

Error Analysis in Essay Writings of Selected Secondary Schools in Mubi

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ABSTRACT

Errors in (written) communication have communicative ramifications and may inhibit the achievement of language users, particularly senior secondary school (SSS) pupils. Unfortunately, most SSS students do not adhere to grammar rules while writing. In this context, the current study aimed to analyse the language usage of 150 students from three purposefully chosen public secondary schools in Mubi in order to assess the learners' communicative competency. The data was submitted to error analysis, which revealed that the students committed several grammatical mistakes in the areas of verbs, spellings, word usage of words, nouns, punctuation/capitalization, and article. Similarly, it was discovered that, due to the prevalence of faults in most essays, the majority of students were unable to write meaningfully on the prescribed writing job. Furthermore, the research found that the pattern of mistakes produced by students seemed to be same across all three institutions. Using the theoretical foundations of Error Analysis (EA), the discovered mistakes were considered to be caused by overgeneralisation of rules, interference from the mother language, extra-lingual influences, and insufficient learning.

Keywords: Language use, writing, error analysis, senior secondary school students, errors

INTRODUCTION

Most second language learners struggle to fulfil the necessary levels for writing. According to [1], having sufficient writing abilities makes it much easier for readers to understand concepts. From this perspective, it is clear that writing abilities are very beneficial in assisting pupils in communicating their thoughts. However, secondary pupils continue to struggle with strengthening their writing abilities. Many studies show that starting EFL students have interruption from their original language when writing in English. Writing in a foreign language is generally the most difficult difficulty for students at all levels, especially essay writing, since this activity is usually longer and therefore more demanding than writing a brief paragraph. The value of the English language cannot be overstated in today's varied society since it provides access to contemporary education while also serving as a medium for learners to gain information and skills. The ordinary Nigerian considers English language competence to be evidence of wisdom and global culture [2]. This implies that having a solid command of the English language gives people and groups an advantage since it not only helps them blend in but also allows them to perform successfully in society. Secondary school students struggle with writing, particularly essays. Some of the sentences they write do not communicate what the authors want to say, lowering the efficacy of the learners' written words. As a result, both public and private secondary schools prioritise English language instruction. The composition teacher's problem is to develop ways to activate in a meaningful manner the students' passive knowledge of writing abilities, as well as to assist them in becoming more proficient while striving to eradicate some of their typical blunders. Reading and writing are the initial steps in education, and most knowledge is communicated via writing. As a result, a lack of writing ability leads to a loss of valuable information. As a result, lack of good writing skills renders one virtually illiterate. In general, Nigerian secondary school pupils fare poorly in English. The May/June 2015 West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results show that the majority of applicants who took the exam failed, with just 31% receiving five credits in English Language. The implications of these findings indicated that just 31% would be qualified for admission to postsecondary institutions. This failure is very concerning for parents, guardians, teachers, counsellors, and educationists in Nigeria, especially in Adamawa State. [3] highlighted that the issue stems from two key sources: interlingual and intralingual variables. Inter-lingual

transfer is defined as the process by which learners employ their first language knowledge to acquire a second language, while intra-lingual reasons stem from a lack of complete mastery of the English language's fundamentals. Other issues might be related to pupils' carelessness while writing. However, little effort has been done to address sentence structure problems in written works. As a result, the purpose of this research is to conduct a thorough investigation of the written composition faults made by secondary school pupils in the Mubi North Local Government Area.

The Concept of Error(s)

Error, according to [4], is a gross deviation from the norm or convention of the language and this could lead to a breakdown in communication. This implies that an error is an act involving an unintentional divergence from accuracy, and this may be due to lack of the adequate knowledge of the rules of the language or due to mistake from human angle. Error occurs at the pre-systematic stage is not known to the speaker and he does not even know he has made an error and so cannot correct himself even if it is identified. At the systematic stage, he may be aware that his sentence is erroneous. At the post-systematic stage, he has gained control of the rules to a great extent and can correct himself and even explain why it is erroneous. [5], defines error from the linguistics perspective and sees it as a noticeable departure from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the inter-language competence of the learner." He cites an example *Does Musa can sing?* Where a preceding *do* auxiliary verb has been used as an error. In applied linguistics, an error is an unintended deviation from the immanent rules of a language variety made by a second language learner. Such errors result from the learner's lack of knowledge of the correct rules of the target language. A significant distinction is generally made between *errors* (systematic deviations) and *mistakes* (speech performance errors) which are not treated the same from a linguistic viewpoint. The study of learners' errors has been the main area of investigation by linguists in the history of second-language acquisition research. In computer for instance an error describes any issue that arises unexpectedly that cause a computer to not function properly. Computers can encounter either software errors or hardware errors. In a society like Nigeria where English language is a second language, errors are therefore bound to occur since second language users will continue to experience interference and other factors that may cause the errors. In linguistics, it is considered important to distinguish errors from mistakes. A distinction is always made between errors and mistakes where the former is defined as resulting from a learner's lack of proper grammatical knowledge, whilst the latter as a failure to utilize a known system correctly. Mistakes of this kind are frequently made by both native speakers and second language learners. However, native speakers are generally able to correct themselves quickly. Such mistakes include slips of the tongue and random ungrammatical formations. On the other hand, errors are systematic in that they occur repeatedly and are not recognizable by the learner. They are a part of the learner's inter-language, and the learner does not generally consider them as errors. They are *errors* only from the perspective of teachers and others who are aware that the learner has deviated from a grammatical norm. That is, mistakes (performance errors) can be self-corrected with or without being pointed out to the speaker but systematic errors cannot be self-corrected. [6], while discussing on errors highlights on factors of error. He observes that, student' grammar errors as reflected in their written composition are caused by two factors: direct factors and indirect factors. Direct factors are due to inter-lingual and intra-lingual transfers. Inter-lingual factors are evident in the use of subject-verb agreement, tenses of the verbs, word orders, the use of articles and prepositions and the sentence structures. This is due to the learner's exposure to his native language (L1). This interference occurs when a structure of language in the second language acquisition manifests some degree of difference and similarity with the equivalent item or structure in the student's first language". High percentage of errors in this study occurred within the category of subject-verb agreement which can be gleaned as rank 1 error for the three study groups. This finding may explain that the use of English verbs was a major learning difficulty for all second language users. The use of verb tense shows that the second language students still find difficulty when and how to use the tense and the form of the verb. The tenses most commonly misused were the simple past tense, future tense, past perfect and present simple as reflected in their written composition. It can be justified by the incomprehensibility of the correct form and use and usage of the verb. Word Order Interference' occurs because of the differences in the composition of words, particularly noun phrases and adjectival phrases, between the foreign language and the native language. In the native language the modifier should be placed after the modified word, but, in the foreign language, the modifier word should be put before.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is approaches from Error Analysis (E.A). By Error Analysis, it is meant a type of linguistic analysis that is concerned with the identification, description and explanation of language learners' errors in either the spoken or written form. Beginning with Corder in the early 1970s, linguists made useful contributions towards establishing (E.A) as a theory of Second Language Acquisition [7], [8]. In order to account for the improper uses of language in the students' essays, this study adopts the Surface Structure

Taxonomy used by [9]. This error annotation device deals with how the surface structures of a language are changed by the learner in especially, the written medium. Accordingly, [9], categorize errors into:

1. Omission Errors: These are the absence of an item that must appear in a well formed sentence. e.g. *There is ^ cat in my room.
 2. Addition Errors: These errors are the presence of items which must not appear in a well formed sentence. In this category, they identify three types of errors, namely:
 - i. Double marking: e.g. *He didn't stood up.
 - ii. Regularization: e.g. *eated for ate, childs for children.
 - iii. Simple addition: e.g. *the fishes doesn't live in water.
 3. Misformation Errors: These are characterized by the use of the wrong forms of the morphemes or structures. They include:
 - i. Regularization: e.g. *The dog eated the meat.
 - ii. Archi-forms: e.g. *Her danced with my brother.
 4. Misordering: Errors of misordering result from incorrect placement of morphemes or group of morphemes in a sentence/utterance. e.g. I don't know what is that.
- Resorting to the underlying principles of the above mentioned Surface Structure Taxonomy, the identified errors in the students' essays are analysed.

Corpus for the Study

This study is corpus based. The corpus of this study was derived from composition/essays written by students of selected senior secondary schools of Mubi North Local Government Area. To achieve this, SSS3 students from Government Day Senior Secondary School and Government Technical Secondary School in Mubi North Local Government Area of Adamawa State were given an essay writing task to write on "How I spent my holiday". The corpus was a detailed essay consisting of 250 words on double foolscap.

Data Presentation

The data for this study were taken from the written essays of one hundred and fifty (150) students randomly selected from two secondary schools in Mubi North Local Government Area, Adamawa State. The essays were carefully marked for error identification. Those essays with serious errors were sorted out. The identified errors were described in terms of the linguistic components affected. These are: Verbs, Spellings, Wrong Forms of Words, Nouns, Pronouns, Punctuations/Capitalization, Articles, Abbreviations/Acronyms and Prepositions. Each error category is exemplified by two erroneous expressions and their corrected versions.

Error Classification

Verbs

- 1a*. As soon as the school **is close** I travelled to Yola to go and... my aunt in Yola and she **promise** that after I **finish** my secondary school, she will pay for me the money to go to university (3).
- b. As soon as the school **closed**, I travelled to Yola to go and... my aunt in Yola and she **promised** that after I **finished** my secondary school, she will pay for me the money to go to university (3).
- 2a*. I **help** my parents with clearing our farm, I **flash** water, **play** football match and I **visit** my grandfather...(5).
- b. I **helped** my parents with clearing our farm, I **fetchd** water, **played** football match and **visited** my grandfather....

Spellings

- 1a*. I spent my holidays in Nasarrawo-Jereng, Angwan Fada. If I **week** up in the **moning** I **use** to wash plate and sweep the area (10)
- b. I spent my holidays in Nasarrawo-Jereng, Angwan Fada. If I **wake** up in the morning, I **used** to wash plate and sweep the area.
- 2a*. I **help** my **parent** a lot with house work and my **neighbors** child was dead and we **go** for his **berials**. **Leter**, we **starte** our Ramadan fast. (12)
- b. I **helped** my **parents** a lot with house work and my **neighbour's** child was dead and we **went** for his burial. **Later**, we **started** our Ramadan fast.

Wrong Use of Words

- 1a*. I help my parent a lot with **house work** and my neighbors child was dead... (12).
- b. I help my parent a lot with **house chores** and my neighbour's child was dead.

2a*. I travelled to Jalingo. My aunt is a lectural at College of Education Zing. I hard been to Jalingo before but I was three years old (15).

b. I travelled to Jalingo. My aunt is a lecturer at College of Education Zing. I had been to Jalingo before but I was three years old (15).

Nouns

1a*. On Sunday, I wash my uniforem after I setat sewing cloth.... (10)

b. On **Sunday**, I wash my **uniform** after I setat sewing cloth....

2a*. I follow her to my granmother area and my granmother she is very happy to see me (3).

b. I follow her to my **grandmother** area and my **grandmother** she is very happy to see me

Articles/Determiners

1a*. I had been to Jalingo before but I was ^ three years old (15).

b. I had been to Jalingo before but I was only three years old.

2a*. It took ^ 10 hours car journey (18).

b. It took a 10- hour car journey.

Punctuations/Capitalization

1a*. After that I travel to Lagos buy in clouth to come and sell in jalingo (1).

b. After that I travelled to Lagos, I bought cloth to come and sell in **Jalingo** (1).

2a*. Conclusion: I was really excited about the whole thing. This day is really memorable for me (17).

b. **In conclusion**, I was really excited about the whole thing. This day is really memorable for me.

Note: Figures in brackets after asterisked expressions indicate serial number of learner's script.

Data Analysis

In the process of analysing the data, tables showing the category, frequency, percentage and mean scores of erroneous or deviant uses of language by the learners were used. The errors identified in the students' essays are related to: verbs, spellings, wrong use of words, nouns, articles/ determiners and punctuations/ capitalization.

These categories of errors are chosen for analysis because they were the most frequent and are considered serious as they affect the grammaticality of the sentences and/or parts of sentences that were written by the students. In what follows, the above mentioned categories of errors are briefly explained to give some ideas of what they entail.

Verb Errors: These are all errors in verb tense or form, including subject-verb agreement (concord).

Spelling Errors: Spelling is the art of putting together words in the correct or accepted order. Thus, the errors of spelling involved instances where the letters of certain words in the learners' essays were incorrectly ordered.

Wrong Words: These are lexical errors of word choice and form, including wrong amalgamation of words and malapropisms.

Noun Errors: These are cases of plural and singular forms of nouns that were incorrect, omitted or unnecessary.

Punctuation Errors: Errors of punctuation manifest themselves in the wrong use or absence of the marks (full stops, commas inappropriate use of capitalization, etc.)

Pronoun Errors: These involve the wrong use of certain types of pronouns, such as incorrect forms of reflexive pronouns, personal pronouns and demonstrative pronouns.

Article Errors: These are cases where articles (definite and indefinite) or other determiners were added unnecessarily or omitted when they should be used.

Errors of Abbreviation: These are instances where abbreviations and even unconventional ones were used in formal writing.

Preposition Errors: The problems with prepositions are due to incorrect choice, addition of preposition when there should not be any or omission.

Error Categories

In this study, six (6) categories of errors were identified for analysis in the essays of the students. These categories of errors are interpreted in the accompanying sub - sections.

Verb Errors

With reference to verbs, the data show that three hundred and sixty- three (363) erroneous uses were identified. This error constitutes the highest percentage (31.1%) of occurrences in the students' scripts with a mean score of 4.7 which is considered significant.

The majority of verb related errors identified in the students' essays involve concord incongruity, because the rules of Subject-Verb Agreement were broken. Other verb form errors are with the use of Tense and Aspect and Auxiliary Verbs. The high proportion of verbal errors is not unconnected with the fact that most of the students are deficient in the knowledge of concord. Such deficiency involves inconsistency in the area of subject/verb agreement, pronoun/antecedent agreement and shifts in construction (sudden change from one number, person, tense, voice to another). Occurrences of errors in this category are shown below:

- 1.* As soon as the school is been close, I travelled to Jalingo (15).
As soon as the school closed, I travelled to Jalingo.
- 2.* When I was there, I use to go to my friend's house and every time we go for outings.... (14)
When I was there, I used to go to my friend's house and every time we went for outings.
- 3.* As soon as the school is close, I travelled to Yola to go and meet my aunt.... (3)
As soon as the school closed, I travelled to Yola to go and meet my aunt.
- 4.* I travel to many villages. I go (to places) like Zing to see my sister (1).
I travelled to many villages. I went (to places) like Zing to see my sister.

NB: The figures in brackets after the erroneous constructions above, and the subsequent ones indicate the serial numbers of the scripts in which the errors were identified.

[10], observes that, "out of all the parts of speech in the English language, verbs are undoubtedly the most problematic." Learners encounter a lot of difficulties using them in sentence construction.

The erroneous sentences above suggest that the learners' verb form errors are related to wrong tenses. Sentences (1) and (2) violate the rule of tenses in which the verb form changes to reflect appropriate tense forms. In sentence (1), the verb should be in the past tense form. Thus, the correct version of the sentence is:

As soon as the school closed, I travelled to Jalingo.

In sentence (2), the subject (I) should go with verbs in the past tense form hence the action being described took place in the past. Consequently, a non - aberrant sentence is:

When I was there, I used to go to my friend's house and every time we went for outings.

The above sentences demonstrate the learners' poor understanding of the rules of English grammar which may be due to inadequate learning of the necessary rules. Such errors may be regarded as intralingual, that is they can be associated with difficulties within the Target Language (TL) [11].

In sentence (3), the problem is with using the simple present form of 'close' when referring to an activity that occurred in the past. This error is very common among Nigerian users of English which is being overlooked almost to a point of fossilization. Fossilised errors in speaking and writing become ingrained and despite correction and remediation, they re-appear [12]. In an incorrect sentence, the writer should present it as:

As soon as the school closed, I travelled to Yola to go and meet my aunt.

Sentence 4 contains wrong tenses of the verbs. In this sentence, the past tense of the verbs (travel and go) should be used. A correct expression is:

I travelled to many villages. I went (to places) like Zing to see my sister.

These errors are indications of either imperfect learning or carelessness. Their causes may be attributed to the difficulties inherent within the English language. According to [13], errors in language learning are caused by a number of factors, prominent among which are: the history of the English language, the irregularities in the language itself, linguistic interference, inadequate mastery of the language from early childhood, some sociological as well as psychological factors.

Spelling Errors

Spelling errors are deviations from the rules of forming words (arranging letters to form words) which could occur in the form of replacing one letter with the other, omission of letters or wrong arrangement of letters of words. A total of one hundred and eighty- four (184) errors, put at 15.8 percent and a mean score of 2.4, were identified in the essays of the students. This category of error was found to be significant in line with the set criterion. The underlined words in the following ill-formed sentences or parts of sentences were misspelt:

- 1.* Because of kindnaping is the must important business in this town (kidnapping, most) (16).

- 2.* I hard never seen a tiger but when I see the tiger, I was amaize.... (had,seen,amazed) (15).
 3.* I alwas advise some of my freinds to go to school and look for a knowndlege and avoid bad habit.... (always, advise, friends, knowledge) (19).
 4.* She can't remeber anything and that's why she has to learn everything again (remember) (18)
 5.* I spen my holidays in many ways (spent) (1).

Several factors are advanced by linguistists [14], [9], [15], as responsible for spelling errors among ESL learners. These include the fact that the English language comes from other languages like Latin, French and Greek. Many words of English are borrowed from these languages, thereby making its spellings to lack uniformity. Other possible causes boarder on the fact that English, unlike many Nigerian languages, is not a syllable timed language which makes spelling of English words difficult by itself.

Furthermore, it is observed that interference from the learners' mother tongues and the absence of a reading culture among students, contribute to spelling errors. Nowadays, most students patronize the Internet to get the required information. Consequently, they lack visual contact with words which could be seen through reading. Another major cause of spelling errors is mispronunciation. Some of the words from the data may have been mispronounced and therefore spelt wrongly.

Use of Wrong Forms of Words

These error forms range from wrong forms of words to incorrect or inappropriate word selection. The errors identified in this category accounted for two hundred and fifteen (215) of the total errors identified with a mean score of 2.8, and were found to be significant based on the criterion reference test set. Below, some examples as contained in some deviant sentences in the learners' corpora are presented:

- 1.* My holidays rement two week to come back to school (11).
 2.* I found so many things have been changed in two years (17)
 3.* He try and have some hand work to me. I'm a weldring (16)
 4.* The chiken was hided around the coner hearing all what he said and she jently open the window and fly out of the house (15).
 5.* I was so anxious I don't know that I will ever see a tiger and touch it without even hurting me (15).

Looking at the above extracts, it could be noticed that they are ill-formed in many respects, but the focus is on those words that are underlined in the deviant sentences. The use of the verb "remain" in extract (1) is improper. The words "have been" is inappropriate in the second deviant extract. In extract (3), "tried, for, and welding" seem to be what the learner intends to say. In extract (4) the erroneous words are "chicken, hide, corner, gently, opened, and flew". In extract (5) the word "don't" does not fit into the intended sense being portrayed in the sentence. When these wrong words are corrected, the deviant sentences should be rewritten as follows:

1. My holidays remained two weeks before resumption of school.
 2. I found so many things have changed in two years.
 3. He tried and have some hand work for me. I'm a welder.
 4. The chicken was hidden around the corner hearing all what he said and she gently opened the window and flew out of the house.
 5. I was so anxious I didn't know that I will ever see a tiger and touch it without even hurting me.

To explain the causes of these wrongly used words, it is taken that they are as a result of improper selection of particular word-classes. This suggests that the students have problems in using the right word classes or derivation forms, e.g. nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs.

Wrong Forms of Nouns

With regard to this category, the errors identified are associated with the plural and singular forms of nouns that were incorrect, omitted or unnecessary. Consider the following extracts from the students' essays.

- 1.* I have see many thing wronning in this town, what I see here is the weather that we are now is very criminal (16).
 2.* ...I have a good carater... (19).
 3.* I heping my perant working at home in the morning... (6).
 4.* ... drive a cars carrying a parsingar from Lagos to jalango (1).
 5.* ...we come back to Nejeria... (11).

In the first of these erroneous sentences, there is problem with the use of "see, thing, wrong, condition/situation". The verb "have" is always followed by a participle form. Besides, the word "wronning" should be presented as "wrong". In a similar stride, the use of 'weather' in the sentence is erroneous. Consequently, the sentence when correctly recast should read as follows:

I have seen many things wrong in this town, what I see here is the condition/ situation that we now witness is very criminal.

In number (2), which is not a complete sentence, the noun "character" is an uncountable noun. Here, it has been wrongly presented as 'carater'. The acceptable rendition runs thus:

I have a good character.

In sentence three (3), the error is with the use of the noun “parent”. This is a clear case of an error of “omission and misspelling”, going by [9], error annotation procedure. In good English, the sentence should be recast as follows:

I helped my parents working at home in the morning.

Example (4) indicates the learner’s inability to use the plural form of the underlined nouns (car, passenger), thereby committing an error of omission as well as an error of commission in the wrong spelling of ‘Jalingo’, the Taraba State capital. The correct version of the sentence should be:

...drive a car carrying passengers from Lagos to Jalingo.

The last example is an error of misspelling of ‘Nigeria’ (noun). The word “Nejeria” as used in that sentence is not appropriate. Although its use does not necessarily impede an understanding of the intended message significantly. Instead, it depicts a poor knowledge of the English vocabulary. The correct expression is:

...we came back to Nigeria...

Errors in the Use of Articles/Possessives and Demonstratives

Articles are among a small group of highly important and useful words which are known as determiners in the English language. Other determiners include Quantifiers or Amount words (some, any, many, little, few etc), Demonstratives (this, that, these, those), Possessive (my, your, his, her, its, our, their) and Numerals (one, two, three etc; first second, third, etc; half, one third etc).

The major errors identified in the learners’ corpora are mainly with the omission of the definite article (the) or the indefinite article (a/an) where they are obligatorily required. Sometimes the learners used the articles redundantly and at other times they used one where another is appropriate as shown in the following aberrant sentences:

- 1.* ... that the will take care of there self in life (19).
- 2.* ...we are doing so many thing their if you want dor, gate, container, windor,... (16).
- 3.* Her in-laws were very happy to the extend that they gave child a big goat (8).
- 4.* The reason why I write letter is to tell you how I spent my holidays (2).

These sentences are erroneous in many ways, but the concern here is with the misuse of articles, possessives and demonstratives. In the first sentence, the writer wrongly presented “themselves” where he is obliged to use it. The wrong expression is corrected thus:

... that they will take care of themselves in life.

The second sentence also involves the erroneous use of the possessive (their) in place of a demonstrative “there”. To be correct, the sentence should be recast as follows:

... we do so many things there like doors, gates, containers, windows....

Sentence (3) is a clear case of omission of the appropriate possessive pronoun and an article (indefinite article). For acceptability, the extract should be corrected to read thus:

Her in-laws were very happy to the extent that they gave her child a big goat.

In sentence (4), there is the case of omission of the indefinite article (a). The wrong sentence should be rewritten as follows:

The reason why I write this letter is to tell you how I spent my holidays.

[10], expresses a little doubt that one of the causes of article misuse among Nigerian learners of English as a second language is interference of the mother tongue. According to her, most Nigerian languages unlike English, do not possess any separate morpheme for the article.

Errors of Punctuation/Capitalisation

Punctuations are printed signs other than letters used to provide divisions between sentences and parts of sentences. They make reading easy because they guide the reader on where to pause a little or a little longer. The wrong use of punctuation marks, or failure to use them, will easily lead to miscommunication. The most frequently used punctuation marks include: full stop (.), comma (,), colon (:), semi-colon (;), inverted commas (“ ”), question mark (?), apostrophe (') and brackets (). The use of capital letters is also an aspect of punctuation.

Errors in punctuation are all too common particularly, with the use of full stops, commas, colons and the use of capital letters. Most of the punctuation errors identified in the students’ essays are associated with non-use of full stops and commas as well as improper use of capital letters as typified by the examples below:

- 1.* as soon as The school is close I traved to Yola to go and meeds my aunt in Yola (3).
- 2.* first of all I am greeting you my Aunty how are you? (5)
- 3.* very early the next day I accompanied my sister to her place of work (13).
- 4.* I spent my Holiday in Zing town and my Holiday was very nice (12).
- 5.* We sow farma from 7 ocolock to 1 ocolock and if I came back are will cooking food into everning (6).

These sentences are anomalous in many respects. However, the concern here is with the non-use of punctuation marks where they are compulsorily required and improper use of capital letters. All the above deviant sentences contain wrongly omitted full stops, commas, and a colon hence, they constitute errors of "omission". When the appropriate punctuation marks are applied, the wrong sentences could be rewritten thus:

1. *As soon as school closed, I travelled to Yola to go and met my aunt.*
2. *First of all, I greet you my Aunty. How are you?*
3. *Very early the next day, I accompanied my sister to her place of work.*
4. *I spent my holiday in Zing town and it was very nice.*
5. *We saw farmers on their farms from 7 o'clock to 1 o'clock and if I came back, I will cook food into the evening.*

Errors in the use of punctuation and capitalization might be due to lack of knowledge, but most often, they are as a result of carelessness.

Based on the data analyzed, the following are the findings of the study: The students made six different types of grammatical errors in their use of English; four categories of errors made by the students were significant across the three schools, while the remaining two were insignificant; and the students were predominantly unable to be effective expressive in the writing task assigned them as evidenced by their responses.

CONCLUSION

This research was carried out with the aim of analysing the language use of the students of two purposively selected public secondary schools in Mubi North Local Government Area of Adamawa State in order to determine the communicative competence of the learners. Based on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected, it can be concluded that the students made different grammatical errors in the areas of verbs, spellings, word use of words, nouns, punctuations/capitalization and articles. Similarly, it was found that, owing to the preponderance of errors in most of the essays, most of the students could not write meaningfully on the assigned writing task. Furthermore, the study revealed that the pattern of errors made by the learners appeared to be uniform across the three schools. Resorting to the theoretical underpinnings of Error Analysis (EA), the identified errors were assumed to have been caused by overgeneralization of rules, interference from the mother tongue, extra-lingual factors and inadequate learning. Errors in (written) communication have communicative implications which impede on the success of language users, especially senior secondary school (SSS) students. These implications are multifaceted and have damning consequences. For instance, an SSS student who cannot communicate in error-free English is not likely going to gain a credit pass in external examinations. In the Nigerian educational system, without a credit pass in English, admission into tertiary education can hardly be secured. Second, error-laced English usage make expression of speaker intent defective. Consequently, such students will experience challenges interacting and engaging with diverse spectra of the society where good English is highly prized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made as means of improving the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria:

1. Teachers of English should try as much as possible to engage in functional teaching of the language so as to improve the communicative competence of the learners. In other words, teaching and learning processes should be interactive in nature.
2. While the General English course caters for the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, ESP methodology should be introduced in public secondary schools so that English teaching can reflect the students' areas of deficiency, after a needs analysis of their proficiency in the English language has been conducted.
3. Pronunciation, spelling and syntactic functions of different classes of words should be effectively taught by teachers of English so as to avoid confusion in usage.
4. Students should be encouraged to imbibe the culture of reading extensively so that they will be familiar with different usages and functions of different grammatical items.
5. More teachers should be trained and employed in the educational system particularly, at the secondary school level.

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