Grammatical and Lexical Errors in the Written English of Teacher Trainees: A Case Study of E.P. College of Education, Amedzofe

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study investigates the grammatical and lexical errors in the writing of fifty final-year students at the E.P. College of Education, Amedzofe. Drawing on Corder's Error Analysis framework, student essays were analyzed to identify error types, frequencies, and their potential causes. Data were collected by simple random sampling from scripts anonymized and supplemented with self-reports on reading habits and mother tongue usage. The most frequent errors involved vocabulary misuse, tense, and structural flaws. These findings highlight the implications for English instruction and teacher training curricula. We recommend enhanced writing practice, improved entry standards, and promotion of reading and spoken English to improve students' written proficiency. The study contributes to the field of second language acquisition and offers pedagogical implications that can improve English language teaching in the Colleges of Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent research continues to highlight the widespread nature and pedagogical significance of grammatical and lexical errors in the writing of non-native English teacher trainees. Studies from diverse contexts show that these issues are not isolated but reflect a broader pattern in English language education across non-English-speaking regions. For instance, Chand (2021) investigated the linguistic challenges faced by undergraduate students in Nepal and found that grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary, and weak sentence structuring were among the most common impediments to effective communication. Similar findings were reported by Magaba (2023) in a South African university, where first-year students frequently made errors in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and lexical choice—problems largely attributed to weak foundational training and minimal exposure to English beyond the classroom. In Bangladesh, Milton (2023) observed that nearly 70% of secondary students' writing samples contained multiple grammatical and lexical errors, with incorrect verb usage and poor word choice being most prominent. Reinforcing these patterns, a meta-analysis by Oguan and Del Valle (2022) emphasized the usefulness of error analysis as a diagnostic tool for identifying learning gaps and designing remedial instruction in ESL contexts. Similarly, Albooni's (2023) study on Sudanese learners demonstrated persistent difficulties with basic grammatical items like

prepositions, especially when learners lacked adequate opportunities for practical language use.

These recurring patterns are particularly relevant in the Ghanaian context, where English serves as the official language of instruction from upper primary through tertiary education. Teacher trainees are expected not only to master English themselves but also to teach it effectively to pupils at the basic level. However, as the literature suggests, such expectations may be undermined by entrenched linguistic challenges that begin with inadequate language preparation and persist due to limited exposure and use. These insights emphasize the urgent need to address grammatical and lexical errors in teacher training institutions as a critical step toward improving broader educational outcomes.

Writing proficiency remains one of the most challenging skills for second language (L2) learners to develop, yet it is essential for academic and professional success (Khatter, 2019; Tran, 2013). While such errors can be frustrating, they are also valuable windows into the learner's evolving interlanguage and, thus, carry important pedagogical implications (Corder, 1967). Given that L2 learners are naturally prone to written errors, especially in academic contexts, the issue has drawn considerable scholarly interest (Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017, p. 464). Errors in writing are widely recognized as a natural and unavoidable aspect of language development (Khatter, 2019, p. 366), especially since writing requires significant cognitive effort and instructional support (Ganaprakasam & Karunaharan, 2020). Educators, therefore, have a critical role to play in identifying the nature and sources of such errors and in applying appropriate pedagogical interventions (Tran, 2013).

Despite various efforts, however, progress in improving students' writing has remained modest, leading some scholars to question whether error correction in L2 writing instruction is being implemented effectively (Ferris, 2004, p. 50). Nevertheless, writing proficiency continues to be a crucial indicator of language mastery (Li & Lin, 2007, p. 233), and the persistent challenges in L2 academic writing have prompted a growing body of research into the types, causes, and pedagogical implications of learner errors. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the grammatical and lexical errors found in the writing of final-year teacher trainees at the E.P. College of Education, Amedzofe. Specifically, it seeks to identify the most common error types, measure their frequency, and propose practical strategies that can help strengthen students' writing competence and overall English language proficiency.

In Ghana, a concerning trend has emerged in tertiary institutions: the quality of students' English proficiency, particularly in written expression, is steadily declining. Numerous studies have documented the widespread occurrence of grammatical and lexical errors in student writing across various institutions (Mahama, 2012; Mireku-Gyimah, 2018), including Colleges of Education, where similar patterns of linguistic deficiency have been observed (Amua-Sekyi & Nti, 2015). This situation is especially troubling given that these colleges are responsible for training future teachers who will be tasked with teaching English at the basic education level. At the E. P. College of Education in Amedzofe, where the researchers served as tutors between 2009 and 2016, a noticeable decline in students' language proficiency became evident starting in the 2013/2014

academic year. This downturn coincided with the admission of students who had obtained a D7 in English, a grade that reflects a marginal pass (between 40% and 45%). Since then, the overall quality of both written and spoken English among students has continued to deteriorate.

Although much research has focused on university students, there is limited scholarly attention on teacher trainees, whose future teaching will significantly impact basic education outcomes. While a few studies have addressed the broader issue of language proficiency in Ghana's Colleges of Education (e.g., Amua-Sekyi & Nti, 2015), there is a notable lack of focused research on the specific grammatical and lexical errors made by students at the E.P. College of Education, Amedzofe. This gap is particularly concerning within the national context, where English serves as the medium of instruction from Primary Four onward and is the primary language of national assessments. Teachers with inadequate proficiency in English grammar and vocabulary are unlikely to teach the language effectively, thereby contributing to a continued cycle of poor language outcomes in basic education.

The study is guided by the following specific objectives: (i) To identify the types of grammatical and lexical errors that appear in the written English of final-year teacher trainees; (ii) To determine the most frequently occurring error types across various grammatical categories; and (iii) To recommend pedagogical strategies and institutional interventions that can help enhance students' writing competence and overall English language proficiency.

Understanding the nature of second or foreign language learning is essential for studying error analysis. Two primary approaches to analyzing language errors are Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) (Krashen, 1999). CA, introduced by Lado (1957), posits that errors in second language (L2) acquisition arise from the negative transfer of elements from the learner's first language (L1) to the target language. According to this theory, similarities between L1 and L2 facilitate learning, while differences lead to difficulties. This perspective led scholars such as Brooks (1960) and Lado (1985, p. 23) to stress the importance of repeated practice to overcome such challenges. Ellis (1985, p. 23) also emphasized that L1 interference is a primary source of errors in L2 learning.

However, Error Analysis (EA) emerged in response to the limitations of CA. While CA could predict errors based on cross-linguistic similarities and differences, it could not fully account for all learner difficulties. Researchers such as Dulay and Burt (1974) argued that not all errors result from negative L1 transfer. Unlike CA, EA does not attribute errors solely to the learner's first language. Instead, it treats the learner's language as a developing system in its own right, a version of the target language shaped by the learner's current level of knowledge. EA focuses on identifying what the learner knows and how they can be supported in acquiring a more accurate understanding of the target language rules (Corder, 1974, p. 170). This shift from CA to EA in the 1970s marked a recognition of learner language as a legitimate and meaningful form of communication.

Like infants, adults learning a new language inevitably make errors. To understand how people acquire language, it is important to examine the cognitive processes involved in learning. Krashen (1987) identified two key phenomena in this regard, distinguishing

between *language acquisition* and *language learning*, particularly in the context of first and second language development.

The first phenomenon, *language acquisition*, refers to the unconscious process through which individuals gain knowledge of a language without formal instruction. This process occurs naturally, typically in informal settings. For example, infants are exposed to a vast and unstructured amount of language data in their environment. At the same time, they are learning many other concepts and skills. As such, first language acquisition is a spontaneous mental and psychological process that does not rely on explicit teaching.

In contrast, *second language learning* is a conscious and deliberate process that typically occurs later in life, when the individual already has a fully developed first language system. It involves explicit instruction, often in a classroom setting, where the learner receives guidance on grammar rules and error correction. Unlike infants, second language learners are not immersed in unlimited linguistic input. Their exposure is controlled and limited by syllabus design and instructional materials. Moreover, they often engage with the language in more structured, less naturalistic environments. This learning process is shaped by cognitive maturity and existing linguistic frameworks.

As Noam Chomsky's theory of the *Language Acquisition Device* suggests, children are biologically equipped to acquire language naturally. They need only exposure to linguistic input to begin developing competence. Therefore, while acquiring a first language is an intuitive and effortless process, learning a second language is more complex, requiring conscious effort, structured input, and guided practice.

Before the 1960s, the behaviourist perspective dominated language learning theory, viewing errors as undesirable signs of mis-learning (Skinner, 1957). From this standpoint, errors were considered the result of ineffective instructional methods. However, this view was challenged by Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (1965), which proposed that humans possess an innate capacity to generate and understand language. This theoretical shift marked the emergence of a cognitive approach to language learning, wherein learner errors were no longer viewed as failures but as valuable indicators of the language acquisition process.

Corder (1967, 1981) was a pioneer in emphasizing the significance of learner errors. He argued that errors are not random but reflect systematic patterns in what he termed "interlanguage"—a transitional linguistic system that develops between the learner's first language (L1) and the target language (L2). According to Selinker (1992), Corder's two major contributions were, first, the recognition of errors as systematic rather than accidental, and second, the redefinition of errors as positive evidence of learning rather than negative signs of failure.

Lennon (1991) defines an error as a linguistic form unlikely to be produced by native speakers in a similar context. Corder further distinguishes between *mistakes*—occasional slips that learners can self-correct—and *errors*, which are consistent deviations stemming from gaps in the learner's linguistic competence. Scovel (2001) adds that such errors offer insight into learners' developing language systems. While native speakers can readily identify and correct these forms, L2 beginners produce them due to an incomplete

understanding of the target language. Because errors are systematic, they typically cannot be self-corrected, unlike mistakes.

Error Analysis (EA) has become a foundational theory in second language acquisition. It involves identifying, describing, and explaining learner errors by comparing them to target language norms (Brown, 2000). Corder (1967) asserted that errors provide crucial information not only to teachers and researchers but also to learners themselves.

According to Brown (2000), errors stem from two primary sources: *inter-lingual* factors (influences from the L1) and *intra-lingual* factors (difficulties inherent in the L2 itself). Inter-lingual errors occur due to negative transfer from the first language, whereas positive transfer can facilitate learning when L1 and L2 structures align (Wilkins, 1972). Richards (1971) further classified intra-lingual errors into four types: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized.

Existing literature indicates that the analysis of students' errors in the use of English has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the years. For instance, studies by Adika (1999), Amoakohene (2017), Adjei (2015), and Dako (1997) have focused on the writing of university-level students. However, relatively few studies have investigated the errors made by students in teacher training colleges (now referred to as Colleges of Education), where individuals are trained to deliver the foundational lessons in English to children during their formative years.

Poku (2008) conducted a case study on error analysis at Wesley College of Education in Kumasi, Ghana, and identified several causes for poor student performance on standardized English tests and their general lack of language proficiency. These included, but were not limited to, lack of tutor commitment, an unconducive learning environment, and inadequate teaching facilities and resources. Notably, Poku emphasized that any effort to address students' poor performance in English without tackling the issue from the teacher's training perspective would ultimately be ineffective. She asserted that while students are often blamed, a more critical examination should consider whether teachers themselves, as key resource persons, are contributing to the problem. Addressing English language deficiencies from the level of teacher education, she argued, is essential to solving the issue at its root.

Similarly, Amua-Sekyi and Nti (2015) examined the poor performance of Level 100 students in English in four Colleges of Education during the second semester of the 2013/2014 academic year. Their findings revealed that multiple factors contributed to the students' poor performance. These included the quality of both teachers and learners, teacher motivation (or the lack thereof), and the availability—or absence—of professional development opportunities for teachers. In their recommendations, the authors strongly advocated that "only qualified applicants" (p. 1) should be admitted into teacher training programmes.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Corder's (1967) approach emphasizes the importance of learners' errors as an important natural element in the language acquisition process. Corder's (1967, p. 167) concept can be understood by the following tenets:

i. Learners' errors are systematic and reflect the learners' current understanding of the target language.
ii. Errors are systematic and come as a result of a lack of knowledge of the correct use of linguistic structures.
iii. Learners develop an evolving linguistic system that enmeshes the features of their L1 and the target language.
iv. There should be a taxonomy of learners' errors, such as omission, substitution, addition, and ordering.

By analyzing the types of errors that learners make, researchers can uncover the underlying linguistic rules and cognitive processes at play. This approach not only sheds light on common challenges faced by language learners but also informs the development of targeted instructional strategies. The process of error analysis typically involves four key stages: recognition, description, explanation, and classification. Recognition involves interpreting what the learner intended to say, despite the presence of errors. Description focuses on identifying and outlining the specific types of errors made. Explanation explores the underlying causes of these errors, such as interference from the first language, overgeneralization, or gaps in linguistic knowledge. Finally, classification involves organizing the errors into categories based on linguistic features or error types.

2.2. Ethical Clearance

The College's Ethics Board granted ethical clearance for the study. Before data collection began, permission was obtained from both the school administrator and the Dean of Students, who gave their full consent. All participants signed a consent form indicating their understanding that the information provided would be used solely for academic purposes. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

2.3. Data Collection Method

Consent was obtained orally from potential respondents, and their identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The College's Ethics Board granted ethical clearance for the study. The research employed simple random sampling.

The primary data sources included two essay prompts, anonymized student responses, self-reported reading data, and students' English WASSCE grades. To select participants, the research assistant, under the guidance of the Dean of Students, prepared 200 pieces of paper, 50 of which were marked "yes." Each student picked one paper at random; those who selected a paper marked "yes" were included in the study.

In addition to writing the essays, participants were instructed to indicate the number of books they had read in the previous academic year by writing a number next to the letter "L" at the end of their scripts. This figure was used to assess their reading habits. Each participant was also asked to indicate the grade they obtained in English at WASSCE and

the qualification with which they gained admission to the college by writing it in the top-right corner of the script. Furthermore, they were to answer the question: *"Do you often use your mother tongue because you cannot express yourself in English?"* by writing either "yes" or "no" on their script.

2.4. Data Collection Task

Respondents were presented with two essay topics to choose from: *"What I Would Do to Improve the Quality of Education in Ghana if I Were the Minister of Education"* and *"How I Spent My Coronavirus Break"*. It was intended to give them the freedom to select a topic they felt more comfortable writing about. Each respondent was instructed to limit their response to one page. To ensure anonymity, they were asked not to include their names or any form of identification on the scripts.

2.5. Identification of Error

Based on Corder's (1974) framework, any instance in a respondent's output that deviated from standard usage was identified as an error. Where the intended meaning was ambiguous, such constructions were also treated as errors, as they reflect a breakdown in communication. Errors were described by classifying them, such as misordering, omission, misinformation, and others. The explanation of errors followed two main types: inter-lingual errors resulted from negative transfer from the respondent's first language (L1), while intra-lingual errors stemmed from incorrect generalization of second language (L2) rules. These included overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, and incomplete application of grammatical rules, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Summary of stages of error analysis based on Corder (1974)

Stage	Description
Error Identification	Determining that an error has occurred in learner output
Error Description	Classifying the error by type (e.g., omission, malformation, etc.)
Error Explanation	Explaining why the error occurred (inter-lingual, intra-lingual, etc.)

The research adopted a clear coding taxonomy in line with Corder (1974). The researcher analyzed the data, and a research assistant also coded it for consistency. To ensure coding consistency, inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, which yielded a coefficient of 0.78, indicating substantial agreement between coders. Table 2 below shows the structure of the taxonomy of errors.

Table 2. Structure of the taxonomy of errors

Category	Subcategory	Code
Verb Tense Errors	Wrong tense, participle misuse, auxiliary errors	VT
Adjective Errors	Double comparatives, incorrect use	ADJ
Subject-Verb Agreement	Plural/singular mismatches	SVA, etc.

I did a quantitative frequency count and assigned numeric identifiers to codes: VOC = 1, VT = 2, SVA = 3, etc., and exported coded data to SPSS for percentage calculations and trend analysis.

The flowchart below visualizes the sequence of processes used in analyzing grammatical and lexical errors in student writing based on Corder's (1974) framework.

Collection of Student Data
↓
Initial Identification of Errors in Student Writing
↓
Description of Errors by Category
↓
Explanation of Error Sources
↓
Classification and Coding

Flowchart 1. Process of error analysis based on Corder (1974)

Table 3. Summary of methodological components

Component	Description
Participants	50 final-year teacher trainees, selected via simple random sampling
Data Collection Tools	Two essay prompts; self-reported data on reading habits and WASSCE English grades
Ethical Clearance	Obtained from the College Ethics Board; participant anonymity and informed consent ensured
Error Identification	Based on deviations from standard English usage using Corder's (1974) model
Error Description	Categorized into grammatical, lexical, mechanical, and syntactic errors (e.g., VT, VOC, SVA)
Error Explanation	Interlingual and intralingual sources identified using Richards (1971) and Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005)
Coding & Analysis	Coded errors were assigned numerical values and exported to SPSS for frequency and percentage trends.
Reliability Check	Inter-coder reliability was tested using Cohen's Kappa = 0.78, indicating substantial agreement.

3. FINDINGS

Most students exhibited significant errors with vocabulary (25%), verb tense errors (22.52%), and structural and expression-related errors (20.24%). Together, these categories account for nearly 68% of all the errors identified in the students' written work. The dominance of vocabulary errors suggests that students have significant difficulty selecting words that appropriately convey meaning in context.

3.1. Grammatical Errors

A grammatical mistake is a term used in prescriptive grammar to denote a flawed, unusual, or contentious usage, such as a missing modifier or an incorrect verb tense (Garner, 2012), and incorrect form, semantics, meaning, and use (Hsu, 2013). Grammatical

errors are caused by defective constructs such as incorrect verbal tense, incorrect sentence form, and so on (Hernandez, 2011). The challenge is also known as a usage flaw. Agreement errors (subject-verb agreement and noun-pronoun agreement), tense errors (past/present, aspect, etc.), number errors (singular or plural), prepositional errors, article errors, and conjunction errors are all classified as grammatical errors in this review.

3.1.1. Tense

The common errors found under tense include the wrong use of the verb 'be' in the passive form followed by the perfective form of the verb, eg., 'be + backed by…', and 'be + looked at …' instead of 'be + back by…' and 'be +look at…' respectively, are found in students' manuscripts. In addition, the past participle form of 'be', 'been' is almost always confused with the continuous form, 'being'. This leads to ungrammatical structures such as, '…are been supplied …,' instead of, 'are being supplied…' The structure, 'did not + base/root verb,' was wrongly used and was common in the data.' For example, 'He did not used the book.' instead of 'He did not use the book.' If the verb 'being' must be followed by a verb in the passive voice, the verb must be the participle. For example, 'students being trained...' but wrong structures such as 'being train' were found in the data. Some other errors collected on tense include the following:

(1). I will make sure that all schools in Ghana are been supplied with professional teachers…

Corrected: I will make sure that all schools in Ghana are provided with professional teachers…

(2). I will make sure that the various materials are been sent to the schools…

Corrected: I will make sure that the various materials are sent to the schools…..

(3).…as far as education is concern teachers are the most important professionals…

Corrected: …as far as education is concerned, teachers are the most important professionals…

(4). …accommodation of teachers will be taking care of…..

Corrected: …accommodation of teachers will be taken care of……

(5). …most teachers did not used teaching and learning materials..

Corrected: …most teachers did not use teaching and learning materials…

(6). The students of the colleges of education are being train in all aspects of life…

Corrected: The students of the colleges of education are being trained in all aspects of life..

(7). …the writer did mentioned that ……

Corrected: …the writer did mention that ……

(8). …teachers are the most important as education is concern….

Corrected: …teachers are the most important as far as education is concerned…

(9). This is how I spend my corona virus holiday.

Corrected: This is how I spent my coronavirus holidays.

(10). Fear Cover all the places; no activity is going one, …

Corrected: Fear covered all the places; no activity was going on….

3.1.2. Errors with Adjectives

An adjective which is inflected as a comparative form may not be preceded by the pre-modifier 'more.' In any case, some students demonstrate inadequate knowledge of the

structure. Some varieties of English may have the structure 'more easy.' Consider the error below:

(1)…the understanding of something becomes more easier…..

Corrected: …the understanding of something becomes easier……..

(2)...it was in Greater Accra that the virus was spreading faster..

Corrected: ...it was in Greater Accra that the virus was spreading fast…

3.1.3. Subject Verb Agreement

Another grammatical error common among the respondents deals with subject-verb agreement: a singular subject must agree with a singular verb, and a plural subject must agree with a plural object (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002; Leech and Svartvik, 1994). But one common problem which confuses these students is, when an intervening preposition phrase separates a subject and its verb. For example, 'One of the students are sick' instead of 'One [of the students] is sick.' Other examples include the following:

(1). We believe this materials appeals to the five senses…..

Corrected: We believe that these materials appeal to the five senses…

(2). This is because many students becomes a burden…..

Corrected: This is because many students become a burden…….

(3). …motivation enable you to do what is required …..

Corrected: …motivation enables you to do what is required …..

(4). Especialy if any one show any false sign like Coughing, Sneezing which usualy disturbe some of us ….

Corrected: Especially, if any one displayed any sign and symptoms such as coughing and sneezing which, some of us are prone to …

(5). …he have to assign some peoples……

Corrected: …he has to assign some people……

3.1.4. Structure and Expression

Dangling modifiers, misplaced modifiers, squatting modifier, jumbled-up or illogical sequence of sentences, incomplete or sentence fragments, run-on sentences or fused sentences, inappropriate use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, and disordering or inversion of a subject and its verb are examples of structural errors in English (for more examples and explication of the concept, see Chandra & Wijaya, 2016, Ho 2005). The following are some errors of structure collected from the transcripts of respondents:

(1). It was in March 2020, when we have been break by the president, because there were a pandemic in the world.

In the above example, the respondent, in a passive construction, identifies the pronoun 'we' as the subject of the passive construction. Writing this in the active voice, the pronoun' us' will be the object of the verb 'break.' In the context of the topic being discussed, humans in a school cannot be the direct object of the verb 'break' to denote the recess or closure of a school session. It renders the sentence ungrammatical; this exemplifies the concept of Richard's 'Ignorance of rule restriction' in which the writer lacks knowledge in the application of a specific rule. The corrected version would read as 'It was

in March 2020, when the president ordered all schools to go on break because there was a pandemic in the world.' Other examples include:

(2)...we learnt that the virus started from China therefore the various Students from others countries or Some of them run to their countries.

Corrected...we learnt that the virus was discovered in China, so the various students from other countries who were studying there ran to their countries.

(3). By two weeks we were informed that the virus is spreading, therefore all boders shall be closed. It is the beginning of the suffery ...

Corrected: Within two weeks, we were informed that the virus was spreading, therefore all boarders were closed. That was the beginning of the suffering…

(4). Businesses are no more flowing…

Corrected: Businesses were no longer worthwhile…/Businesses had failed…

3.1.5. Spelling Mistakes

Spelling mistakes may be explained as errors in the conventionally accepted form of spelling, or words which do not conform to the accepted form of morphological shape as found in an English language dictionary. When a writer consistently commits a spelling error in spelling a word, then they are not aware of their fault, but when the writer spells the word correctly and, in an instance, spells the same word incorrectly, then the writer has made a mistake rather than an error (Cf: Corder 1967). A non-native speaker can commit spelling mistakes because there is no one-to-one correspondence between the sound system of the learner and that of English, and this can lead to incoherent sentence construction (Hyland 1993). Consider the error at number (42) below:

(1). Pupils go to school with empty stomack……

Corrected: Pupils go to school on empty stomach…..

The above error might have come about because of phonological problems. The writer may have written the word the way it sounds. There are a number of graphemes which correspond to /k/ in English. For example, the sound /k/ is has different underlying representation in the following underlined form: *stomach*, *stack*, and *talk*. This linguistic phenomenon can pose a problem for a learner. Some other words which pose a problem to learners and sometimes to users who may be proficient include words which have double sounds such as *accommodation*, and *committee*. Consider the following items:

(2). The average students at a college of education lacks basic….accomodation and well-equiped….

Corrected: The average student of a college of education lacks basic….accommodation and well-equipped….

(3). The commitee met to discuss the matter….

Corrected: The committee met/convened to discuss the matter….

Table 4 shows the summary of misspelt words due to orthographic problems

Table 4. A summary of misspelt words due to orthographic problems

Problem	Target word	Error
Wrong choice of sound	stomach	Stomack
Double consonant	accommodation	accomodation
Double consonant	equipped	equiped

Double consonant	committee	commitee
Separation words	myself	my self
Exchange of vowels	travel	treval
Exchange of /i/ for /e/	entertainment	intertainment
Exchange of /i/ for /e/	complete	complite

3.1.6. Punctuation Errors

Punctuation is the use of standard signs and marks in organizing words into sentences, clauses, and phrases, in order to clarify meaning. Punctuation marks are pauses or gestures used to clarify the meaning of our words. 'They are signals to the reader that indicate pause, place emphasis, alter the function or show the relationship between the elements of the text.' (Jane, 2008:122). The misuse of punctuation leads to unclear and clumsy sentences, which make a piece of text difficult to understand. The application of punctuation marks brings along the idea of the correct use of capital and lowercase letters, too. For instance, under normal circumstances, a capital letter always follows a full stop. Consider a respondent's wrong placement of a comma, and how it creates an ungrammatical construction in the following sentence:

(1). In case people did not wear masks and they entered a shop, they were told to go back.

The prepositional phrase, 'In case,' should have been marked off by a comma, so that the subject of the verb, 'did not wear,' should be 'people,' but the subject of the sentence in 51 above, as it stands, is 'In case people'. Other errors noted in respondents' scripts include:

(2)...teaching and learning materials help student's to learn …

Corrected: …teaching and learning materials help student to learn …

(3). I will provide the necessary TLM's……

Corrected: I will provide the necessary Teach Learning Materials…

(4). Later on I travel to Accra to work and find some money.

Corrected: …Later on, I travel to Accra to look for money.

(5). I went back to my hometown, Denu from my station ….

Corrected: I went back to my hometown, Denu, from my station ….

(6). In around September 2019, we were hearing of Corona Virus…..

Corrected: Around September, 2019, we began to hear about the coronavirus ..

3.1.7. Omission, Insertion of Unnecessary Language Items

(1). It was … March 20202 that the directive came from

Corrected: It was in March, 2020, that the directive came from

(2)…bans were placed on all forms of social gatherings like churches, clubs, conferences, etc.

Corrected: A ban was placed on all forms of social gatherings such as church meetings, clubs, and conferences, etc.

(3). I feel bored since our television got spoiedl and we…not….

Corrected: I felt bored since our television got spoiled and **we were** not ….

(4). Briefly, is … how I spent my corona virus break….

Corrected: Briefly, this is how I spent my coronavirus break….

3.1.8. Preposition

One grammatical item that is confusing in English is the use of appropriate prepositions. Some of the errors relating to prepositions in the data have to do with the wrong choice of preposition. For example, 'I prefer this classroom than that one' instead of 'I prefer this class to that one.' There are cases where the use of a preposition is unnecessary. for example,

(1). 'As a Minister of Education, I will set in rules to every college....' instead of 'As a Minister of Education, I will establish guidelines for each college….' It could be argued that the example above exemplifies Ellis & Barkhuizen's concept of 'misinformation/substitution' where learners use the wrong preposition or substitute a preposition with the wrong one (2005:61). Words keep company, that is, they collocate. So, it is with prepositions. However, the data shows the wrong choice of prepositions for verbs, which do not collocate. For instance,

(2). 'He was admitted in the hospital' instead of 'He was admitted to the hospital,' and 'He was charged for a crime,' instead of 'He was charged with a crime.'

3.1.9. Vocabulary Errors

It refers to the analysis of data which focuses on the use of words which sound similar, homophones and near-homophones - which for their similarity in pronunciation cause students to make wrong choices, and therefore construct ungrammatical sentences. When lexical choices are selected incorrectly, they can lead to a 'direct misinterpretation of the message, or at the very least, an increase in the burden of comprehending the text' (Llach, 2015:109). Consider the following examples found in the data:

(1). A number of students troup to our schools…

Corrected: A number of students trooped into our schools….' A large number of students arrived in our school…

(2). They should pack bag and baggage and live the house

Corrected: They should pack bag and baggage and leave the house..

(3). Teachers come to school late or abscent themselves from school….

Corrected: Teachers come to school late or absent themselves from school…./Teachers are frequently late or are absent from school…

(4).…payment of allowances will seased…

Corrected: …payment of allowances will cease….

(5). They have the potential to pursue a coarse……

Corrected: They have the potential to pursue a course…

(6). The headmaster wants you to save the meal……

Corrected: The headmaster wants you to serve the meal…..

The table below shows the results of the error analysis based on linguistic categories, themes, number of errors, and their corresponding percentages.

Table 5. Shows the result of the analysis of the results

Linguistic Category	Theme	No. of Errors	Percentage (%)
Verb Tense Errors	Grammar	19	22.52
Adjective Errors	Grammar	2	2.38
Subject-Verb Agreement	Grammar	5	5.95

Structure and Expression	Grammar	17	20.24
Spelling Mistakes	Mechanics	7	8.33
Punctuation Errors	Mechanics	6	7.14
Omission/Inclusion Errors	Syntax	5	5.95
Preposition Errors	Grammar	2	2.38
Vocabulary Errors	Lexis	21	25.00
		84	100.00

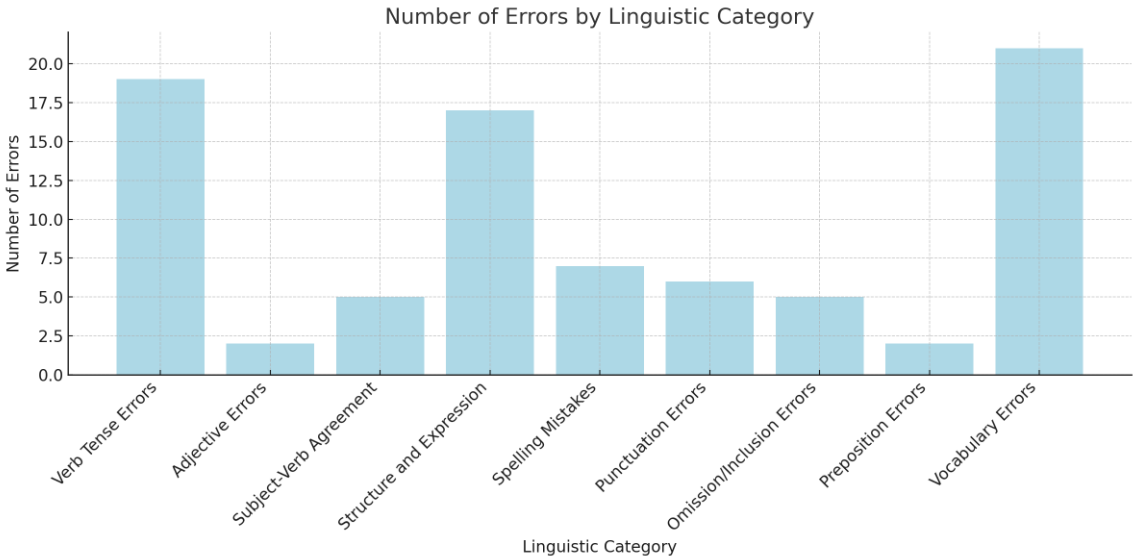

Figure 1. A bar chart visually illustrates the trends already discussed in Table 4

3.2. Quantitative Summary of the Findings

The statistical trend in the error analysis reveals a concentration of challenges in three key linguistic areas: vocabulary, verb tense, and sentence structure. Vocabulary errors emerged as the most dominant, accounting for 25% of all the errors identified. It indicates a significant struggle among students in selecting the right words to convey intended meanings accurately. The high percentage suggests a limited vocabulary range and weak lexical competence, which undermines clarity and precision in writing. Following closely are verb-tense errors, which constitute 22.52% of the total errors. It reflects widespread confusion among students in using appropriate tenses, particularly with auxiliary verbs and participle forms. The frequency of these errors implies that many students have not fully mastered the grammatical rules governing tense formation and usage, an essential component of syntactic accuracy.

Structural and expression-related errors rank third, making up 20.24% of the errors. These include fragmented sentences, misused conjunctions, and illogical sequencing of ideas, all of which impede coherence and fluency in writing. Together, these top three categories, vocabulary, tense, and structure, account for a combined 67.76% of all recorded errors. It clearly points to a concentration of difficulties in core areas of written English. In contrast, spelling mistakes (8.33%) and punctuation errors (7.14%) are less frequent but still notable. These mechanical errors suggest insufficient attention to writing conventions

and orthographic rules, although their lower percentages imply that students are somewhat more familiar with surface-level aspects of writing.

Errors related to subject-verb agreement and omission or unnecessary inclusion of items each accounted for 5.95%, indicating moderate challenges in syntactic consistency and sentence completeness. The least common errors were in the use of adjectives and prepositions, both registering at 2.38%. While their lower frequency might suggest better handling of these aspects, it may also reflect a limited variety in sentence construction where such elements are less frequently employed.

3.3. Interpretative Summary of the Research Findings

The findings reveal that vocabulary errors (25%), verb tense errors (22.52%), and structure and expression-related errors (20.24%) were the most prevalent, accounting for approximately 68% of all observed mistakes. These dominant categories point to foundational deficiencies in the learners' linguistic competence and reinforce the importance of examining such errors within a robust theoretical framework.

The study adopts Corder's (1967, 1974) Error Analysis (EA) framework, which positions learners' errors not merely as failures but as systematic indicators of their underlying interlanguage development. In contrast to Contrastive Analysis (CA), which attributes most errors to negative transfer from the mother tongue (L1), EA expands the scope to include intra-lingual factors, such as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, and misapplication of rules, as principal contributors to errors. This theoretical lens is crucial to interpreting the findings of the study, especially in a multilingual Ghanaian context where both inter-lingual and intra-lingual factors are at play.

The widespread vocabulary errors are not merely issues of word knowledge but reflect deeper lexical retrieval problems that arise from insufficient exposure to the target language. These errors indicate that learners are operating within a limited lexicon, often substituting phonetically similar or semantically inappropriate words, leading to the distortion of meaning. It aligns with Corder's view that such deviations are developmental in nature and part of the learner's internal system-building.

The frequency of verb tense errors suggests an incomplete acquisition of temporal and aspectual distinctions in English. Many students, influenced by their L1S, which often have simpler tense systems, struggle with English's more complex temporal structures. It reinforces Krashen's (1987) distinction between language acquisition (natural, unconscious) and language learning (explicit and rule-based), indicating that these learners may have acquired surface fluency but lack grammatical depth due to insufficient meaningful exposure and interaction.

The structural and expression-related errors further support this interpretation. These errors, which include fragmented sentences, illogical constructions, and misuse of conjunctions, reflect an underdeveloped ability to organize ideas cohesively in writing. According to Corder's taxonomy, these are not random but systematic errors revealing how learners internalize syntactic rules. They demonstrate that while learners may have some knowledge of grammar, their ability to apply it in extended written discourse is underdeveloped.

From a pedagogical standpoint**,** several factors explain why these errors persist. First, the quality of students admitted plays a significant role. The data shows that a sizable proportion of students entered the college with weak passes in English (D7), indicating that they began their training with already fragile language foundations. Secondly, the lack of a reading culture, as revealed in the study, means that learners have limited exposure to rich, model English texts, reducing opportunities for incidental vocabulary acquisition and syntactic development. Additionally, first language interference continues to shape learners' English use, especially in areas such as word order, verb agreement, and tense formation. Lastly, the lack of practice in spoken English, as 80% of students admitted to resorting to their L1 for expression, suggests that these learners operate in environments that do not foster meaningful English communication, which is critical for internalizing linguistic forms.

These persistent errors not only hinder learners' academic writing but also have broader implications for their future roles as teachers. If these teacher trainees are not equipped with strong English proficiency, they are likely to transfer their errors to the pupils they will teach, thereby perpetuating a cycle of language deficiency in Ghana's basic schools.

To address these challenges, the following measures could be adopted.

a. Strengthen entry requirements**,** ensuring that only candidates with adequate language proficiency are admitted**.**
b. Integrate intensive writing and grammar workshops within the curriculum to provide focused support on recurring problem areas.
c. Promote a culture of reading**,** possibly through reading clubs or graded reading assignments, to expand lexical and syntactic exposure.
d. Encourage spoken English in daily academic activities to help internalize grammar in use, which can improve both written and spoken competence.
e. Finally, data-driven teaching should be adopted, where teachers analyze student errors using frameworks like EA to design targeted remedial interventions.

The research not only documents the grammatical and lexical struggles of teacher trainees but also, through the lens of Error Analysis, provides a roadmap for diagnosing and addressing these challenges. By connecting these findings to theory and practice, the study offers valuable insights into how language proficiency can be improved in teacher training institutions, ensuring better outcomes for both teachers and the pupils they serve.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Causes Of Errors In A Student's English Language Usage

4.1.1. Poor Grades

From the data, one factor that is responsible for the poor level of proficiency of teacher-trainees is the quality of students admitted to pursue the course. The 2010 admission requirements allowed applicants with a grade of D in English, equivalent to a range of 45%-49%, to be admitted. The interpretation of this grade is weak and a pass. It

implies that such a student could hardly competently speak or communicate effectively in writing. Table 5 below shows the distribution of 50 respondents to the mark under investigation.

The table below presents the distribution of the fifty respondents based on their WASSCE English Language grades, including the corresponding mark ranges, frequencies, and percentages.

Table 6. Distribution of respondents by english language grades

Grade	Mark Range (%)	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
A1	80–100	0	0.00
B2	75–79	0	0.00
B3	70–74	5	23.33
C4	65–69	5	23.33
C5	60–64	20	6.66
C6	55–59	5	25.00
D7	50–54	15	16.66
E8	45–49	0	5.00
		50	100.00

WAEC Grading of WASSCE English Language Examinations) Source: https://avenuegh.com/waec-wassce-english-language-marking-scheme-and-grading-system)

From the data in Table 5, an analysis of the grades of respondents under review indicates that no students scored an A_1 (80-100) or a B_2 (75-79). It suggests that the best crop of senior high school graduates do not go to the colleges of education. The bulk of the respondents obtained a grade of C_5, corresponding to a mark range of (60% -74 %). But surprisingly, 13 respondents out of a total of 50 respondents applied with a D_7, which could be interpreted as a weak pass or failure. Therefore, poor grades, among other factors, are responsible for the low level of proficiency in the English language of the students whose transcripts were studied. When Amua-Sekyi and Nti (2015) observe that only qualified people should be allowed into teacher training colleges, this may be what they mean.

4.1.2. Lack of Reading

Reading is one of the practices that can help to improve one's proficiency in a language, especially English. However, there is a serious lack of a reading culture among the students under investigation. When the respondents were asked to state the number of books they read in one year, 15 out of 50 respondents indicated that they read a book in one year, while 35 of the total respondents indicated nothing (zero). A text is the integration of all aspects of a language, and so by reading, one becomes more familiar with the use of language items like adverbs, adjectives, punctuation, tense, and aspect, etc.

4.1.3. Mother Tongue Influence

Students in Ghana learn English as a second language, so it is expected that they will face some difficulties in attempting to use the language. Before learners go to school, they have acquired a first language, whose structure and features, such as tone, stress, and intonation, are already internalized. These mother tongue features (negatively) influence

the learning of the English language (L2), as these features are transferred to the learning of the L2. For instance, West African languages are tonal, but the one major feature of European languages such as English is intonation (a musical tone on an utterance). It is therefore difficult for the students whose scripts are being examined to speak English with the correct intonation.

Similarly, the same thing applies to tense. For instance, most West African languages have three basic tenses: present, past, and continuous tenses, but English has six basic tenses. It is therefore a problem for most students to effectively use tenses in the English language. The fact that most of the respondents used the wrong tense in the data (shown above) shows that most of them were not good writers.

4.1.4. Failure to Practice Spoken English

Another factor responsible for these errors is not practising oral English enough, but resorting to speaking the mother tongue (L1), which may be a result of having a limited vocabulary in English. Students in the colleges of education are mature and can effectively handle their mother tongue. The English language is critical because students need it to teach and communicate both in speech and writing. All questions in the college of education examinations are written in English, and some questions in the L1 subjects are written in English as well. Practice makes perfect, but most teacher-trainees do not practice speaking English. To the question, 'Do you sometimes resort to your L1 because you cannot express yourself correctly in English?' 40 students out of 50, representing 80%, answered yes. And if learners of the English language have not developed and organized their oral English well, it can affect their written English (August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 4).

The findings of this study highlight three major areas where teacher trainees struggle the most in their written English: vocabulary misuse, tense errors, and structural issues. Together, these account for nearly 68% of all the errors identified, a figure that echoes what other researchers have found both internationally (Chand, 2021; Magaba, 2023; Milton, 2023) and within Ghana (Amoakohene, 2017; Amua-Sekyi & Nti, 2015). These persistent issues point to deep-rooted challenges in how English is taught and learned among non-native users, particularly those preparing to become teachers.

Vocabulary errors**,** which emerged as the most frequent (25%), reflect more than just a lack of word knowledge; they signal limited exposure to rich language use and weak awareness of how words fit together in context. As Llach (2015) notes, poor word choice can distort meaning and make a text hard to follow. It suggests that vocabulary teaching in Colleges of Education must go beyond rote memorization. Trainees need opportunities to learn vocabulary in meaningful contexts through reading extensively, exploring word collocations, and distinguishing between synonyms based on use and nuance. Instructors should guide students in recognizing appropriate word usage, tone, and register in different types of writing.

Tense errors, which accounted for 22.52% of all errors, show that many students are grappling with the complexities of English tense and aspect. Krashen (1987) explains this kind of difficulty as stemming from the gap between natural language acquisition and formal learning. For students whose mother tongues have simpler tense systems, as is often the case in Ghana, English tenses can be confusing. It reinforces the need for explicit

grammar instruction using contrastive analysis, guided exercises, and peer editing to help learners internalize rules. Practical strategies like tense drills, sentence rewriting, and the use of timelines can help make abstract tense concepts more concrete.

Structural and expression errors (20.24%), such as incomplete sentences, misused connectors, and jumbled ideas, point to challenges with clarity and coherence. These types of mistakes, also noted by Chandra and Wijaya (2016), often stem from poor awareness of how English sentences and paragraphs are organized. When students can't express their ideas clearly, even correct grammar and vocabulary won't help. That's why writing instruction should emphasize how to build and link ideas logically. Activities such as paragraph planning, sentence combining, and sequencing tasks can help students strengthen their command of written expression.

Though less frequent, subject-verb agreement and adjective errors still disrupt grammatical accuracy and fluency. These issues, also observed by Magaba (2023) in South African contexts, tend to be rule-based and correctable through focused practice. Grammar exercises that ask students to spot and fix agreement errors, combined with corpus-informed examples, can sharpen their sensitivity to common patterns in academic English. Mechanical issues like spelling (8.33%) and punctuation (7.14%) may seem superficial, but they play a key role in shaping how polished and professional writing appears. Often, such errors result from a lack of proofreading and editing skills. Teaching writing as a process, emphasizing drafting, revision, and peer feedback, can go a long way in addressing this. Students should be encouraged to use tools like dictionaries, grammar checkers, and peer review to improve accuracy. As Ferris (2004) argues, even surface-level feedback can significantly improve learners' overall writing quality.

Prepositional errors and issues involving the omission or unnecessary insertion of words appeared less frequently but are still worth addressing. As Albooni (2023) points out, prepositions remain one of the trickiest areas for many ESL learners, often because they require context-based learning. Teachers can help by incorporating fun, interactive activities—like sentence gap-fills, collocation maps, and bilingual comparisons—that reinforce correct usage through repetition and engagement.

Overall, the study's findings affirm Corder's (1967, 1981) position that learner errors are not random or meaningless; they are signs of progress, clues to where students are in their interlanguage development. When analyzed carefully, these errors can serve as powerful teaching tools. Colleges of Education should adopt a data-informed approach to instruction, where students' real-life writing errors are used in lessons to build metalinguistic awareness and foster active learning (Brown, 2000; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

The broader concern is that if these errors go unaddressed, they may follow these trainees into their future classrooms. Teachers who lack confidence in their English proficiency may struggle to model good language use or correct their pupils effectively. It risks perpetuating a cycle of weak language skills in Ghana's basic schools. To break this cycle, institutions must take proactive steps: raise admission standards, integrate targeted grammar and writing support, encourage consistent reading habits, and promote the use of English in daily communication. These interventions are not simply best practices; they are

essential if we are to prepare competent English teachers who can help improve literacy outcomes nationwide.

6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the grammatical and lexical errors found in the written English of final-year teacher trainees at the E.P. College of Education, Amedzofe. Specifically, it aimed to: (i) identify the types of grammatical and lexical errors that occur in student writing, (ii) determine the most frequently occurring error types across various grammatical categories, and (iii) recommend pedagogical strategies and institutional interventions to enhance students' writing competence and overall English language proficiency.

The findings revealed that three types of errors, vocabulary misuse (25%), verb tense errors (22.52%), and structural/expression errors (20.24%), dominated student writing, collectively accounting for nearly 68% of all errors identified. These patterns are deeply concerning, especially in the context of teacher training, where proficiency in English is critical not just for academic success but for future teaching effectiveness.

Using Corder's (1967, 1981) Error Analysis framework, this study affirmed that these errors are not simply careless mistakes but systematic indicators of learners' evolving interlanguage. They reflect gaps in lexical development, tense usage, and syntactic organization each of which plays a critical role in written communication. Left unaddressed, such deficiencies could seriously undermine trainees' ability to teach English effectively at the basic school level, thereby perpetuating a cycle of weak language instruction.

The study's findings raise important policy questions for Ghana's teacher education system. First, there is a clear need to revise admission criteria for Colleges of Education. The fact that some students gained admission with English grades as low as D7 suggests that the current thresholds may not be adequate for preparing future language teachers. Raising the minimum grade requirement for English could help ensure that admitted trainees have a stronger linguistic foundation.

In addition, there is a need for embedded language support systems within the teacher training curriculum. These could take the form of grammar and writing workshops, remedial classes, and structured reading programs. Beyond formal instruction, institutions should also encourage the use of English in daily campus life, through debates, clubs, and presentations, to promote practical language use. Continuous professional development for tutors in language instruction is equally critical, ensuring that they are well-equipped to address these persistent learner challenges.

While this study provides important insights, it was limited in scope to a single college and a sample size of 50 students. Future studies should explore whether similar error patterns exist across other Colleges of Education in Ghana. A nationwide, multi-institutional study would help determine if these findings are generalizable. In addition, longitudinal studies tracking language development throughout the three-year diploma program could offer deeper insights into how and when such errors emerge and persist.

Further research should also assess the impact of specific pedagogical interventions, such as the use of error logs, peer editing, or digital grammar tools. Qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or classroom observations could enrich our understanding of the personal, educational, and sociolinguistic factors that contribute to persistent error types.

In conclusion, this study underscores the urgent need to strengthen the English proficiency of teacher trainees in Ghana. The recurring errors in vocabulary, grammar, and structure point to systemic challenges that require both instructional reform and policy-level action**.** If left unaddressed, these challenges could continue to affect the quality of English education in Ghana's basic schools. However, with targeted interventions, revised entry standards, and sustained research, it is possible to equip future teachers with the tools they need to communicate and instruct effectively in English.

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