

## ARTICLE

# Process Types Identification Challenges and Pedagogical Implications for EFL Learners

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding the meaning of the processes is essential for comprehending clause meaning from experiential perspective, however, the studies examining the identification of transitivity processes in the performance of EFL learners are scarce. This study examines the performance of 28 Arab Open University (AOU) English as a Foreign Language Learners (EFL) enrolled in the course E304A: Exploring English Grammar I in Jeddah branch. Drawing on Halliday's Transitivity Theory (1985), the study identifies the challenges faced by the students in identifying process types and proposes pedagogical implications for improvement. The students were provided with materials and activities related to processes, followed by a performance assessment test. The analysis reveals difficulties in correctly identifying process types, including 'escaped', 'coming', 'fainted', 'shares' and 'jolted'. To enhance comprehension and reduce errors, the study recommends enhancing the teaching of process types via various ways. Thus, it is recommended for EFL learners to (1) understand the relationship between lexical item and process types, (2) use tests in form of questions to differentiate between several types of processes, and (3) understand the differences between behavioural and material processes (as explained in the study). The findings contribute to the advancement of process type instruction and deepen students' understanding of clause meaning in the EFL context.

**Keywords:** Halliday's Transitivity Theory; EFL learners; Process Types Difficulties; Pedagogical Implications

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# 1. Introduction

Processes are identified as the core element of a clause from ideational perspective. The term “process” is broadly defined to encompass various phenomena expressed by verbs, including events, states, and relations<sup>[1]</sup> (p. 39). Processes are primarily about the actions, events, or states that participants are involved in<sup>[2]</sup>. According to Leedham and Allington<sup>[3]</sup> processes are essential for the meaning of clauses, and a clause can not exist without “a process” (p. 9). It is emphasized that each clause should contain only one process, even if it is “a one-word command”, such as read!<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, it is recommended to prioritize the identification of processes when analyzing clauses, as they represent the core element that determines clause boundaries and meaning, according to the transitivity system. Halliday<sup>[4]</sup> states that processes are organized within the semantic system of a language and are expressed through the grammar of a clause (p. 10). In the transitivity system, processes are categorized based on two factors: the different kinds of meaning they convey and their grammatical behaviour. According to Halliday<sup>[4]</sup>, transitivity specifies the various types of processes recognized in a language and the structures used to express them (p. 101). These transitivity processes are classified into (1) material, (2) mental, (3) relational, (4) verbal, (5) behavioural, and (6) existential processes. Material processes refer to action of doing, mental processes involve sensing or thinking, relational processes describe state of being, verbal processes pertain to processes of saying, behavioural processes involve actions or behaviours, and existential processes signify existence<sup>[4]</sup>. Most studies on transitivity focus on analyzing texts, not on learners’ ability to identify process types. Thus, there is a notable gap in linguistic research related to this area. The current study aims to bridge this gap by examining the performance of AOU students in correctly identifying process types. Furthermore, the study provides analysis of the errors in process types produced by AOU students with the aim of suggesting some corrective steps for avoidance of these errors in the future.

# 2. Objectives of the Study

The current research endeavors to assess the performance of Arab Open University (AOU) students, who are EFL learners of English, in accurately identifying the cor-

rect type of process based on Halliday’s Transitivity Theory (1985) which identifies six semantic categories of processes. The study not only focuses on investigating the students’ performance in process identification but also aims to provide corrective measures for the types of process errors made by the student, with the intention of helping them avoid these errors in the future. The study includes a hierarchy of difficulties related to processes in the students’ performance.

# 3. Research Questions

To achieve the goals of the study, the present study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the performance of AOU students in deciding the correct type of process?

RQ2: What is the most difficult category of the semantic categories of processes types in the performance of AOU students?

RQ3: How to improve the performance of the students in deciding the correct category of process?

# 4. Statement of Research Problem

This linguistic study gains its significance from the researcher’s observation of a notable gap in linguistic research related to transitivity theory: while several studies investigated several texts with the aim of extracting the prevalence process type, there remains a surprising lack of scholarly attention devoted to analyzing students’ ability to identify process types accurately. Thus, the present study sets out to bridge this gap by examining the performance of AOU students. Furthermore, the study focuses on the errors produced by the students in identification of correct type of process based on the context of a media text with the main aim of suggesting some corrective steps to help learners to avoid these committed errors in the future.

# 5. Review of Literature

## 5.1. Transitivity System

Halliday<sup>[5]</sup> argues that the experiences individuals undergo in their lives encompass various “goings-on” such as happenings, actions, perceptions, meanings, existence, and transformation (p. 106). These experiences are communi-

cated through language in the form of clauses. Depending on their worldview shaped by these experiences, individuals express themselves in specific ways, which are referred to as processes within the transitivity system. The transitivity system, developed by Halliday, aims to expand upon the traditional concept of transitivity, where the presence or absence of an object for a verb is not the primary consideration. According to Halliday<sup>[5]</sup>, a transitivity process comprises three components: the process itself, the participants involved, and the circumstances surrounding them. Therefore, the transitivity system focuses on analyzing the structure of clauses by examining processes (realized through different types of verbs), participants (part of the nominal group), and circumstances (realized through adverbial and prepositional phrases). This system belongs to the ideational metafunction, which allows us to “semantically and syntactically” encode our mental representations of the physical world as well as our imagination<sup>[6]</sup>. The present paper specifically focuses on one aspect of the ideational metafunction, namely the process of the clause, and explores the various categories of processes outlined in the transitivity system. In the following section, process types will be discussed.

According to Halliday<sup>[4]</sup>, processes are categorized and expressed through the grammar of the clause based on their semantic meaning and grammatical behaviour (p. 101). The transitivity system classifies processes into different types, including material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural, and existential processes, which represent actions, feelings/thoughts, relationships, communication, behaviour, and existence, respectively<sup>[4]</sup>. Material processes involve physical actions performed on or by participants. They can be concrete or abstract and realized by both verbs of doing and verbs of happening. For example, ‘I bought a cat’ and ‘offer temptation’ are examples of material processes. They can be transitive or intransitive, depending on whether they involve multiple participants or a single participant. An example of a transitive material process is ‘I bought a cat,’ while an example of an intransitive material process is ‘I fell’<sup>[4]</sup>. As for mental processes, they convey feelings, thoughts, and perceptions. They are further divided into three subcategories: thinking/cognition, perception/sensing, and feeling/emotion. For example, verbs like ‘think’, ‘see’, and ‘fear’ represent different types of mental processes. Additionally, some metal clauses can project an idea, where one clause serves as the

projecting clause and another as the projected clause. For example, in the sentence ‘Sarah don’t know if the girls knew each other,’ the mental process ‘don’t know’ projects the idea ‘if the girls knew each other’<sup>[4]</sup>. The type of the processes which focuses on relations, attributes, identifications, and possession is relational process. Relational processes serve various functions, such as indicating qualities, attributes, location, time, causality, comparison, identification, and possession. For example, ‘Sarah is smart’, and ‘that woman is my mother’ are examples of relational processes<sup>[4]</sup>. As for verbal processes, they pertain to communication and are realized by verbs of saying, signaling, and showing. They can involve projecting ideas through quoting or reporting clauses. For example, ‘Sarah told Shaimaa the news’ represents a verbal process. Examples of projecting ideas through quoting or reporting: ‘Sarah say, ‘don’t panic’, or ‘she said that she is on her way’<sup>[4]</sup>. According to Halliday<sup>[5]</sup>, behavioural processes “represent outer manifestations of inner workings, the acting out of processes of consciousness and physiological states” (p. 107). They involve conscious behaviour displayed by a human participant. For example, ‘sorry, I was daydreaming’ represents a behavioural process. Behavioural processes are described as “grammatically more like one of doing”<sup>[7]</sup> (p. 301), and involve conscious beings outwardly displaying in their inner feelings<sup>[4]</sup>. For Leedham and Allington<sup>[3]</sup>, behavioural processes types “can be tricky to distinguish from material and mental processes” (p. 33). The last category is existential process. Existential processes indicate existence or occurrence. They require the use of ‘there’ in the clause and are represented by verbs like ‘be’, ‘exist’ and ‘arise’. They introduce new information and present the feature of existence. For example, ‘there was a historical city near the river’ represents an existential process. According to Halliday and Matthiessen<sup>[7]</sup>, “existential clauses have been interpreted as ‘presentative’ constructions” (p. 308).

It must be noted here that the relationship between lexical items and process types is not always one-to-one. The determination of process type depends on (1) semantic meaning based on the context and (2) grammatical behaviour in which the verb is used. For example, the verb ‘goes’ can be employed in different senses, such as its material sense: ‘Sarah goes to school’ or its verbal sense: ‘Sarah goes, I do not know what they teach you in that school’. Therefore, understanding the meaning of the verb in its context is crucial

for determining the process type.

## 5.2. State of the Art in Transitivity Analysis: Uncovering Processes in Varied Texts

Transitivity analysis has received considerable attention in recent years due to its potential for revealing the intricacies of language and its representation across diverse textual contexts. Researchers have conducted a series of intriguing studies aimed at unravelling the multifaceted nature of transitivity processes and their implications in various domains (e.g., Chen<sup>[8]</sup>; Muhammad<sup>[9]</sup>; Agbayani<sup>[10]</sup>; Alfiana<sup>[11]</sup>; Morandarte<sup>[12]</sup>; Fitriana<sup>[13]</sup>; Aini<sup>[14]</sup>; Zein et al.,<sup>[15]</sup>; Sari et al.<sup>[16]</sup>).

Chen<sup>[8]</sup> examined transitivity processes in academic writing. The primary aim of the study was to analyze an extracted passage from the academic essay *The Feminist Reader* and to reveal the author's underlying ideology of feminism. The transitivity system was employed as a theoretical framework for the analysis with aim of achieving the aim of the study. The study highlighted that relational processes were particularly dominant in academic discourse, especially in feminist texts, where they reflected the author's ideological stance on femininity. Furthermore, the study emphasized the significant role of genre, register, and author intentions in shaping the proportions of these processes, with relational processes being most prevalent, followed by material processes, and then verbal and mental processes. By applying Halliday's transitivity system, the study revealed how authors construct meaning through their linguistic choices, showcasing the hidden ideologies they convey. Through this analysis, the study demonstrated that transitivity choices not only reflect the author's perspective on femininity but also serve as covert manifestations of the author's broader ideological views.

Using transitivity approach, Muhammad<sup>[9]</sup> examined the use of processes types in 50 Nigerian political headlines collected from five major Nigerian newspapers. The aim of the study was to understand how language is employed to construct political narratives in Nigerian newspapers. The results of the study show that material processes are the most frequently used as they represent 48% of the headlines, followed by mental (32%), verbal (20%), and relational processes (10%). Existential and behavioral processes were minimally represented. These results indicate

that political discourse in Nigeria is predominantly action- and belief-oriented, with a focus on tangible actions as well as the intentions of political figures.

Agbayani<sup>[10]</sup> conducted a notable study that focused on analyzing transitivity processes in automobile advertisements. By meticulously examining a substantial corpus of 492 randomly selected ads, Agbayani<sup>[10]</sup> revealed that presence of all six types of transitivity processes, with the relational process emerging as the dominant one within these advertisements. This finding highlighted the strategic employment of relational processes to captivate readers' interest and elicit a positive response. The study concluded that the skillful utilization of transitivity in automobile advertisements allows authors to effectively communicate their intentions, principles, beliefs, and authorities through assertive claims and statements, ultimately shaping readers perceptions and influencing their decision-making. Alfiana<sup>[11]</sup> adopted a border perspective by exploring process types within the transitivity system across various genres. The study highlighted the diverse ways in which authors employ process types to convey meaning and construct narratives. The main argument of the study is that by understanding the distribution and patterns of processes types within the transitivity system, researchers can unravel the complex interplay between language, cognition, and communication. Shifting the focus to the realm of education, Morandarte<sup>[12]</sup>, examined processes types in a commencement speech delivered by DepEd Sec. Leonor Briones. By applying transitivity analysis to the speech, the study revealed the significant role of material processes in conveying factual information about achievements, fostering motivation among learners and instructors amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, and addressing crucial concerns faced by Filipino learners. In a qualitative exploration, Fitriana<sup>[13]</sup> examined six students' recount texts using Halliday's transitivity theory. The analysis revealed that some students primarily described locations, using relational processes, while others mostly employed material processes but failed to include evaluations of events (mental processes). The findings of the study indicated that students had struggled to effectively convey past events in their writing, with some focusing solely on activities without evaluative elements, and others concentrating only on describing places rather than narrating activities. The study suggested that to enhance students' abilities in writing re-

count texts, there was a need for more example texts, direct instruction, and targeted feedback. Likewise, Aini<sup>[14]</sup> examined the representation of experiences in recount text given by students. However, Aini's<sup>[14]</sup> study differs from Fitriana's<sup>[13]</sup> in that it examines the effect of gender. Thus, the study examined recount text produced by male and female students. The study revealed the extensive employment of material, mental, and relational-attributive processes by both genders, with the genre of the text playing a more significant role in shaping students' representation of experiences than their gender. As for Zein et al.<sup>[15]</sup>, the focus of their study was on processes types prevalent in narrative texts written by English department students. The results of the study showed that the dominant process type found was material process totalling to 427 occurrences (53.3%) followed successively by the occurrences of mental (139 or 17.3%), relational (124 or 15.4%), verbal (58 or 7.2%), behavioural (24 or 3%). Based on these results, the study highlighted the dominance of material processes in conveying actions, events, and physical experiences. For Sari et al.<sup>[16]</sup>, the focus of their study was on processes types given in students' persuasive writings titled "How to Keep Ourselves Healthy Inside and Outside". The aim of their study was to is to determine (1) the types of transitivity processes present in students' persuasive texts, and (2) the most dominant processes in these texts. The research adopted a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings revealed five types of processes: material process (36.7%), relational process (23.5%), mental process (17.6%), behavioral process (14.7%), and existential process (7.3%). No verbal process was identified in the texts of persuasive writings. Furthermore, among the five processes, the material process was the most dominant.

Furthermore, in the domain of literature, various studies were conducted employing transitivity model to explore various aspects of texts. While the majority of these studies focus on novels, several others have been conducted within the context of poetry. Notable works in this field include those by Abdulameer and Abdulameer<sup>[17]</sup>, Abd Al-Qader<sup>[18]</sup>, Faizin et al.<sup>[19]</sup>, Zhen et al.<sup>[20]</sup>, Nkansah and Bonsu<sup>[21]</sup>, Ezzina<sup>[22]</sup>, Nkeiruka<sup>[23]</sup>, Yousif and Bulaila<sup>[24]</sup>, and Amoussou<sup>[25]</sup> in novels, and those by Haroon and Arslan<sup>[26]</sup>, Farooq et al.<sup>[27]</sup>, and Al Amiqi and Sunardi<sup>[28]</sup> in poetry. These studies high-

light the application as well as adaptability of the transitivity model in analyzing both prose and poetry across various linguistic and cultural contexts.

These studies collectively contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding transitivity analysis and its implications within diverse textual contexts. Obviously, analysing transitivity processes offers valuable insights into language representation, cognitive processes, and effective communication across various domains. Nevertheless, despite the valuable insights gained from these studies, a substantial gap persists in the literature regarding students' ability to identify process types accurately. As these studies analyzed several texts to extract the prevalence process type but they did not analyse the performance of the students or participants in correctly identifying the types of processes used in specific texts. Consequently, the present study sets out to bridge this gap by examining the performance of AOU students and focusing on the errors produced by the students in identification of correct type of process based on the context of the text with the main aim of suggesting some corrective steps to help students to avoid these committed errors in the future.

## 6. Method of Analysis

### 6.1. Theoretical Framework

The current study adopts Halliday's transitivity theory<sup>[4]</sup> as the theoretical framework, with especial focus on the processes of clauses within the ideational metafunction. According to Halliday<sup>[4]</sup>, the ideational metafunction of the clause is concerned with "the transmission of ideas" (p. 35). Its function is that of "representing 'processes' or 'experiences': actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations"<sup>[4]</sup> (p. 53). The term "process" is broadly defined to encompass various phenomena expressed by verbs, including physical, and non-physical events, states, or relations<sup>[1]</sup> (p. 39). There are six process types: material, relational, verbal, mental, behavioural, and existential process. Each one of them represents different aspect such as doing, being, saying, sensing behaving, or existing, respectively. These process types play a crucial role in the representation of meaning within clauses<sup>[4]</sup>.

## 6.2. The Sample Students

The sample students are Arab Open University (AOU) students who registered the course *E304A: Exploring English Grammar 1* as a course among other courses devoted to obtaining BA program honors in English language and literature during the year 2023. The sample was drawn from all students registered in the E304A course. The key inclusion criterion for participation was active registration in the course. This ensures that the sample comprised individuals who were directly involved in the course content as well as activities. This approach provided a relevant and focused group for the research. The total number of AOU students who participated in the study and conducting the paper-based exam is 28 female students and they are in Jeddah campus of Arab Open University. Since the students are studying English as a foreign Language (EFL) as they are studying English in Saudi Arabia, a country where English is used as a foreign language, so the AOU students are considered as EFL learners. The reason for targeting specific students who registered the course E304A is that the course is mainly focusing on Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) which transitivity theory is considered as part of it. Thus, the participants will be given the chance to know what is meant by 'process' and to differentiate between types of processes. This allows the researcher to examine the performance of the participants in correctly identifying the type of process and analyse their errors with the aim of suggesting some corrective steps for avoiding the occurrences of these errors in the future and this is the pedagogical implication of the study.

## 6.3. The Test

The test is paper based exam conducted on Jeddah campus of AOU. It was given to students as part of their exams related to their continuous assessments to ensure that they all exert their utmost efforts in answering the test question related to deciding the correct type of the processes given in a media text. The text itself is part of a media text carries the title 'Portland family narrowly escapes death' and it is short. The media text includes several types of processes and the total number of processes is 15. The students are asked to decide the type of lexical verb given in bold in the text based on the meaning of the text, i.e., its context. So, the students' task is to decide the correct semantic category of the process

based on what they have studied regarding processes' types in their E304A course. Test items which are 15 lexical verbs are given in bold and they represent several types of processes based on the context of the text. They are: (1) **escaped** (as a material process), (2) **crashed** (material), (3) **smashing** (material), (4) **was** (relational), (5) **said** (verbal), (6) **jolted** (material), (7) **shares** (material), (8) **said** (verbal), (9) **make** (material), (10) **heard** (mental), (11) **coming** (material), (12) **saw** (material), (13) **starting to move** (material), (14) **fainted** (behavioural) and (15) **remember** (mental). The below text is the media text given to the students:

A mother of three narrowly **escaped** (1) death yesterday when a massive tree **crashed** (2) into their three-bedroom board house at Janga Gully Road in Bound Brook on Sunday, **smashing** (3) furniture and electrical appliances. It **was** (4) a frightening experience for 51-year-old Linneth Jackson, who **said** (5) that she was **jolted** (6) by a sound shortly after 6:30 a.m. at her house, which she **shares** (7) with her two teenage sons and daughter. Jackson **said** (8) "I was preparing to **make** (9) Sunday morning breakfast. Then, I **heard** (10) a loud noise **coming** (11) from the garden, I **saw** (12) our tree **starting to move** (13). I must have **fainted** (14) because I don't **remember** (15) anything after that.

(The given text is entitled **Portland family narrowly escapes death**- it is part of an article in a newspaper- Published: Monday | September 26, 2022 | 12:11 AM Gareth Davis Sr/Gleaner Writer)

The students are given this question for the test: Label the semantic type of each of the main lexical verb in bold as: **V** (for verbal), **M** (for mental), **R** (for relational), **B** (for behavioural) or **Mat** (for material).

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Website: Portland family narrowly escapes death | Lead Stories | Jamaica Gleaner (jamaica-gleaner.com)

<https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20220926/portland-family-narrowly-escapes-death>

Regarding the answer key (AK) used in the study, it was developed for the specific test text, a short media report entitled 'Portland family narrowly escapes death', which contains 15 process types for analysis. The key was developed in collaboration with the General Course Coordinator (GCC), the Branch Course Coordinator (BCC), and the course tutors and received approval from all three entities to ensure its

validity and alignment with the course's intended learning outcomes.

From a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, this process of collaborative validation is crucial and context-specific. SFL posits that meaning is not absolute but is functionally and socially constructed within a specific text and context. The test required students to analyze a real-world media text, where processes must be interpreted within their specific narrative context (e.g., interpreting 'escapes' as a Material process in the context of a life-threatening event...etc). The consensus among the three experts—the GCC, BCC, and the course instructor—represents a negotiated alignment on the functional and contextual interpretation of each of the verbs within the framework of this specific text and the course's pedagogical goals. This process ensures the answer key reflects a shared understanding of how each of the 15 process types function within the register of a high-stakes news report. This enhances the metafunctional reliability and contextual accuracy of the instrument.

This multi-expert validation process ensures that the AK was thoroughly reviewed and agreed upon by individuals with significant expertise in the subject matter. Consequently, for the text 'Portland family narrowly escapes death', the AK can be considered a reliable and contextually valid reflection of the correct responses, as it is grounded in the collective expertise applied to the specific meaning-making practices of that text.

#### 6.4. Procedures

Materials related to processes and processes types are given to E304A students to prepare themselves for a coming online class. The chapter entitled 'processes: what is happening?' which is related to different categories of processes is explained with examples to students via Microsoft teams. The online class is given in two hours and supportive materials like videos are given to students. After that students are given activities related to processes from the book as well as AOU Learning Management System (LMS) and they are asked to solve these activities because another session/class will be devoted to discussion of their answers of assigned activities. The main aim of this session is to ensure practise on the part of the students. Then, the students are informed

that a test will be given as part of their continuous assessment of the course and that they need to study course materials. However, they are not informed about the nature of the question related to their test. So, it is recommended for them to prepare themselves and to expect all possible forms of questions: multiple choice questions, true or false question, ..., etc.

Prior to any data collection, the study's design and protocols received formal institutional approval from the relevant ethics committee at the Arab Open University. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all 28 participating female students at the Jeddah Campus. They were clearly briefed that their test answers, which were part of their regular course assessment, could be used anonymously for research purposes aimed at improving teaching and learning materials. Participation was voluntary and had no impact on their course grades.

The test was administered at the Jeddah Campus and 28 female students attended. The handling of the resulting data was conducted in strict accordance with ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity. All student identifiers were removed from the test scripts during analysis. Also, each script was assigned a code number (e.g., S1, S2) to ensure participant anonymity throughout the research process. The physical and digital data are stored securely and will be retained only for the duration of the research period before being responsibly disposed of.

The answers of the students are analyzed with the main aim of identifying the most difficult group of words in the identification of processes in their performance. To ensure consistency and reliability in the analysis, inter-rater reliability measures are used to assess the agreement between different evaluators in categorizing the types of processes based on Halliday's transitivity theory. Additionally, the analysis aims to suggest corrective steps to help the students in identifying the correct type of process, thus enhancing the process of teaching the types of processes.

## 7. Results and Discussion

The below **Table 1** provides the frequency of occurrence and percentage regarding each process type.

**Table 1.** Participants' Performance in Identification of Processes Types.

No.	Process Given in the Text	Correct Type of Process Based on the Text	Correct Frequency	Percentage	Incorrect Frequency	percentage
1.	Escaped	Material	19	67.85%	9	32.14%
2.	Crashed	Material	23	82.14%	5	17.85%
3.	Smashing	Material	21	75%	7	25%
4.	Was	Relational	22	78.57%	6	21.42%
5.	Said	Verbal	22	78.57%	6	21.42%
6.	Jolted	Material	6	21.42%	22	78.57%
7.	Shares	Material	7	25%	21	75%
8.	Said	Verbal	24	85.71%	4	14.28%
9.	Make	Material	20	71.42%	8	28.57%
10.	Heard	Mental	24	85.71%	4	14.28%
11.	Coming	Material	14	50%	14	50%
12.	Saw	Mental	23	82.14%	5	17.85%
13.	Starting to move	Material	21	75%	7	25%
14.	Fainted	Behavioural	9	32.14%	19	67.85%
15.	Remember	Mental	25	89.28%	3	10.71%

The frequency and percentage of correct and incorrect identification of processes are given in the table from which the overall accuracy of the identification of process on the part of the students is calculated as 66.67% This indicates that 66.67% of the processes were correctly identified. As for the percentage of incorrect identification, it is 33.33%.

From the table, the most frequently correctly identified processes are "Said" (85.71%), "Remember" (89.28%), and "Heard" (85.71%). Furthermore, the most frequently incorrectly identified processes are "Jolted" (78.57%), "Shares" (75%), and "Fainted" (67.85%). As for the identification of the process "coming", half of the students' identification is correct, while the second half is incorrect. Thus, the percentage is 50 for correct identification, and the same for incorrect identification.

Overall, these results suggest that the identification of processes is generally accurate 66.67%, but there is room for improvement, especially for the processes that are frequently misidentified (representing 33.33%). Thus, the analysis of the performance of the students indicates that they face difficulties in identifying certain types of processes and the most difficult group for them, based on high percentages of incorrect identification of the above table, is the one with the following processes: "coming" 50% incorrectly identified, "fainted" 67.85%, "shares", and "jolted" 78.57%.

In response to the first research question, results show that the overall performance of AOU participants in correctly identifying process types is not low. This can be explained by the teaching sessions and practices that they received before conducting the test. The students were given activities to solve and discussions were given in classes by the tutor to

ensure that they knew processes types and their identifications. By doing that, the researcher tried to minimize the students' errors to specific types of processes. Hence, this is the focus of the study. The study focusses on the errors produced by the participants in identifying correct process types based on a given text.

The table also shows the processes given in the text of the test. The given text is a media text and the analysis of the processes given in the text indicates that material processes dominated the text as there are 8 cases out of 15 processes. This dominance of material processes goes with the results of Muhammad<sup>[9]</sup>, Zein et al.<sup>[15]</sup>, Sari et al.<sup>[16]</sup> and Morandarte<sup>[12]</sup>.

The following hierarchy represents the performance of AOU students in identifying the correct type of process. It shows the order of the difficulty on the part of AOU students in ascending order, consequently, the group entitled TWO at the bottom of the hierarchy represents the most difficult processes, while the first group, i.e., the group entitled ONE represents the least difficult processes. Thus, based on the correct identification on the part of the students, there are two groups in the hierarchy. The type of the process is given for each category as well as the total number of correct answers given by 28 Jeddah AOU students in round brackets. Thus, for example, '10-shares (material-7)' in group TWO means that only seven students out of 28 correctly identified the process 'shares' as a material process. Due to low number of students (only 8), the process 'shares' is located in group two which represents the most difficult group of processes for students. The total number of processes of the two groups is 15. Also, processes with the same number of correct identifi-



cation are grouped together, for example, “heard” and “said” have the same number of correct identification on the part of the students which is 24, thus they are grouped together under serial number 2 as shown below in group one.

Hierarchy of difficulty in determining the correct type of process.

ONE:

Remember (Mental-25).

Heard (Mental-24), Said (Verbal-24).

Crashed (Material-23), Saw (Mental-23).

Said (Verbal-22), Was (Relational-22).

Starting to Move (Material-21), Smashing (Material-21).

Make (Material-20).

Escaped (Material-19).

TWO:

Coming (Material-14).

Fainted (Behavioural-9).

Shares (Material-7).

Jolted (Material-6).

Thus, the processes of group two are ‘coming’, ‘fainted’, ‘shares’, and ‘jolted’. These processes are the most difficult processes for students as their performance is low because of high percentages of incorrect identification above 68%, except for the process ‘coming’ which the percentage of incorrect identification is 50, as half of the students identified it correctly as material process based on the given text in the test.

Identification of these processes, ‘coming’, ‘fainted’, ‘shares’, and ‘jolted’, is mainly related to the study research question 2 as the second research question is related to the identification of the most difficult category of the semantic categories of processes types in the given text.

The below table, **Table 2**, gives the errors produced by EFL student in each process type of Group Two (which represents the most difficult group for the students based on the results of the study). For analysis of all errors produced by EFL students, see **Table A1** in **Appendix A**.

**Table 2.** Types of Incorrect Processes in Group Two by EFL Students.

	Process (Type-Incorrect Cases)	Number of Incorrect Cases	Incorrect Cases –(Types)
12.	Coming (Material-14)	14	7 Behavioural 3 Verbal 2 Relational 2 Mental
13.	Fainted (Behavioural-19)	19	7 Material 6 Mental 3 Relational 2 Verbal 1 not identified
14.	Shares (Material-21)	21	11 Relational 7 Behavioural 2 Mental 1 Verbal
15.	Jolted (Material-22)	22	11 Behavioural 7 Mental 2 Relational 1 Verbal 1 not identified

The table includes the number of errors for each process type and the corresponding types of errors made by the EFL learners. For the process ‘coming’, there were a total of fourteen errors. Among these errors, seven were categorized as behavioural errors, indicating that the students incorrectly identified the process as a behavioural when it should have been classified as a behavioural process. A possible explanation is that the AOU students may mistakenly consider ‘coming’ as a behavioural process in the sentence “I heard a

loud noise coming from the garden” because it is linked to the verb ‘heard’, which is often associated with mental perception. However, ‘coming’ itself is describing an external movement or event (the sound approaching). This qualifies it as a material process rather than a behavioural process. The confusion arises because the entire sentence involves the perception of sound, which might lead to an assumption that the process is internal or psychological, but ‘coming’ is still describing an observable external event. Thus, the

correct process type for ‘coming’ is material. Additionally, three errors were classified as verbal errors, indicating that the students mistakenly identified the process as a verbal process. Furthermore, equal number of errors, i.e., two, were classified as relational and mental errors.

For the process ‘fainted’, there were a total of 19 errors, among these errors, 7 were categorized as material errors, indicating that the students incorrectly identified the process as a material process when it should have been classified as a behavioural process. A possible explanation for this error is that students might mistakenly consider ‘fainted’ a material process because it involves a physical change, i.e., the collapse of the body in the sentence “I must have fainted because I don’t remember anything after that”. However, the key distinction here is that fainting is a reaction to a mental state (e.g., shock or fear) and involves a loss of consciousness, which is an internal psychological experience leading to a physical outcome. Therefore, ‘fainted’ is better classified as a behavioural process because it expresses an internal state (i.e., reaction to a frightening experience) through an external, observable action (collapsing or losing consciousness). Thus, ‘fainted’, as behavioural process, involves a response to an emotional or psychological condition. Also, from the table, for the process ‘fainted’, 6 errors were classified as mental, 3 as relational, 2 as verbal and one case is not identified, indicating that the students incorrectly categorized the process in their answers.

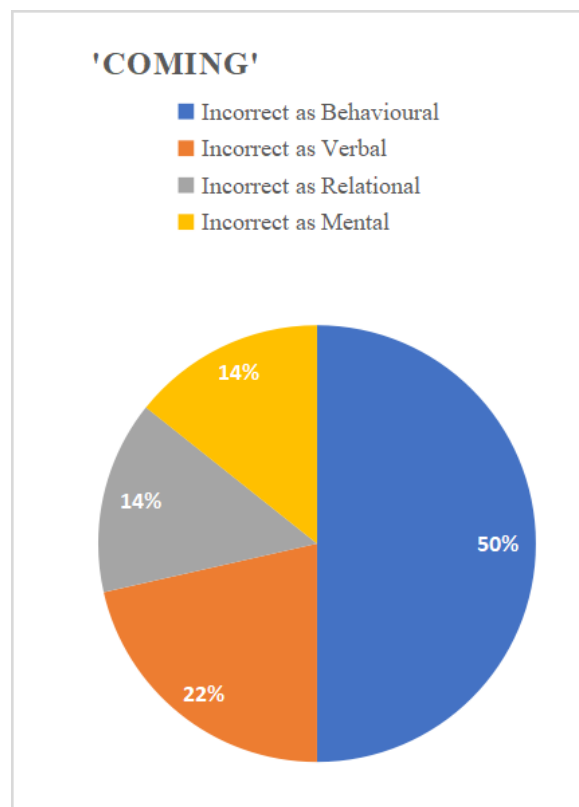
As for the material process ‘shares’, there were 21 errors: 11 errors were given to the relational category, 7 for behavioural, 2 for mental, and one for verbal, indicating that students incorrectly identified the process ‘shares’ in their answers. Obviously, the highest number of errors is devoted to relational category. A possible explanation for this error is that the AOU students might mistakenly identify ‘shares’ as a relational process because it involves relationships between the mother and her children. However, ‘shares’ in the context of the text, i.e., in the sentence “which she shares with her two teenage sons and daughter”, refers to an action. It is the act of dividing or distributing the house among the family members. Thus, it is a material action which involves physical interaction, i.e., sharing the space, rather than defining a relationship or state of being.

As for the process ‘jolted’, there were a total of 22 errors. Out of these errors, 11 were behavioural errors, indicating that the students incorrectly identified the process as a behavioural process. AOU students might mistakenly

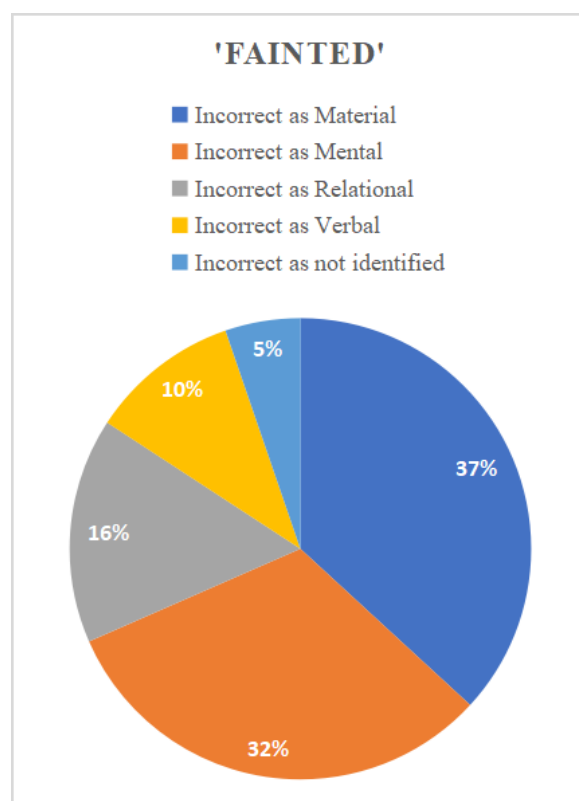
consider ‘jolted’ a behavioural process because it involves a reaction to an external stimulus (the sound), and reactions to external stimuli can sometimes be interpreted as emotional or psychological responses. However, in the context of the given media text: “It was a frightening experience for 51-year-old Linneth Jackson, who said that she was jolted by a sound shortly after 6:30 a.m. at her house, which she shares with her two teenage sons and daughter”, ‘jolted’ refers to a physical shock or movement. Thus, it (the process ‘Jolted’) is an observable physical reaction to the sound, not an internal mental or emotional process. Therefore, ‘jolted’ is a material process because it describes a physical reaction to an external stimulus. Also, from the table, for the process ‘jolted’, seven errors were categorized by students as mental errors, suggesting that the participants mistakenly identified the process as a mental process. Two errors were relational errors, indicating that the students incorrectly categorized the process as a relational process. One error was categorized as verbal error, and also one error was counted in the performance of the students as the process was not identified.

The below **Figures 1–4** better represent each process type as well as the percentages of errors committed by AOU students in identification based on the text.

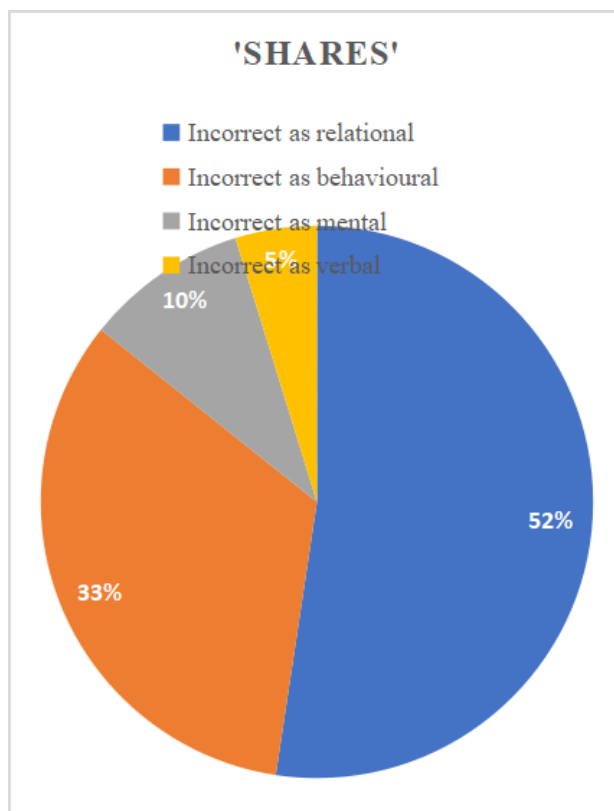
The most difficult group consists of four processes as shown in the figures above, three of which are material processes: ‘coming’, ‘shares’, and ‘jolted’ and only one process is behavioural: ‘fainted’. This indicates that the dominant process type is material process in the group with 75%. From the figures above, it can be seen that the most common error, produced by AOU students, in the identification of material process is that their identification of it as behavioural with 50% of the total errors in the process ‘coming’ and 52% in the process ‘jolted’. For the process ‘shares’, the highest percentage is devoted for the incorrect identification of the process as relational with percentage 52%, followed by behavioural with 32%. On the other hand, the most common error for the identification of the behavioural process ‘fainted’ is its identification as material process with 37% of the total errors. The highest percentage is for material (with 37% of total errors), followed by mental with 32%, relational with 16%, verbal with 10%, and one case with no identification with 5%. It can be concluded that material process is incorrectly identified as behavioural and vice versa behavioural process, in the given text ‘fainted’, as material process.



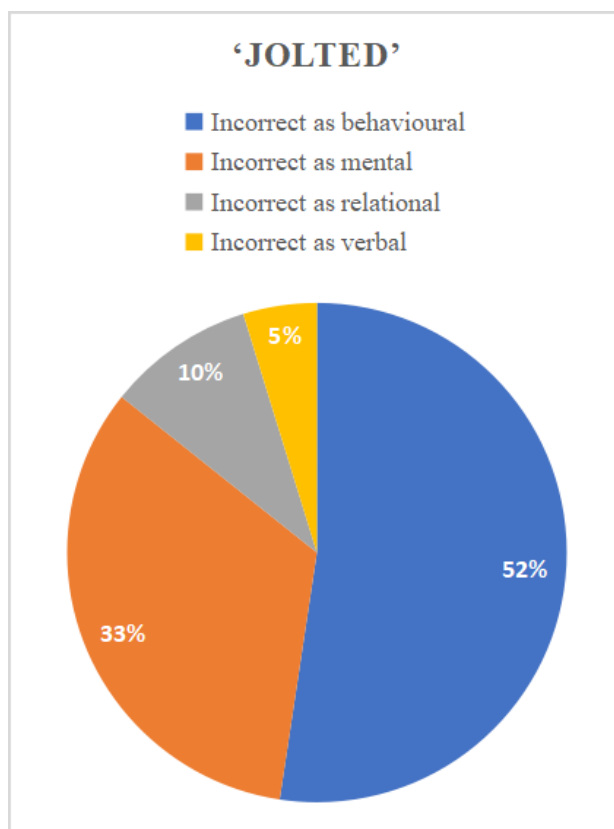
**Figure 1.** Error Analysis of the Material Process 'Coming'.



**Figure 2.** Error Analysis of the Behavioural Process 'Fainted'.



**Figure 3.** Error Analysis of the Material Process 'Shares'.



**Figure 4.** Error Analysis of the Material Process 'Jolted'.

These detailed results provide insights into the specific types of errors produced by the students for each process type. The analysis of errors for each process type reveals pattern in the type of errors on the part of the AOU EFL Jeddah students. They frequently, misidentified material processes ‘coming’, and ‘jolted’ as behavioural processes and vice versa the behavioural process ‘fainted’ misidentified as material process. The confusion between material and behavioural processes in second language acquisition (SLA) often arises from several factors. These are (1) cognitive, (2) developmental, and (3) functional factors. EFL learners may struggle to distinguish between these processes, i.e., material and behavioural, due to cognitive overload, where they must simultaneously manage syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. This difficulty is further complicated by first language (L1) interference, as learners may transfer cognitive strategies from their native language. This leads to misinterpretations. For instance, in the sentence “I heard a loud noise coming from the garden,” learners might classify the verb ‘coming’ as a behavioral process because it is linked to ‘heard,’ which is commonly associated with mental perception. However, according to Halliday’s<sup>[5]</sup> systemic functional grammar theory, ‘coming’ describes an external event or physical action, qualifying it as a material process. This confusion can stem from the cognitive tendency to associate perception-related verbs with internal processes, as seen in schema theory, by Meylani<sup>[29]</sup>, where learners rely on pre-existing mental frameworks to interpret new information. Furthermore, the development of grammatical understanding in SLA is gradual, and learners may continue to struggle with distinguishing process types until they gain more exposure and experience.

Furthermore, this confusion between material and behavioral processes goes with what is given by Leedham and Allington<sup>[3]</sup> that “Behavioural processes can be tricky to distinguish from material and mental processes” (p. 33). They add that “even experienced SFL theorists argue over some instances” (p. 33). Along the same lines, Machin and Mayer<sup>[30]</sup> argue that behavioural processes are a cross between material and mental categories of processes. Based on the results of the study, special focus should be given to the distinction of behavioural processes from material processes in classes of E304A for EFL learners. The following section entitled ‘recommendations and pedagogical implications’

provides suggested corrective steps for the students with the main aim of enhancing comprehension and reducing errors on the part of EFL learners.

## 8. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications

To enhance comprehension of processes types and reduce errors in identification of processes categories, it is recommended that EFL learners should understand the relationship between lexical item and process types. There is not always a one-to-one relationship between lexical items and process types. That is mainly because two factors are working together in deciding on the process types. These are: the semantic meaning, which is based on the context, and the grammatical behaviour. For example, the verb ‘goes’ can be used in different senses: its material sense, for example, Sarah goes to school as well as its verbal sense, Sarah goes, ‘I do not know what they teach you in that school’. Thus, understanding the context is very important factor that aids in correct identification of the type of the process on the part of the EFL learners.

Furthermore, it is recommended for EFL learners to use tests in form of questions to differentiate between several types of processes. For material processes, the students need to ask themselves the question ‘What X do (to Y)?’ the answer to the question should include a material process. Thus, the verb do, in the question used as a test, can substitute for the verb in a material process. For example, What did the mother of three do? A mother of three narrowly escaped death yesterday. On the other hand, mental processes answer the question: What did X feel/think/like/perceive (about y)? Thus, the question for the material process given above does not work with mental processes (see tips given by Leedham and Allington<sup>[3]</sup>). For relational processes, three questions can be used: What is X like? What does X have? Where is X? This is mainly because relational process, generally, has two participants: someone or something is related to, identified as or possesses someone or something else. The answer to the question: What did X say? is supposed to be by verbal processes as they are processes of communication. Finally, behavioural processes answer the question: What did X do? Or What happened to X? One important point that the students should know while dealing with behavioural

processes is that this type of processes usually have only one participant that is a conscious being. Machin and Mayer<sup>[30]</sup> argue that in behavioural processes ‘the action has to be experienced by a single conscious being, that is a person’ (p. 152).

Additionally, it is recommended for EFL learners to understand the difference between behavioural processes and material processes. One of the differences is that in the clause of the behavioural process, the participant is a single conscious being (see Machin and Mayer<sup>[30]</sup>). Prasetyo et al.<sup>[31]</sup> refer to the same point related to behavioural process by citing Gerot and Wignell<sup>[32]</sup> (p. 60) “there is one obligatory participant, that is behavior, and typically a conscious being”, they add “but the process is grammatically more like one of doing” (p. 12). Halliday and Matthiessen<sup>[7]</sup> describe behavioural processes as “grammatically more like one of doing” (p. 301). Thus, the EFL students should be aware of the two pieces of facts that (1) the behavioural process is grammatically more like the material process, and that (2) only one obligatory participant which is typically a conscious being, i.e. a person, is expected to be found in the clause of the behavioural process. This awareness of the differences between behavioural and material process will aid the students in correctly identifying the correct process types and hence this will improve their performance.

Thus, based on the results of the study, tutors should focus in their classes on (1) showing the students the relationship between lexical item and process types by explaining with examples this relationship and emphasising that ‘there is not always a one-to-one relationship’ between lexical items and process types; (2) using tests in form of questions for each process types as these questions are useful for aiding students in deciding the correct type of process in the context of the text; (3) raising the students’ awareness to the differences between behavioural and material processes by explaining that the behavioural process is grammatically more like the material process, and that only one obligatory participant which is typically a conscious being, i.e. a person, is expected to be found in the clause of the behavioural process.

Based on the findings of the current study, several practical steps can be taken to enhance learners’ ability to identify process types using Halliday’s transitivity theory. Tutors should focus on demonstrating the relation-

ship between lexical items and process types. This can be achieved by providing examples to show that the same lexical item can correspond to different process types depending on context. They should also use targeted exercises and tests for each process type, such as sentence classification, multiple-choice, or fill-in-the-blank tasks. This helps students practice identifying the correct process type in context. Furthermore, raising students’ awareness of the differences between behavioural and material processes is crucial; teachers should explain that behavioural processes are grammatically similar to material processes but typically involve only one obligatory participant, usually a conscious being. Furthermore, additional strategies are recommended. These are (1) contextualized sentence analysis, where students label process types in short texts, (2) group discussions or peer review activities that encourage explanation, correction, and reflection, and (3) scaffolded approach (i.e., tutors should start from simple examples and gradually progress to complex or ambiguous sentences) which can strengthen learners’ analytical skills and build confidence in their application of transitivity theory. In addition to above mentioned points, tutors in their illustration of process types should use real-life examples which are relevant to students’ experiences and interest. This will help EFL students to connect the abstract concepts to concrete situation, thus it will be easier for them to understand the differences between types of processes.

Finally, further studies are suggested in employing the above-mentioned pedagogical techniques to a larger number of students to see their effects on student performance. Additionally, expanding the data scope is recommended by including multiple campuses, larger and more diverse samples, and possibly mixed-gender groups. Moreover, further studies with different methodologies are suggested to improve students’ performance in identifying process types.

## 9. Conclusions

This study investigated the performance of EFL students in accurately identifying process types within a media text. The results show that the overall correct identification rate is of 66.67%. Thus, the error rate is of 33.33%. Accordingly, while students demonstrated strong accuracy

in recognizing certain processes—such as “said” (85.71%), “remember” (89.28%), and “heard” (85.71%)—they faced considerable challenges with others, particularly material and behavioural processes like “jolted” (78.57% incorrect), “shares” (75%), “fainted” (67.85%), and “coming” (50%). These findings suggest that while students possess a foundational understanding of process types, certain categories remain problematic. This necessitates targeted instructional interventions.

A detailed analysis of errors revealed that the most frequent mistakes involved the misclassification of material processes as behavioural (e.g., “jolted” and “coming”) and behavioural processes as material (e.g., “fainted”). This aligns with existing linguistic research, which acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing between these two process types due to their overlapping grammatical and semantic features<sup>[3,30]</sup>. Additionally, relational misclassifications were observed, particularly with the process “shares,” where 52% of errors involved labeling it as relational rather than material. These patterns highlight the need for explicit instruction on the distinguishing features of each process type, particularly in contexts where ambiguity arises.

To address these challenges, several pedagogical recommendations emerge from the study:

**Contextual and Lexical Awareness:** Students should be taught that process identification depends not only on the lexical verb but also on its function within the sentence. For instance, verbs like “goes” can function as either material or verbal processes depending on context. Explicit examples and exercises should reinforce this concept.

**Diagnostic Questioning:** Instructors should train students to use process-specific questions, as given in Leedham and Allington<sup>[3]</sup>, (e.g., “What did X do?” for material processes vs. “What did X feel?” for mental processes) as a heuristic for identification. This structured approach can reduce ambiguity in classification of processes.

**Behavioural vs. Material Process Differentiation:** Since behavioural processes are particularly prone to misidentification, lessons should emphasize their key characteristics: (a) they typically involve a single conscious participant (the behavior), and (b) while grammatically similar to material processes, they describe actions that are more psychological or physiological (e.g., “fainted,” “cried”). Contrastive examples and error analysis can solidify this distinction.

**Real-World Applications:** To enhance engagement and comprehension, instructors should incorporate authentic texts and relatable examples (e.g., social media posts, news headlines) that illustrate how process types function in natural discourse.

To sum up, while the participants in this study exhibited a moderate level of proficiency in identifying process types, the persistent errors—particularly in distinguishing material and behavioural processes—underscore the need for refined pedagogical strategies. By integrating explicit instruction, contextual practice, and metacognitive questioning techniques, educators can equip EFL learners with the analytical tools needed to navigate the complexities of process identification. Ultimately, such measures will not only improve grammatical accuracy but also deepen students’ comprehension of how language functions meaningfully in diverse textual contexts.

## 10. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current study is limited by its small sample size. It consists of only 28 students from Jeddah branch of Arab Open University (AOU). This limited sample size poses a challenge to the generalizability of the findings. Thus, it may not be fully representative of the broader student population across different branches of AOU. To enhance the reliability and applicability of future studies, it would be beneficial to expand the sample size by including students from different AOU branches across different countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Bahrain, Oman, and others. This would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of student’s performance regarding processes of Halliday’s transitivity theory. Furthermore, future research could broaden the scope by focusing not only on the processes and their types (such as material, mental, relational, behavioural, and verbal processes) but also on the participants (the agents performing the actions) and the circumstances (the context in which actions occur) within Halliday’s transitivity framework. Additionally, integrating modern advancements in technology could provide new dimensions to future research. Specifically, incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in teaching methods would be a promising avenue for future studies. Investigat-

ing how AI-enhanced learning environments impact student performance, engagement, and comprehension could offer valuable data that helps refine instructional strategies and optimize student learning experiences in the context of linguistic theories like Halliday's. This could also align with ongoing trends in educational technology, offering a more innovative and effective approach to teaching complex linguistic concepts.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Appendix A

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study will be available upon reasonable request.

## Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks and gratitude are to Almighty Allah for enabling me to successfully conduct this study.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Table A1.** Analysis of Errors Produced by EFL Students.

	Process (Correct Type-Number of Incorrect Identification)	Number of Incorrect Cases by EFL Students	Incorrect Cases-Types
1.	Remember (Mental-3)	3	3 Behavioural
2.	Heard (Mental-4)	4	3 Behavioural 1 Verbal
3.	Said (Verbal-4)	4	2 Behavioural 1 Mental 1 Relational
4.	Crashed (Material-5)	5	2 Behavioural 3 Verbal
5.	Saw (Mental-5)	5	4 Verbal 1 Relational
6.	Said (Verbal-6)	6	3 Behavioural 1 Mental 1 Material 1 Relational
7.	Was (Relational-6)	6	5 Verbal 1 not identified
8.	Starting to move (Material-7)	7	3 Behavioural 2 not identified 1 Verbal 1 Relational
9.	Smashing (Material-7)	7	4 Behavioural 1 Verbal 1 Relational 1 not identified
10.	Make (Material-8)	8	5 Verbal 1 Behavioural 1 Mental 1 Relational



Table A1. Cont.

	Process (Correct Type-Number of Incorrect Identification)	Number of Incorrect Cases by EFL Students	Incorrect Cases-Types
11.	Escaped (Material-9)	9	6 Behavioural 2 Mental 1 Verbal
12.	Coming (Material-14)	14	7 Behavioural 3 Verbal 2 Relational 2 Mental
13.	Fainted (Behavioural-19)	19	7 Material 6 Mental 3 Relational 2 Verbal 1 not identified
14.	Shares (Material-21)	21	11 Relational 7 Behavioural 2 Mental 1 Verbal
15.	Jolted (Material-22)	22	11 Behavioural 7 Mental 2 Relational 1 Verbal 1 not identified

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