gravity issues such as tense, subject-verb agreement, and word order.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore a significant misalignment between the grammatical hierarchies prioritized by JNV educators and the actual linguistic challenges faced by the student population. As Erickson (1986) said, “The basic issue is that many students, for a variety of different reasons, do not appear to be learning what the teacher and the school claim to be teaching.” (p. 138; Schmidt, 2010). To address this, I propose the adoption of individual linguistic portfolios tailored to the specific sociolinguistic contexts of rural learners. By replacing standardized error hierarchies with student-centric data and by providing the JNV PGT-English teachers with CPDT focused on “gravity bias” awareness, institutions can develop fairer assessment rubrics. Such reforms ensure that evaluation is not merely a tool for penalization, but a reflective practice that addresses the genuine linguistic needs of the ESL learners.

Ultimately, this research positions JNV educators not merely as instructors, but as pivotal innovators and facilitators capable of reshaping the landscape of rural ELT. While centred on Grade XII students across nine districts in Gujarat, these findings serve as a microcosm for broader systemic change. By addressing the seminar’s core pillars—from navigating the challenges of rural education and implementing innovative pedagogical approaches to informing policy interventions and refining assessment methods—this study underscores the transformative power of EA through a structured ‘hierarchy of errors’. To

build upon this foundation, it is imperative that future research expands to include more diverse demographics and varied educational boards. By doing this, we can make sure that these interventions work on a national level and that the spirit of innovation that JNVs promote becomes the norm for all rural students in India.

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Abbreviations used in the article:

CF: Corrective Feedback

CPDT: Continuous Professional Development for Teachers

EA: Error Analysis

EC: Error Correction

EG: Error Gravity

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESL: English as a Second Language

GTM: Grammar Translation Method

JNV: Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya

NS: Native Speaker

PGT: Post Graduate Teacher

SD: Standard Deviation