An analysis of grammatical errors in student teachers' written work at Rock view University in Lusaka.

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Abstract: *The aim of this study was to analyse the grammatical errors made by student teachers in their written work at Rockview University. It sought to examine the frequency of the errors and what could be done to improve the teaching of English writing. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research design. Fifty-eight (58) participants took part in the research, with a breakdown of fifty (50) students and eight (8) language lecturers. Two questionnaires were administered to students and language lecturers, and the responses were analysed. Written assignments were also used to collect data which was also analysed. The identified grammatical errors were agreement errors, singular and plural errors, spelling errors, punctuation errors, prepositional errors, omission of words errors, article errors, and repetition errors. The study found that the most frequently committed grammatical errors were spelling errors followed by subject verb-agreement errors and punctuation errors. The study also brings out the recommendations to use effective strategies for the improvement of English writing by students.*

Keywords: *grammatical errors, students, written work, English writing, prepositional.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Grammatical errors are errors committed by students in their written work. These errors are usually in form of adjectives, adverbs, articles, nouns, possession, pronouns, prepositions and verbs, substance errors (capitalization, punctuation and spelling), lexical errors (word formation and word selection), syntactic errors (coordination/ subordination, sentence structure and ordering), and semantic errors (ambiguous communication and miscommunication). In addition, writing is the most difficult skill in English, so most students of English as a Second Language tend to make errors in writing. In teaching learners to successfully acquire writing skills, the investigation and analysis of errors as well as the understanding of their sources are necessary.

Students in both private and public higher institutions of learning face problems in writing and their written work are characterized by numerous grammatical errors. The problem was first noticed when the researcher began lecturing in 2018. These grammatical errors make students' pieces of writing difficult to understand. As the reader reads through the work, he or she will pay attention to these errors and will have to struggle to understand what the writer wants to say. Students, like any other learners, should be taught English so that their grammar improves. Insufficient knowledge of grammar has led to many University students committing numerous errors that have resulted in their written work losing meaning. These errors are noticed in the assignments they write. Lecturers have complained about this, indicating that they spend a lot of time reading assignments that are full of errors and therefore, there is need for significant improvement in the way students write their texts. Grammar is a significant aspect that students have to develop mastery among other aspects of language (Agcam&Ozkan, 2016). Further, errors in writing distort meaning and the correction of these errors forms an essential requirement for the successful learning of English. As teachers to be of English, they should improve the way of teaching to reduce the errors which are always made by the learners.

In the late 1990s, James proposed five categories of errors which include grammatical errors (adjectives, adverbs, articles, nouns, possession, pronouns, prepositions and verbs), substance errors (capitalization, punctuation and spelling), lexical errors (word formation and word selection), syntactic errors (coordination/ subordination, sentence structure and ordering), and semantic errors (ambiguous communication and miscommunication) (James, 1998 as cited by Agcam&Ozkan, 2016).

Another research was conducted on grammatical errors in which it was discovered that out of 80 Form One students, 30 committed numerous and countless errorsin the use of the tenses in addition to the prepositions rather than the agreement of the subject-verb.

Another researcher also added that grammatical error is a term used in prescriptive grammar to describe an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a misplaced modifier or an inappropriate verb tense (Garner, 2012 cited by Owu-Ewie, 2017). According to him grammatical errors involve faulty structures which may include wrong verbal tense, incorrect verbal forms, and syntax problems. It is also called usage error. In this study, the following were identified as grammatical errors: agreement errors (subject-verb agreement and noun-pronoun agreement), tense errors (past/present, aspect, etc.), number (singular/plural) errors, prepositional errors, article errors, and conjunctions errors. Agreement errors (subject-verb and noun-pronoun agreement). Subject-verb agreement is the correspondence of a verb with its subject in person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural) (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002 cited by Owu-Ewie, 2017).

In another study errors were analyzed at the sentential level. All of the errors were classified as subject-verb agreement, tenses, parts of speech, participial phrases, relative clauses, passive voice, parallel structure, punctuation, run-ons and fragments (Hengwichitkul, 2006 cited by Agcam&Ozkan, 2016). Likewise, Runkati categorized the errors found in her study into two main types. The former type dealt with errors at the sentential level which were fragments, run-ons, subject-verb agreement, word order, tenses, capital letters and punctuation. The latter one was errors at the word level, such as articles, prepositions, word choices, nouns and numbers (Runkati, 2013 cited by Alsahafi, 2017). As the present study focused on errors in English sentences, the analysis of errors found at the sentential level and the word level was adopted. The one regarding sentential level errors included fragments, subject-verb agreement, word orders, tenses, capitalization and punctuation. The other concerning errors at the word level were articles, prepositions, word choices, nouns, pronouns and verbs. Other kinds of analysis, for example, addition and omission were also referred to as sub-categories of the sentential level errors and the word level.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In Zambia's tertiary institutions, specifically teacher training colleges, students, both male and female, face challenges in written English Language. This is due to the fact that they produce sentences that have errors of subject- verb agreement and incorrect punctuations and spellings. This problem is seen in their written work, that is, in assignments and examinations. Incoherently packaged information, especially the distortion of the subject-verb agreement and exhibition of incorrect punctuations and spellings, distorts the flow of information and meaning of the text. This has an impact in the development of themes within written texts. There are many categories of errors and one of these is intralingual interference. These errors are committed by writers who do not fully understand a distinction in the target language. This is a result of incorrect generalisation of rules in the target language. Scovel (2001 as cited by Kaweera, 2013) adds that intralingual errors are identified as the confusion a language learner experiences when confronting patterns within the structure of a newly acquired language. These categories of errors make it difficult to understand the written work. Also, Carelessness, mental fatigue or mental lapses on the part of the learners result in committing grammatical errors but what is more prominent are the interlingual causes. Bbela (2000) describes interlingual error as that which is found as one of the most important factors affecting deviant problems which result from negative interference from mother tongue (L1) to the target language (English).

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyse the grammatical errors that student teachers at Rockview University make in their written work such as grammatical structures, subject-verb agreement, punctuation and spellings.

1.3. Specific Objectives

This study intended to achieve the following specific objectives: To assess the grammatical errors in the students' written work;
i.   To establish the extent to which the first language interferes in the subject-verb agreement in English Language;
ii. To examine the use of punctuation marks in students' written work;
iii. To analyse the students' written texts as regards the use of spellings.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the psychological activity theory pioneered by Sergei Rubenstein in the 1930's whose foundational concept is activity which should be understood as purposeful, transformative and developing interaction subjects and objects. The activity theory of learning looks at the types of knowledge towards which the learning process is directed which appears as motivation in which a student's need for learning becomes objectified and the activity's objective and lies in Vygotsky (1978) who regards mental functioning as developing from the performance of external actions.Errors are due to carelessness, mental fatigue or mental lapses on the part of the learners which result in committing grammatical errors but what is more prominent are the interlingual causes and to work on them, students need to be motivated in language learning and be provided with a lot of exercises for practice purposes.

1.5. Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of the study would contribute to the knowledge gap amongst all the stake holders interested in grammatical errors in student teachers' written workand student's classroom language learning proficiency in Zambia at tertiary level such asCurriculum development specialists, educationists, lecturersand other stake holders in the sense that only when proficiency is attained will performance be improved in language learning thereby culminating in less errors in students' written work.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Problems in English Grammar and Language

Problems in English grammar and language are the number one troubles students face when studying a foreign language. When a student from a country for example, with a lot of major local languages and more other languages and dialects studies in a single foreign language-- English, problems are bound to crop up. But in this globalized world of digitization, we need to ensure that the language we study in since entering school is used flawlessly as it is the medium on which most of us would build our professional lives (Taboola, 2017).

The correction of the errors has been the most inevitable process in the world when the foreign language has been acquired. The learners and the students who are in the process of language learning will benefit from the errors they have made. This will help them to get the response and feedback on the work they have produced. In various efforts, the learner will get used to and will be able to successfully attain their required goals and objectives. The errors made by the learners are of the significant and specific prominence for the reason that the making of the errors in the work has been regarded as a device that the learners will use in order to make themselves learn from it. So, Error Analysis is a valued help and support to classify and clarify the problems and difficulties confronted by the language learners. Further, Error Analysis has been serving as a consistent response to plan and make a corrective coaching manner. Candling (2001) in showing concern states that 'the second language learner and the errors they made are significantly important for the recognition and understanding of the procedures of getting hold of the foreign language or the Second Language Acquisition as SLA'.

Olasehinde (2002) has also been arguing that it is expected and certain that the apprentices possibly will make the errors in their work. He recommended that the errors are inevitable as well as an essential portion of the learning curve when applied to a student. In the work of Sercombe (2000), he explained that the Error Analysis works for the three purposes. First of all, it has been able to discover out the level of the proficiency of the language, that a learner has attained. Furthermore, to gain knowledge and information regarding the most common problems in the process of the language learning, and lastly, to discover out how individuals learn a foreign language that is opposite of their mother tongue. Stapa and Izahar (2010) analyzed errors of subject-verb agreement found in 40 written compositions – argumentative and factual- among 20 post graduate teacher trainees in a teachers' training college in Malaysia.

2.2. Grammatical Errors in Students' Written Work

Little attention has been paid to studies involving students studying English as a second language in teacher training institutions in Zambia. This is in connection with grammatical errors that they make in their written discourse. Raimes (1983) gives the explanation that students commit errors in writing and students find it useful if they can understand their errors because of the following reasons: "First,

it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that have been taught to students. Second, when students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language. Third, when they write they necessarily become very involved with the new language". Zawahreh (2012)), Yahya, Azizi, et al. (2012), Sun and Shang (2009), Zawahreh (2012) and Stapa and Izahar (2010) analysed different aspects of grammar in the writings of different levels of students from different countries. Secondary students' writings – descriptive, argumentative and narrative- gets more focus from the researchers for analyzing errors. Syntactic errors are looked into specifically. WH questions, passive construction and verb usage are all examined to a little extent. Only Stapa and Izahar (2010) examined the errors of agreement between subject and verb.

2.3. Error Analysis

Error analysis has attracted the attention of most scholars over the last two decades in the region. This stems from the fact that it is considered as an analytical tool that learners use in order to learn (Khansir, 2013 cited by Amokehene, 2017). The outcome of error-based analysis of students' essays therefore serves as an effective means of improving the language of students as it gives them an insight into some errors that they usually make in their writing. Another researcher is of the view that three main issues make students commit errors in their writing and these include carelessness on the side of the students, first language interference (the influence of the native language of the learner on his or her acquisition of the target language) and translation.

Dominant among research works in error analysis within the ESL (English as a Second

Language) context is the scholarly work of Quibol-Catabay (2016) cited by Amokehene, (2017) who explored the frequency and the types of sentence errors that characterize the writings of second year students. Qui-Catabay (2016 as cited by Amokehene, 2017) further stressed that punctuation mark errors dominated errors that were linked to the mechanical category whereas wrong use of tense was prototypical of errors in the realms of the grammatical category. Fragments, as stressed by Qui-Catabay (2016) as cited by Amokehene (2017), dominated errors within the structural level (structural category).

2.4. Use of English in Speech or Writing

English in Zambia is a second language and because of this, most of the speakers face the challenge of how to use it correctly in either speech or writing. Most of the studies that have been conducted on the use of English in Zambia have focused on elements which constitute a second language such as the Zambia variety of English and on language in education and did not touch much on issues of grammar (Njobvu, 2010). Little attention has been paid to studies connected with grammar errors in spoken and written English in Zambia among students in teacher training institutions.

The analysis of students' written pieces of discourse is necessary because quality in higher institutions of learning is evaluated on the basis of the written products as produced by the students. Furthermore, Mu (2006) also observed that second language research writing had paid attention to the differences between the first language and the second language which are likely to interfere with second language writing.

The integration of subjects of English and Zambian Languages to become Literacy and Language Education under Zambia Teacher Education Course (ZATEC) did not help much in the learning of English as a second language because the two subjects which are different in nature were taught as one subject, so not much attention was paid to English as a subject. Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2013) states that ZATEC adopted a concept of study areas in which the subjects were group according to clearly definable relationship among them. So, the macro skills of listening, speaking, writing and reading in English in teacher training institutions were not adequately taught. The framework also adds that with regard to language and communication, much as the learners are taught Languages at various levels, a number of them are unable to communicate effectively. This is indicative of the absence of the communication skills component in the teaching of the languages.

Educating Our Future (1996), on the other hand, says that all pupils will be given an opportunity to learn initial basic skills of reading and writing in a local language, whereas English will remain as the official medium of instruction. By providing for the use of a local language for initial literacy acquisition, children's learning of essential reading and writing skills should be better assured. While this maybe true with literacy in local languages, the situation may not be the same with English since

the spelling system of this language is by far different from local languages hence the need to start learning English at the early stage.

Another study within Zambia sought to analyze written English errors made by Grade 11 learners in a multilingual context in Monze and Kabwe Districts of Zambia. This was done by Moonga, (2011). The study aimed at identifying and categorizing the errors that the Grade 11 learners make in their written English. The study also established which of these errors relate to interference and whether or not these errors relate to a specific L1 or generally cut across languages as used by pupils. The findings for Moonga (2011) revealed that there were 8 types of errors. These included misuse of prepositions, poor punctuations, wrong expressions, wrong word order, wrong time expression, double grammatical errors and poor spellings. The study also identified Interlingua errors due to L1 interference and intralingua errors due to inadequate knowledge of rules in the target language. The findings of this study left a knowledge gap for the current study to find out the extent to which grammatical errors influence students' essay writing since the studies focused on secondary school pupils only.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Design

The aim of the study was to analyse the grammatical errors student teachers at Rockview University make in their written work. The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive survey design was considered appropriate it allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions. The research design was a descriptive survey, as Kasonde-Ngandu (2013) pointed out that a descriptive study may often result in the formation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problems.

The study employed questionnaires to collect information from lecturers of Language and questionnaires for student teachers as well as analyzing students' written texts after administering an assignment to them (Best and Kahn, 2006). Data collected was in form of words, sentences and extracts while the internet also supplemented data for the study.

3.2. Research Sites

The study was carried out at oneselected tertiary institution (Rockview University) in Lusaka from which respondents were also sampled.

3.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised of eight (8) lecturers in the Languages department and fifty (50), that is twenty (25) male and twenty-five (25) female second year student teachers at Rockview University representing 10% of total second year student populace,Awokeni (2006). Simple random sampling was used to select students because it provided each participant in the population with equal opportunity to be selected to be part of a study sample,Ngandu (2013). The researcher wrote down numbers on pieces of paper and put them in a carton box. He then used the lottery method to select the fifty (50) participants. Purposive sampling was used to select specialist lecturers because it enabled the researcher to select participants that were believed to be reliable for the study and were considered to have rich information for in-depth analysis related to the issue being studied.

In the sampling of institutions, the study adopted the stratified cluster random sampling technique, Donald (2003). Sampling was done zone by zone. Institutions of higher learning were clustered by zones. One zone was purposively selected based on highest number of institutions of higher learning. The sampling was done at three levels: Sampling zones and institutions of higher learning- level 1, lecturers of languages-level 2 and Sampling students-level 3.

3.4. Data Analysis

In this research, data was analysed qualitatively as the semi structured interviews and observation schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi structured interviews and observation schedules Kombo and Tromp (2006). Charts and graphs were used to analyse data. The data gathered was analysed according to the themes of the study, the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the interview guide was analysed manually and also, a combination of software MS Access, SPSS and MS Excel was used to analyse data. Analysis was mainly descriptive, that is, mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation. Related statistics were applied where possible.

Statistical testing took the form of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation and regression both simple and multiple.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The researcher avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this research, the researcher was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researcher for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

The Researcher got permission from the Vice Chancellor to interview lecturers and students. The names of respondents would remain anonymous for the sake of confidentiality, Bryman (2001) and Diener and Crandall (2008). However, the identity of respondents was concealed in the thesis but for identification in the thesis, the fifty students were allocated numbers 1 to 50 while the eightlecturers were allocated letters of the alphabet A to H.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

4.1. Grammatical Errors Based on Type of Error

The study also established which of these errors relate to interference and whether or not these errors relate to a specific L1 or generally cut across languages as used by pupils. The findings revealed that there were eight types of errors. These included misuse of prepositions, poor punctuations, wrong expressions, wrong word order, wrong time expression, double grammatical errors and poor spellings. The study also identified Interlingua errors due to L1 interference and intralingua errors due to inadequate knowledge of rules in the target language.

Table 1 below shows the analysis of grammatical errors based on type of error, number of errors and percentage in students written assignments. Students' assignments were marked and the following grammatical errors were established.

Table1. *Grammatical errors made by Rock view student teachers in written assignments.*

TYPE OF ERROR	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA)	8	16
Wrong spellings	12	24
Incomplete word/sentences	2	4
Omission error-verb	1	2
Pronoun	2	4
Possessive pronoun	1	2
Definitive article	3	6
Wrong word	2	4
Singular-plural	3	6
Non count noun	1	2
Repetition	2	4
Punctuation	5	10
Preposition	1	2
Adverb	2	4
Use of connectors	2	4
Overgeneralization of rules	1	2
Missing words	2	4
Total	**50**	**100**

4.2. Identified Grammatical Errors

As illustrated in the table 2 below, the responses from lecturers on the grammatical errors student teachers make in their written work were as follows: Four (4) lecturers representing 6.9% responded that students made numerous errors of subject- verb agreement, two (2) lecturers representing 3.4%

responded that students exhibited plural tense errors while the remaining two (2) 1 each representing 3.4% answered that students reflected errors of compound and collective noun as well as non-count noun errors.

Table 2 below shows the grammatical errors that students make in their written work.

Table2. *Grammatical Errors that students make in their written work.*

Grammatical errors	Male	Female	Total respondents	percentage
Subject-verb agreement	2	2	4	50
Plural tense	1	1	2	25
Compound-collective nouns	1	0	1	12.5
Non-count nouns	0	1	1	12.5
Total			8	100

The study found that grammatical errors first, it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that have been taught to students. Second, when students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language. Third, when they write they necessarily become very involved with the new language. Moreover, different linguists analysed different aspects of grammar in the writings of different levels of students from different countries. Secondary students' writings – descriptive, argumentative and narrative- gets more focus from the researchers for analyzing errors. Syntactic errors are looked into specifically. WH questions, passive construction and verb usage are all examined to a little extent and so were the errors of agreement between subject and verb. The study, however looked at the errors which were identified in students' written work and Figure 1 below shows most of the grammatical errors identified in students' written work after administering written assignments to second year student teachers at Rockview University and these errors are presented by percentage and frequency.
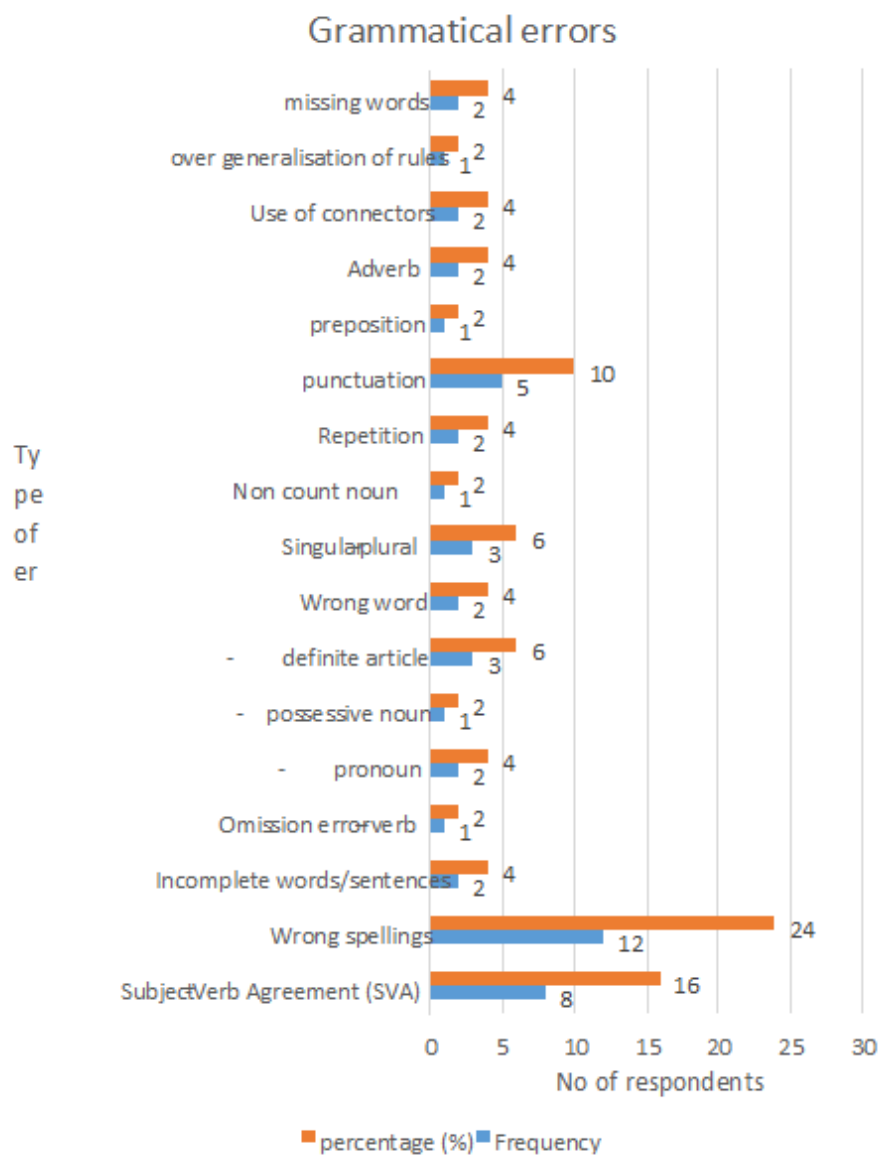
Figure1. *Identified grammatical errors*

4.3. The Impact of Grammatical Errors of Subject-Verb Agreement on the Students' Performance

The responses to the grammatical errors of subject-verb agreement on students' performance were as follows:

All the eight (8) language lecturers responded that students' grammatical errors of subject verb agreement reflected in their written work and this made their work difficult to read and get meaning from.

4.4. First Language Interference in the Subject Verb Agreement in English Language

There were multiple responses to this question: Nineteen (19) responded with the answer 'yes' while six (6) indicated 'no', bringing the total number of male respondents to twenty-five (25). Four (4) respondents indicated that interference was in words both singular and plural while two (2) respondents indicated that they make mistakes with the plural prefix in the mother tongue which comes at the beginning of the word while the plural suffix in English comes at the end of the word, for example, *abantu aba-* is the plural prefix in Icibemba while in *friends* the plural suffix - s in English comes at the end of the word. Fifteen (15) respondents gave incorrect responses to the question asked. Four (4) respondents left blank spaces in the questionnaire. On mother tongue interference, female respondents gave the following responses: Twelve (12) respondents indicated that they followed the stages of writing and thirteen (13) had incorrect answers. The total respondents were twenty-five (25).

The following table shows first language interference in the subject -verb agreement in English language.

Table3. *First language interference in the subject verb agreement in English language.*

L1 interference in L2	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
subject-verb agreement interference	0	1	1	12.5
use of L1 forms to express concepts in English	1	1	2	25
Spelling interference	1	0	1	12.5
Transfer of syntactic rules	0	1	1	12.5
direct translation	0	2	2	25
No comment	1	0	1	12.5
Total			**8**	**100**

The interference of the first language in the second language (English) was to a large extent reflected in students' writing.

4.5. Stages of Writing Students Follow Before Producing the Final Written Text

The findings on stages used the responses were that five (5) respondents indicated that they actually followed the five stages of writing, nineteen (19) indicated that they followed two or three stages while one (1) did not answer the question. Total, twenty-five (25) male respondents. With female student respondents, (4) indicated that they followed the five stages of writing, (18) followed two or three stages while (2) were not sure.

4.6. Spelling Mistakes Committed

On spelling mistakes committed when writing assignments: Two (2) respondent answered that he had problems with the singular-plural forms of irregular verbs such as formula (singular) and formulae (plural), twenty-six (26) respondents indicated that they made several mistakes they could not itemize, twelve(12) respondents provided wrong answers to the question, six (6) respondents indicated that they had problems with capitalization, the use of small letters in place of capital letters and vice versa. Two (2) respondent indicated that he had problems of omission of words and letters in the text while two (2) student indicated that he had a problem with homophones (words that sound the same but have different spellings and meaning) bringing the total to fifty (50) male and female respondents.

The table below shows the stages of writing that students use when they are producing the final text.

Table4. *Stages of writing*

Stages of writing	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
All stages	10	7	17	34
Incomplete stages	12	20	32	64
No answer	0	1	1	2
Total			**50**	**100**

4.7. Punctuation Marks Used in Writing Texts

On punctuation marks, sixteen (16) respondents indicated that they used several punctuation marks but eight (8) indicated that they used two types of punctuation marks, namely comma and full stop. No one (0) indicated that she used no punctuation marks while thirty-one (31) respondents indicated that they exhibited wrong spellings of difficult words. Five (5) respondents indicated that they had spelling problems with words with double letters. Thirteen (13) respondents had difficulties with words with silent letters while one (1) had problems in spelling homophones.

The following table below shows the punctuation marks students use when they are writing.

Table5. *Use of punctuation marks*

Punctuation marks	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Several punctuation marks	18	13	31	62
More than four marks	3	2	5	10
Less than three marks	8	5	13	26
No punctuation	1	0	1	2
Total			**50**	**100**

4.8. Spelling Mistakes in Students' Written Work

On spelling mistakes, One (1) respondent answered that he had problems with the singular-plural forms of irregular verbs such as formula (singular) and formulae (plural), eighteen (18) respondents

indicated that they made several mistakes they could not itemize, three (3) respondents provided wrong answers to the question, one (1) respondent indicated that they had problems with capitalization, the use of small letters in place of capital letters and vice versa. Six (6) respondent indicated that he had problems hormophones, words with double letters and silent letters in the text while twenty-one (21) student indicated no response or wrong responses bringing the total to fifty (50) male and female student respondents.

The following table below shows the spelling mistakes students make in their written work.

Table6. *Spelling mistakes*

Spelling mistakes	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Wrong spellings of several words.	11	7	18	36
Singular – plural (irregular verbs)	1	0	1	2
Capitalization	1	1	3	6
Omission of words/letters	0	1	1	2
Homophones	0	2	2	4
Words with double letters	1	1	2	4
Silent letters	0	2	2	4
No response/wrong response	10	11	21	42
Total			**50**	**100**

4.9. Overall Errors Students Commit

4.9.1. Spelling errors

The spelling errors occur when a person regularly spells a word wrongly due to lack of knowledge. But sometimes people spell words wrongly only once and subsequently spell them correctly in the same text and the examples of the spelling mistakes in students written work included *pronounciation (pronunciation), feture (future), mainting (maintaining), writting (writing), insetance (instance), prequisite (prerequisite), excuting (executing), October (October), grad(grade), intracted (interacted), beging(beginning), reconded (seconded) and fackle (tackle).* The results revealed that the students confused words which have double letters when they are written in the past participle tense, like the word *write* which becomes *written.* So, in the continuous tense they write it as *writing, Singh (2017) citing Krashen.* Additionally, they tended to write words the way they pronounce them (wrong pronunciation resulted in wrong spelling). Words with double letters confused them so much. This revelation was picked from the questionnaire that they answered.

4.9.2. Omission of Possessive Pronoun, Pronoun, Verb and Definite Article

Another error the students made in their writing was omission. Omission is any deletion of certain necessary items in sentences. The errors are the omission of verbs, pronouns, possessive pronouns and articles. The students' inability to include certain words in their assignments revealed their weaknesses in writing, Tin (2000).

4.9.3. Singular-Plural Error

Like in many languages, English has singular and plural phenomenon. In the sentences below, the demonstrative *these* does not take the plural morpheme -*s* when it is followed immediately by a verb. Similarly, the auxiliary verb*are*in the second sentence was preceded by the subject *this* which is singular, Chele (2015). The two sentences below show this singular- plural error and the correct versions are indicated in brackets.

a.All these *shows* that the people in the legislative council were in agreement. (Allthese show that people in the legislative council were in agreement.)

b.This *are* seen to be in agreement. (This is seen to be in agreement.) In the writing of assignments, some students had difficulty in dealing with singular and plurals as is evident in the two sentences above.

4.9.4. Non-count noun

In English non- count nouns represent items existing as a mass and rarely take plurals. In the students' written work, plurals were used where they were not necessary, Moonga (2011). The following are some examples identified from the data collected and their corrected versions in brackets.

a.   All the *furnitures* were put in the store room. (All the furniture was put in the store room).

b. Many *literatures* of the people in the area were local. (Many types of literature of the people in the area were local).

The errors in a and b reflected the students' thinking that every noun should have the suffix -s in its plural form as in any regular noun. This is a typical example of overgeneralization.

Another instance of overgeneralization is seen in the word October which is not just a question of wrong spelling of the word October but that of overgeneralization since we have September, November and December, we should also have Octomber. It is also an element of confusion in the names of months of the year.

4.8.5 Punctuation

These are marks, such as full stop, comma, and brackets, used in writing to separate sentences and their elements and to clarify meaning. A number of students, at least five of them exhibited errors of punctuation, more especially the use of capital letters and full stops. Two students exhibited the omission of full stops in their written assignments, as shown in the examples below:

a. *Hardman recommendation became enshrined in the 1966 Education Act for reasons of national unity plus a belief that a local language can result in better learning of concepts, the ministry of education ratified the recommendations.* (Hardman recommendation became enshrined in the 1966 Education Act. For reasons of national unity plus a belief that a local language can result in better learning of concepts, the Ministry of Education ratified the recommendations)

b. *Primary stage is the source of knowledge for anyone to be at the higher level must pass through the primary school. (*Primary stage is a source of knowledge. For anyone to be at a higher level he or she must pass through the primary school).

The other three students did not capitalize the following sentences:

a. considerable resources were committed over the following years.

b. just before the break up …

c. romanian Curriculum for the Primary School …

This appears to be negligence on the part of the students as most of the punctuation marks were observed in their written work.

The above discussion was based on grammatical errors in students' written work.

Eighteen (18) student0s indicated that they exhibited spelling errors in their written work. So, a large number of students representing 36% admitted that they face problems in the area of spellings. They cited words that had double letters to be particularly problematic. For example, *commit* could be written as *comit.* This is notthe case with words in Icibemba *(mother tongue)* which do not permit doubling letters. Thirty-one (31) students representing 62% indicated that they had difficulties with punctuation marks while two (2) students each answered that they face challenges in the area of homophones, words with double letters and silent letters representing 4% in each case, but they did not give examples of such words in English.

Thirty-eight (38) students representing 76% indicated that there was mother tongue interference in the way they used the subject-verb agreement in English with eight (8) students citing examples as follows: Icibemba: *umw*ana (singular) abana (plural). Singular and plural prefixes for count nouns are indicated at the beginning of the noun unlike in English where there is no prefix indicated at the beginning of the noun to indicate singular but the plural suffix of a count noun is indicated by putting -*s* as in pot- pots, banana – bananas. Similarly, since there are words in the mother tongue which do not show elements of singular and plural, students tend to treat certain words in English the same as those in the mother tongue. The examples below illustrate this confusion: Icibemba: Ing'oma (singular) Ing'oma (plural).   But in English it is drum (singular) and drums (plural). So, this confusion is easily transferred from mother tongue to English language.

5. CONCLUSION

The study found that they were many types of grammatical errors that students committed in their written assignments. It was discovered that grammatical errors that were mostly committed were in

the order of spellings, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, number errors (singular and plural), pronouns, prepositions, missing words, connectors, adverbs, repetitions, wrong words, definite article, non-count nouns, and overgeneralization. The study also observed that there were some lexical errors in form of homophones, although these were just mentioned in passing. The three areas of subject-verb agreement, incorrect spellings and incorrect punctuations featured prominently in the students' written work. The study also revealed that there was mother tongue interference to a large extent in the use of the subject- verb agreement in English language. Wrong punctuations were exhibited in students' written work as well as incorrect spelling of words.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study have revealed grammatical errors that students commit in their written work. The study implies that the teaching of English writing at teacher training level should be stepped up. The following are some recommendations:

- Lecturers in the languages department should employ better and modern pedagogies to teaching of writing to improve the students' writing skills.

- Since some of the errors reflected in the students written work were as a result of students transferring their grammatical knowledge from their L1, English Language lecturers should have an understanding of both the L1 and the L2 of the students and teach the transfer that cause confusion.

- English Language lecturers should be retrained through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to have adequate knowledge of how to identify students' grammatical errors in writing and use effective teaching strategies to deal with the errors.

- Language lecturers should create a conducive classroom environment in which students will be participating in classroom writing activities in addition to the obvious assignments that they write.

- More formative assessment activities in writing should be given to students as a way of sharpening their writing skills.

- Error analysis, which include identification of errors, their causes, and remedies, should take the centre stage in teacher training programmes. If anything, this topic should be taught from first year up to third year of teacher training.

- Language lecturers should serve as role models by using appropriate English in their speech and writing for students to emulate.

- Students should be made to cultivate their writing skills by listening and reading extensively outside the class room and reflect on their writing before and after the writing exercise.

- Language lectures should emphasise on the process and stages of writing to help students edit work for themselves.

- During the teaching process, students should be provided with a lot of input and examples to help them understand grammatical concepts taught.

- Language lecturers should introduce essay writing competitions as an interclass activity to help students improve their skills in writing.

- Language lectures should intensify research among students and supervise their presentations intensely.

- The curriculum should provide more periods of English Language on the time table for lecturers to teach all aspects of language intensely.

- Since punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, capital letters, colon and   semi-colon are relevant to the writing of a text, they should be wholly taught to   the students.

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