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Analysis of the Problems in the Usage of Verb Phrase Ellipsis for Undergraduate Students of Hazara Region

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges faced by undergraduate English language learners in Hazara region in using elliptical constructions such as verb phrase ellipsis (VPE), including gapping and sluicing. Ellipsis, as an economy-driven grammatical phenomenon, plays a central role in natural discourse but remains underexplored in Pakistani EFL context. The primary objectives of this research were to examine the accuracy and error patterns in learners' use of these constructions, to identify the influence of instructional gaps and structural complexity, and to propose pedagogical strategies for improvement. The samples were collected from two hundred and eighty-six participants enrolled in different universities of Hazara region at undergraduate level. They were administered diagnostic grammar tasks that assessed VPE, gapping, and sluicing in controlled written tasks. The answers given by the learners were contrasted and compared with the native samples of the British National Corpus (BNC) and Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The findings revealed the existence of an apparent rank of competence, that VPE had been marginally the most robust category that had moderate accuracy, that sluicing had been partially learned, but that recoverability had been an issue and gapping had been the worst-behaving category in regards to avoidance rates. Patterns in errors suggested that there is low coverage of ellipsis in the curricula and low frequency of input in natural texts. Such pedagogical implications include the explicit teaching of grammar, training in parallelism, training in discourse, and materials based on corpus. The study adds to the existing literature on syntactic acquisition in Pakistani EFL learners and the value of introducing more sophisticated grammar phenomena in a controlled manner to increase communicative competence.

Key Words: Elliptical Constructions, VPE, Gapping, Sluicing, EFL, BNC, COCA

INTRODUCTION

When conceptually used in syntax, the term ellipsis describes one or more parts of a clause that have been left out, usually in grammatical terms, by reasons that can be determined by its context, with resulting grammatical economy and consistency. Alawad and Ahmed (2024) argued that elliptical constructions enable writers to rationalize narratives and avoid redundancy, particularly in prescribed educational discourse. The elliptical structure of formal and business communication has a pragmatic point in the fact that it narrates meaning more skillfully, which is the subject of current discourse analysis (Malyuga & Dzhagatspanyan, 2024). According to Landau (2023), the constituents that were removed in a clause should be grammatically well formed and contextually restorable in order to maintain precision of the structure and transparency of meaning. VPE identifies a complex phenomenon of omission of a verb phrase in a clause, which occurs in coordinate or subordinate constructions, and the meaning of which may be read independently of a previous clause in the same sentence. For instance, "*She can play the piano, and he can too*". It is evident that, in verb phrase ellipsis, a verb phrase in a clause is omitted, but can be interpreted in a proper semantic and pragmatic context; for example, the verbal group, *playing the piano*, is omitted in the second structure but can be easily construed. VPE usually contains auxiliary verbs such as *do, can, will, or have*, which function as licensors for elliptical omissions and sustain the syntactic composition of the sentence. VPE presents a noteworthy obstacle for EFL learners, as it requires a thorough comprehension of auxiliaries, parallelism in syntax, and coordination among clauses, often ignored in teaching through traditional grammar training (Alawad & Ahmed, 2024).

Gapping is a type of ellipsis characteristically present in coordinate clauses, which omits the verb or auxiliary. The example, "*Ali plays cricket and Ahmed football*" exhibits a gap between two remaining components. Here, the verb (*plays*) in the second clause has been omitted, yet the sentence remains grammatically correct. Gapping typically involves syntactic parallelism in both clauses and shares a common verb phrase (Iqbal et al., 2024). In most of the EFL contexts, the educators ignore the stress upon the advanced and explicit syntactic concepts like gapping, causing lack of awareness among learners and thus committing grammatical mistakes. Pakistani EFL learners tend to use full clauses instead because of the lack of syntactic knowledge of grammatically permissible use of gapping in communication (Sultana et al., 2022). Sluicing takes the omission of all the components of an embedded clause with the exception of *wh*-word. For example, "*Someone called, but I do not know who*". In this construction, the omitted part (*called*) becomes comprehensible from the context in the antecedent clause. Sluicing is one of the most commonly occurring forms of elliptical constructions in verbal as well as formal English discourse where many L2 learners face hurdles with its grammatical usage (Alawad & Ahmed, 2024). EFL learners experience problems when the matrix clause takes the intricate characteristics such as tense, modality, or aspect. This grammatical intricacy frequently causes errors in sluicing or absolute avoidance in written communication (Malyuga & Dzhagatspanyan, 2024).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

EFL learners cannot master syntactical structures comprehensively unless they are not able to understand coherence and accuracy in formal and academic communication to reach fluency in the correct use of syntactic structures. When it comes to use English for academic purposes, learners are supposed to get a mastery over such intricate syntactic structures. Among these structures, Verb Phrase Ellipsis, including gapping and sluicing are easily distinguishable playing an important role in communication. These elliptical forms avoid redundancy by taking care of the quality and conciseness of verbal and grammatical discourse (Landau, 2023). The omission of such redundant elements improves the stylistic fluency and the economy of the sentences in

the extent that the spoken and written registers apply (Kovalenko et al., 2023). These elliptical forms acquired naturally by natives require conscious efforts for second language learners. EFL learners often face hurdles in the recognition, processing, and application of these elliptical forms in their communication properly. These hurdles and obstacles become more challenging in formal writing, where the redundant syntactic elements and a proper lack of syntactic diversity can cause a hindrance in producing clear and coherent content (Nasiri & Gorjian, 2023). Many learners seem avoiding elliptical constructions because they get a minimal exposure to them. Moreover, there has always been almost no emphasis on these structures in our teaching English as far as the formal instructional methods in teaching advanced grammatical constructions are concerned (Masood, 2023). Having a less exposure to the sophisticated instructional methodologies, most of the EFL learners frequently overuse these redundant structures, which results in the excessive use of these redundant forms and repetition in stylistics ([Alawad & Ahmed, 2024](#)). Especially in the context of Pakistan, where the prominent instructional medium at the tertiary level is English, the undergraduate EFL learners are faced with continuous obstacles and difficulties in acquiring a comprehensive command on these elliptical constructions in syntax. When they go on to write anything, they come across the factor of excessive repetition of the redundant linguistic forms. Moreover, most of their writings are grammatically incoherent and inconsistent ([Sultana et al., 2022](#)). The mentioned challenges and issues indicate the gaps and place a severe question mark on the proper syntactic formation of the EFL learners and the type of academic input that they have received (Ramzan et al., 2023). This situation reaches its lowest ebb when it comes to the various linguistic areas such as Hazara region where there is a lack and insufficiency of teaching the instructors in the instruction of complex grammars and multi-lingual interference in pedagogical strategies, in particular, the more complex grammars and syntactic constructions. In such linguistically diverse areas, learners are preoccupied with the transfer of their first language and this is a direct impediment to learning elliptical constructions (Iqbal et al., 2024). Besides all this, the syllabus of the universities in most cases overlooks or takes a minimal emphasis on the advanced concepts in grammar like ellipsis, making the students inefficient in academic and professional communication (Nazar & Nur Rasyidah, 2024). The current study aimed to fill this gap by examining the problems in the usage of verb phrase ellipsis for undergraduate students in Hazara region. The problems for learners are identified and analyzed suggesting appropriate methodological concerns for learning and teaching English at undergraduate level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most recent investigation has come to regard ellipsis, particularly verb phrase ellipsis, including gapping and sluicing, as a test of L2 syntactic representations and processing, with both theoretical and pedagogical implications. As an illustration, current studies shows that VPE demonstrates fluctuation and enduring lapses in the context of L1 and L2 systems even at high levels, which highlights the importance of these constructions in terms of instructed contexts (Janke & Kolokonte, 2025). Simultaneously, the corpus-based studies point out that the syntactic complexity of L2 writers in academic years and fields of study develops in a certain way not as compared to L1 writers, but directly affecting cohesion and the possible role of ellipsis in academic writing (Shen et al., 2023). In most of the settings, the traditional and fundamental concepts of grammar lay emphasis upon with minimal focus given to the complex syntactic categories like ellipsis itself (Malyuga & Dzhagatspanyan, 2024). Evidence from higher education contexts suggests that curricula and instruction often emphasize foundational grammar and sentence-level accuracy over advanced syntactic options such as ellipsis. While broad attention is placed on grammatical accuracy, less emphasis is given to structures that enhance cohesion.

Intervention studies confirm this gap: explicit instruction of conjunctions and cohesive devices significantly improves students' writing quality, particularly in coherence and logical connection (Alawerdy & Alalwi, 2022). This indicates that without targeted focus on advanced syntactic categories, students' repertoires remain limited.

Ellipsis is not only a stylistic tool from the point of view of generative grammar, but a phenomenon related to advanced syntactic forms rooted in the core of syntax. The ellipsis occurs at the boundaries of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics within the foundations of the minimalist program, highly focusing on the recoverable omitted forms and parallel structures. The Minimalist Program tends to see ellipsis as an operation occurring at the interface between syntax and semantics. Elliptical constructions are constructed based on totally constituted structural demonstrations and certain elements are deleted at Phonological Form and are interpreted and described semantically due to their occurrence at Logical Form (Landau, 2023). In spite of its theoretical importance, learners of English in EFL contexts frequently lack the meta-linguistic knowledge to recognize and use elliptical constructions precisely. They prefer using full and overt expressions, which cause unsubstantial repetition, hampered fluency, and inefficient syntactic awareness (Alawad & Ahmed, 2024). Additionally, the low syntactic competence of the learners to implement the rules for applying elliptical constructions adequately results in minimal syntactic variety and systematic sentence construction (Kovalenko et al., 2023).

Theoretical constraints also help explain why learners struggle with ellipsis. Verb phrase ellipsis is not freely available; it is constrained by conditions on identity, recoverability, and contrast. For example, the tautologous conditionals prevent the use of ellipsis due to a breach of the requirements of contrast, and such constructions are ungrammatical (Stockwell, 2022). Equally, recent experimental research indicates that under the condition that VPE is contingent on nominal antecedents; the acceptability depends on the nature of the antecedent in question, which complicates the acquisition of L2 even further (Miller & Hemforth, 2024). These results indicate that ellipsis has interpretive requirements that complicate the task of learners who usually use overt expression instead. The majority of the Pakistani universities are concerned with basic and traditional grammar such as subject verb agreement, proper use of tense and proper construction of a sentence. On the one hand, the multifaceted and complicated areas of grammar like ellipsis, inversion, and subordination are ignored as to their systematic application (Sultana et al., 2022). This difference in the teaching strategies appears to be reflected in the written texts of the learners, which in most cases are not characterized by the application of sophisticated patterns of syntactic constructions and abstract level of characteristic of the skillful pedagogic writing stylistic form (Ramzan et al., 2023). The number of studies done so far on the topic of ellipsis in Pakistani EFL backgrounds and the region, in general, is minimal and the field is untapped especially at the undergraduate level where the exact written discourse of academics is inescapable to do so. With this background in mind, the given study is likely to fill this research gap by examining the understanding and use of ellipsis in terms of undergraduate students of different public sector universities located in Hazara Division in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive survey design to investigate the problems in the use related to verb phrase ellipsis, including gapping and sluicing among undergraduate students in Hazara region. The target population of this study included all undergraduate students in different departments of the public sector universities located in Hazara Division of Pakistan. A representative sample of 286 undergraduate students through convenience sampling technique was selected around 286 using Slovin's formula (Anugraheni et al., 2023; Bishry, H., 2023). This non-probability sampling method was chosen because of the availability and accessibility of participants, making

it practical and time-efficient for a study of this nature. Two distinct but connected phases were implemented in the research. Phase I, performed a corpus-based analysis to explore the distribution and patterns of usage of elliptical structures established by native English. The British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) were used as main data sources (McEnery & Hardie, 2022; Saif et al., 2025). This phase aimed to introduce a standard for the accurate and valid usage of the elliptical constructions in the academic and lay communication in English. Phase II, conducted diagnostic investigation based on testing through structured tasks of grammar assigned to undergraduate students of different departments in selected universities of Hazara region. These assignments included multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank and error detection activities specifically designed to test students' recognition and production of VPE, including gapping and sluicing (Safari & Ahmadi, 2025; Barghi et al., 2025). The data was analyzed in two separate stages. In the first stage, the data from students' writing on the basis of their performance in diagnostic tasks in the test was analyzed by using frequency counts and percentage distributions with Microsoft Excel to identify common syntactic errors and usage patterns. In the second stage, the data from native English about the correct use of elliptical structures was collected from broadly accepted, authentic and academically validated corpora, such as, British National Corpus (A 100-million-word collection of samples from a wide range of genres of written and spoken British English) and Corpus of Contemporary American English (A 1-billion-word balanced corpus that includes texts from spoken, fiction, academic, and news genres) which was compared with the correct usage of elliptical constructions by second language learners of English (McEnery & Hardie, 2022; Saif et al., 2025). These corpora were computed by means of appropriate online query systems and filtered to identify naturally occurring instances of verb phrase ellipsis, including gapping and sluicing. Each example was carefully analyzed for its syntactic structure, frequency, and contextual use to provide the base of a reference model against which performance by students was compared. The results of the corpus study as a comparative point of reference to identify the extent of the deviation between native and non-native use was analyzed in these two phases of analysis. This two-phase, comparative design not only allowed the identification of the areal issues related to the use of language among learners but also suggested a data-based source for academic prescriptions for correct use of English and actual learner performance. A reference set of authentic examples was collected from the corpora to provide a clear normative baseline: sixty VPE, forty-five Gapping and fifty Sluicing instances. These samples exhibited canonical syntax, clear recoverability and pragmatic appropriateness and they served as exemplars at the time of coding learner responses. Participants were given a sequence of written diagnostic tasks that triggered contexts where verb phrase ellipsis, including gapping or sluicing naturally were licensed. All students' answers were marked as either (a) grammatical and (b) appropriate use, ellipsis in accordance with native-speaker standards; (b) ungrammatical use, syntactic or morphological mistakes, or recoverability impaired, and (c) avoidance or non-production, where ellipsis is substituted with a complete clause or incompletely formed. The coding process was carried out independently by researchers and a second trained rater, with inter-rater agreement exceeding the threshold was considered acceptable for qualitative reliability in language research (Miles & Huberman, 2020).

RESULTS

This data about elliptical constructions like VPE, including gapping and sluicing produced by a total of 286 undergraduate students across several departments in universities of Hazara region from the two phases of analysis is reported in this section. Diagnostic grammar exercises were used to elicit the target structures, and the test items based on authentic examples extracted

from the BNC and the COCA. In this way, learner performance could be compared reflexively against native-speaker usage patterns, and the canonical forms are compared directly to actual learners' output. A brief corpus investigation (BNC & COCA) confirmed known distributional facts: VPE is licensed mainstream in auxiliary/modal contexts; gapping is mostly in strict parallel coordinate structures; sluicing is mostly after *wh*-movement with recoverable antecedent. These observations used as criteria of reference are compatible with formal characterizations of ellipsis and with recent syntactic analyses (Landau, 2023). Analysis of diagnostic responses revealed that one hundred and thirty-seven participants (48%) successfully produced VPE forms consistent with corpus norms. These correct responses typically included an appropriate auxiliary in the ellipsis site and demonstrated accurate tense/aspect alignment with the antecedent verb phrase. For example, *"Maria booked the tickets, and I did too"* illustrates the correct recovery of the antecedent *"booked the tickets"* through the auxiliary *did*. Such responses reflected clear antecedent identification and grammatical coherence. Despite these successes, around ninety-two participants (32%) produced inaccurate VPE. Several error patterns emerged in the analysis of the collected data; the most frequent being over-explicit repetition, where learners repeated the entire verb phrase rather than eliding it e.g., *"She had already finished her homework, and I had finished my homework as well"* instead of *"and I had too"*. Other issues included unlicensed deletion, where an auxiliary was missing *"They will leave at noon, and we"*, and tense or aspect mismatches *"They have been studying, and we did too"*. Referential problems also occurred when antecedents contained pronouns or ambiguous references, leaving the ellipsis unrecoverable. In addition to these error types, about fifty-seven participants (20%) avoided producing VPE altogether. In such cases, learners either supplied full clauses or left responses incomplete. The following table (table 1) below shows the accurate and inaccurate usages of verb phrase ellipsis.

Table 1: The Accurate and Inaccurate Usages of Verb Phrase Ellipsis

Structure	Accurate Usage %	Inaccurate Usage %
VPE	48%	52%

The data above shows that overall, 52% of responses still contained grammatical inaccuracies in use of VPE. The most frequent error was overt repetition of the verb phrase, where learners avoided ellipsis altogether and instead produced full clauses (32% of the total errors). For example, *"I could attend the workshop, but I don't want to attend the workshop,"* repeats material unnecessarily, and undermining the syntactic economy that ellipsis is intended to achieve. The errors in the data also included errors in the form of avoiding VPE (20% of the total errors). Both inaccurate usage (mostly grammatical inaccuracy) and avoidance of VPE were considered inaccurate use of VPE in the data. The greater percentage of errors shows the problems for undergraduate students in the correct use of VPE.

A second recurrent error involved tense and aspect mismatch, as in *"She has finished her work, and I will too,"* where inconsistency between perfect and future tense weakened grammatical cohesion. The third error type reflected auxiliary omission, leaving no grammatical cue for recoverability, as in *"They have cleaned the room, and we cleaned."* The frequency of these error types is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of VPE Errors (n = 89)

Error Type	Frequency	% of Total VPE Errors
Overt repetition	48	54%
Tense/aspect mismatch	27	30%
Auxiliary omission	14	16%

The above table shows the frequency and percentage of error types. The data shows overt repetition instead of VPE. The percentage (54%) of errors shows that students were not aware of the correct use of VPE and repeated the VPE in their use. The data also shows that 30% of the students had some knowledge about VPE but they couldn't match the tense and aspect in omitted part of VPE and committed mistakes in its usage. Similarly, the data also shows that learners commit mistakes in the use of auxiliary omission and 16% of errors were noticed of this nature. These findings suggest limited awareness among learners of the licensing conditions required for verb phrase ellipsis. This pattern resonates with observations in other Pakistani EFL contexts, where insufficient explicit instruction has been linked to avoidance or inaccurate distribution of ellipsis (Alawad & Ahmed, 2024).

Learners in the present study demonstrated considerable difficulty with gapping compared to VPE. Only eighty-three participants (about 29%) generated grammatical and contextually appropriate constructions that met corpus-like norms. Correct answers had a tendency of parallelism of conjuncts, and the core verb was always omitted in the second condition. The deletion did not affect the meaning, and the deleted information was always restored in the first conjunct. An example of a learner output was *"Ali can play the guitar and Sara the piano"*, which fits well as an example of gapping. There was a significantly larger group of one hundred and twenty-nine subjects (45%), who wrote incorrect forms. The most widespread mistake was the repetition of the entire verbs, in which learners did not use ellipsis at all *"Ali can play the guitar, and Sara can play the piano"*. Other error types included violations of syntactic parallelism *"Ali can play the guitar, and the piano Sara"*, over-deletion that obscured meaning *"Ali can play, and Sara the piano"*, and lexical mismatches across conjuncts *"Ali plays the guitar, and Sara the violin is playing"*. Avoidance was also prominent: seventy-four participants (26%) did not attempt gapping at all, and instead supplied full clauses or unrelated constructions. This avoidance was notably higher than in the VPE task, reflecting both the relative rarity of gapping in natural input and its higher cognitive demands. Previous studies highlight several underlying factors contributing to these difficulties. The following table (table 3) shows the data analyzed for gapping.

Table 3: Accurate and Inaccurate Usages (Including Avoidance) Faced in Gapping.

Structure	Accurate Usage %	Inaccurate Usage %
Gapping	29%	71%

Gapping presented the highest rate of difficulty among learners with 71% errors (including 45% of errors as inaccurate and 26% errors of avoidance). The most frequent error type involved ellipsis avoidance, where learners produced full clauses instead of omitting the verb. For instance, *"Ali bought apples, and Ahmed bought bananas"* demonstrating grammaticality but lacking ellipsis, thereby reducing syntactic economy. Another widespread error was violation of parallel structure, in which syntactic symmetry between conjuncts was disrupted. A

representative example is *“Ali bought apples, and bananas Ahmed,”* where word-order inversion produces ungrammaticality. The third observed error type was incorrect element deletion, in which essential constituents were omitted, rendering the construction incomplete, as in *“Ali apples, and Ahmed bananas.”* The distribution of these errors is presented in **Table 4**, which shows that ellipsis avoidance accounted for more than half of all inaccurate responses, followed by parallelism violations and incorrect element deletion.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Gapping Errors

Error Type	Frequency	% of Total Gapping Errors
Ellipsis avoidance	72	55%
Parallelism violations	39	30%
Incorrect element deletion	21	15%

The table above shows that 55% of the errors in gapping were noted in ellipsis avoidance and 30% of errors in parallelism followed by 15% errors in the incorrect element deletion. The findings suggest that learners have considerable difficulty in the correct use of gapping to correspond with the accurate use of such constructions by native speakers.

When the data was analyzed for sluicing forms, one hundred and three participants (36%) produced grammatically correct and contextually appropriate sluicing forms comparable to native-speaker usage. Their responses demonstrated accurate wh-phrase selection, appropriate use of auxiliaries when necessary, and clear recoverability of the omitted material. One of such instances was, *“Somebody has taken my notebook, although I do not know who”*. On the contrary, one hundred and eighty-three participants (64%) committed errors in using correct sluicing forms (including 38% errors for inaccurate usage and 26% errors in avoidance of sluicing forms). The incorrect and invalid usage of sluicing forms was noticed in the data, and some of the errors were committed repeatedly. The frequent and unnecessary recurrence was excessively observed, as in the example, *“someone has taken my notebook, but I do not know who has taken my notebook”*, reveals ellipsis as insignificant. The wh-fragments which were generated otherwise devoid of explicit antecedent, *“I don’t know who”* with a preceding clause missing, does not match between wh-words and antecedents, *“he will go somewhere, but I don’t know when”* or excessively filtered phrases which hindered consistency, *“somebody came but I don’t know who the somebody is who came”*.

In case of sluicing, a considerable body of avoidance was evident (26%). Learners avoided using it altogether, preferring either full subordinate clauses or alternative question structures. This avoidance rate was identical to that found for gapping. Learners also struggled with recoverability constraints, indicating unfamiliarity with the principle that the elided clause must be fully reconstructed from its antecedent (Kim, 2022). Table 5 presents the accurate and inaccurate usages of sluicing.

Table 5: The Accurate and Inaccurate Usages Faced in Sluicing.

Structure	Accurate Usage (%)	Inaccurate Usage (%)
Sluicing	36%	64%

Sluicing errors were observed in 64% of learners’ responses (38% errors for inaccurate usage and 26% errors in avoidance), indicating that this structure remains challenging for EFL learners. The

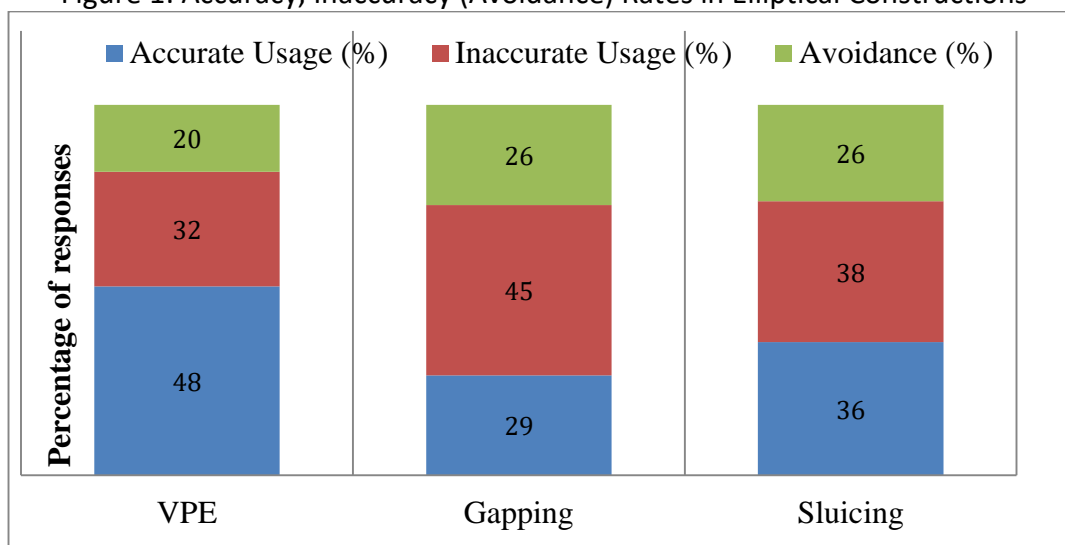
most common error involved the retention of redundant material, where learners failed to omit repeated elements from the subordinate clause. For example, instead of producing “I don’t know who,” many learners wrote “I don’t know who called,” thereby eliminating the intended conciseness of sluicing. Another frequent issue was ambiguity due to unclear antecedents, such as “I don’t know who,” without a supporting clause in discourse, which rendered the ellipsis uninterruptable. The third prominent error type involved improper wh-element usage, where learners mismatched the wh-word with the omitted content. For instance, “Someone left, but I don’t know where” demonstrates an inappropriate use of “where” when the context requires “who”. The distribution of these errors is summarized in **Table 6**, which shows that nearly half of the errors stemmed from redundant material retention, followed by ambiguous antecedents and wh-element mismatches.

Table 6: Frequency Distribution of Sluicing Errors

Error Type	Frequency	% of Total Sluicing Errors
Redundant material retention	51	47%
Ambiguous antecedent	38	35%
Wh-element mismatch	20	18%

The above table shows that errors in the redundant material retention was 47%, followed by errors in the use of ambiguous antecedent (35%) and 18% errors in wh-element mismatch. These results indicate that **VPE was the strongest area of learners’ performance**, with over half of participants demonstrating accurate usage. **Gapping emerged as the most problematic**, in terms of both accuracy and the high rate of complete avoidance. **Sluicing occupied a middle position**, but error rates and avoidance suggest partial mastery at best. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the performance distribution for each elliptical construction type, showing the proportion of accurate, inaccurate, and avoidance responses.

Figure 1: Accuracy, Inaccuracy (Avoidance) Rates in Elliptical Constructions



The figure clearly shows that VPE has the highest proportion of accurate responses, while gapping has both the lowest accuracy and the highest combined rate of inaccuracy and avoidance.

avoidance. Sluicing occupies the middle position, but with substantial room for improvement, reflecting both instructional gaps and limited exposure in classroom materials.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data analyzed based on comparative referential analysis of the corpus data collected through British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English with learners' data, the accuracy and inaccuracy (including avoidance) revealed that the verb phrase ellipsis emerged to be carrying the highest accuracy of (48%), sluicing stood moderate with an accuracy rate of (36%), wherein gapping had the lowest accuracy measured as (29%) similar to some internationally conducted studies suggesting different degrees of difficulty in acquisition of different types of ellipsis with VPE being easier than gapping and sluicing (Nasiri & Gorjian, 2023). The inaccuracy including avoidance for verb phrase ellipsis was calculated as (52%), gapping (71%) and sluicing (64%). The inaccurate usages for each of these constructions comprised avoidance rates of (20%) for VPE and (26%) for gapping and sluicing respectively. Similarly, each construction found different type of errors as figured out through learners' data against corpus norms. VPE revealed overt repetition with a frequency of forty-eight which is (54%), tense/aspect mismatch with a frequency of twenty-seven and a percentage of (30%), and auxiliary omission with a frequency of fourteen which is (16%) of the total population committing these errors across VPE. On the contrary, gapping observed ellipsis avoidance with a frequency of seventy-two which is (55%), parallelism violations with a frequency of thirty-nine which is (30%), and incorrect deletion of elements with a frequency of twenty which is (15%) of the total population. Sluicing came up with yet another three prominent errors comprising redundant material retention with a frequency of fifty-one which is (47%), ambiguous antecedent with a frequency of thirty-eight which is (35%), and wh-elements mismatch with a frequency of twenty which (18%) of the total population. This avoidance rate was identical to that found for gapping. Learners also struggled with recoverability constraints, indicating unfamiliarity with the principle that the elided clause must be fully reconstructed from its antecedent (Kim, 2022). This pattern in the data analyzed in the present study resonates with observations in other Pakistani EFL contexts, where insufficient explicit instruction has been linked to avoidance or inaccurate distribution of ellipsis (Alawad & Ahmed, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the problems undergraduate EFL learners in a Hazara region of Pakistan face in understanding and applying high-level syntactic structures like ellipsis in their academic writing. The study was based on the objectives to examine the authentic language use of verb phrase ellipsis, including gapping and sluicing in academic English and to examine how they are used by learners in authentic writing tasks to explore specific problems related to their usage. This is because the research intended to identify the specific challenges that undergraduate students living in the Hazara region face in the use of correct elliptical constructions in written discourse. Ellipsis is a syntactic construction in which elements of a sentence may be omitted without changing the meaning. This makes it especially useful in academic writing, where conciseness and clarity are important (Chomsky 1995). Ellipsis in English means that there is a greater economy in communication; we do not waste words when we do not need to without losing the integrity of the message. Based on comparative referential analysis of the corpus data collected through British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English with learners' data, the accuracy and inaccuracy (including avoidance) rates were measured through frequency counts and percentages in MS Excel. The verb phrase ellipsis emerged to be carrying the highest accuracy of, sluicing stood moderate with an accuracy rate, wherein gapping had the lowest accuracy measured. The inaccuracy including avoidance in the correct economic

use of verb phrase, gapping and sluicing. The inaccurate usages for each of these constructions found different type of errors as figured out through learners' data against corpus norms. In the data analyzed, VPE revealed overt repetition, tense/aspect mismatch, and auxiliary omission. Gapping was observed as ellipsis avoidance, parallelism violations, and incorrect deletion of elements. Sluicing came up with yet another three prominent errors comprising redundant material retention, ambiguous antecedent, and wh-elements mismatch. The low syntactic competence of the learners to implement the rules for applying elliptical constructions adequately results in minimal syntactic variety and systematic sentence construction (Kovalenko et al., 2023) and recent experimental research indicates that under the condition that VPE is contingent on nominal antecedents; the acceptability depends on the nature of the antecedent in question, which complicates the acquisition of L2 even further (Miller & Hemforth, 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of the present study, it is recommended that VPE demonstrates fluctuation and enduring lapses in the context of L1 and L2 systems even at high levels, which highlights the importance of these constructions in terms of instructed contexts (Janke & Kolokonte, 2025) which is commonly ignored and must be included in our instructional practices lack of which complicates the acquisition of L2 even further (Miller & Hemforth, 2024). One of the main suggestions for future study is to increase the geographical scope of the study by carrying out similar studies in other regions of Pakistan and other countries with different linguistic backgrounds. Additionally, future research could also investigate the cross-cultural use of ellipsis in terms of comparing learners from different countries and speech backgrounds. Ellipsis operating differently in the spoken and written modes of communication can be research from different perspectives. Future research can examine how ellipsis can be applied in speech situations and in the written text. This may involve the investigation of the application of ellipsis in spoken presentation, scholarly writing and informal communication. A study may be conducted in the future to observe the cognitive predictors of ability to process and make use of ellipsis among students. As an example, the aspect of working memory and cognitive flexibility can be researched as the determinant of whether learners can produce the ellipsis in a correct way. In addition to the cognitive aspects, pragmatic competence is a significant factor to be considered in the comprehension of the use and appropriateness of ellipsis.

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