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Thank you.

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GRAMMATICAL ERROR ANALYSIS COMMITTED BY NCE STUDENTS IN KWARA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ILORIN

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Abstract: The English language plays a vital role in Nigeria's educational system as the official language and primary medium of instruction. This research investigates grammatical errors committed by Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) students in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin. The study aimed to identify the most frequent grammatical mistakes in students' spoken and written English, understand their causes, and suggest practical improvement strategies. Using a qualitative research approach, data was gathered through written essays from 24 NCE students randomly selected across different year levels. The study revealed persistent errors in five main areas: subject-verb agreement (35%), tense consistency (28%), article usage (18%), preposition selection (12%), and sentence construction (7%). Root causes include mother tongue interference, insufficient exposure to standard English, and gaps in foundational grammar knowledge. The research concludes that systematically addressing these errors will boost students' academic performance and enhance their English proficiency. The findings underscore an urgent need for more interactive, student-centered grammar teaching, regular writing practice, and focused remedial strategies.
Keywords: Grammatical Errors, NCE Students, English Language, Mother Tongue, Language Interference, Pedagogy

Introduction

English occupies a unique position in Nigeria's education system as both the official language and primary medium of instruction. Students must develop solid grammatical skills to succeed academically and professionally. Yet despite years of English exposure, many College of Education students continue struggling with basic grammatical errors in speech and writing (Adebayo, 2020; Onukaogu & Arua, 2022). Canale and Swain(1980) emphasised that grammatical competence forms the foundation of communicative competence, involving mastering sentence structure, syntax rules, morphology, and appropriate word usage. Recent studies show that grammar errors reveal deeper issues with language learning processes, mother tongue influ
ence, and teaching method shortcomings (Yusuf & Adedokun, 2021; Egbokhare, 2023).

At Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin, English serves dual purposes: as a subject of study and as the tool for learning other subjects. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2022) expects NCE graduates to demonstrate high grammatical accuracy, yet classroom observations reveal troubling patterns of recurring errors in subject-verb agreement, tense usage, article application, and sentence structure.

While numerous studies examine grammatical errors among Nigerian university students, few focus specifically on NCE students in Colleges of Education. This oversight is significant because these students are future teachers whose language habits will directly influence children at primary and secondary levels. Understanding their grammatical errors can improve language pedagogy and enhance educational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Many NCE students lack the grammatical competence needed for effective academic and professional communication. When these future teachers graduate with substandard English skills, they perpetuate linguistic inadequacy cycles that undermine national educational objectives.

Studies have identified persistent problems. Adebayo (2020) found rampant issues with article usage, verb tenses, and subject-verb agreement among College of Education students across Southwest Nigeria. Ogunmodimu (2021) discovered persistent sentence structure and verb form problems that resist correction. Onukaogu and Arua (2022) argued that students cannot internalise grammar rules because traditional teaching methods emphasise rote memorisation over meaningful language use.

This study addresses the research gap by focusing specifically on NCE students at Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin, offering context-specific recommendations for curriculum development and English language instruction.

Purpose of the Study

This research examines grammatical errors committed by NCE students in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. examine the nature and patterns of grammatical errors commonly made by NCE students
2. identify which grammatical errors occur most frequently in students' spoken and written English
3. classify these errors according to established grammatical categories
4. investigate the possible causes behind these errors

Research Questions

1. What kinds of grammatical errors do NCE students commonly make?
2. Which grammatical errors appear most frequently in their spoken and written English?
3. How can we categorize these errors according to different grammatical areas?
4. What causes these grammatical errors among the students?

Literature Review

Understanding Grammatical Errors

Grammatical errors are deviations from accepted syntax and morphology rules. James (2013) defines them as systematic deviations made by learners who have not fully mastered target language rules. Such deviations are common in ESL environments where learners are influenced by first language patterns.

Common Error Types and Causes

Researchers have identified recurring grammatical errors in Nigerian educational institutions: subject-verb agreement, verb tense, article usage, prepositions, and sentence structure problems (Adebayo, 2020; Egbokhare, 2023). Several factors contribute to these errors:

- Mother tongue interference: Nigerian languages have syntactic patterns different from English, causing inappropriate L1 structure transfer (Odumuh, 2022)
- Poor foundational knowledge and ineffective teaching methods: Rule-based, decontextualised

grammar instruction fails to promote meaningful understanding (Onukaogu & Arua, 2022)

- Limited exposure: Weak reading culture and limited exposure to correct language models reinforce poor grammar usage (Ogunmodimu, 2021)

Theoretical Foundations

This study builds on two frameworks:

1. Corder's (1974) Error Analysis Theory: Learners' errors are natural, informative parts of second language learning that provide windows into language processing

2. Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Theory: Many errors result from structural differences between learners' first language and the target language

Methodology

A mixed-method design was chosen for identifying and analyzing grammatical error patterns. The target population was all NCE students at Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin. Purposive sampling focused on School of Languages students, with random sampling selecting 24 students distributed evenly across NCE I, II, and III levels (8 students per level).

Data Collection

The primary instrument was a written essay task requiring approximately 300 words on "The Importance of Education in Nigeria." This topic was chosen for its familiarity and lack of specialized knowledge requirements. Focus group discussions provided additional insights into students' thought processes and spoken English patterns.

Data Analysis

Written essays were analyzed using qualitative content analysis guided by Corder's (1974) Error Analysis framework. The process involved identifying grammatical errors, categorising them according to standard classifications, and describing patterns within each category. Percentages were calculated to determine error prevalence.

Results, Interpretation and Discussion

Analysis of 24 essays revealed five major grammatical error categories:

1. Subject-Verb Agreement Errors (35% of all errors)

This was the most frequent problem area. Students consistently failed to apply basic concord rules, especially with third-person singular subjects.

Examples:

- Student wrote: "The boy go to school every day."
- Should be: "The boy goes to school every day."
- Student wrote: "My sister have three children."
- Should be: "My sister has three children."

These errors appeared consistently across all NCE levels, suggesting fundamental gaps in understanding basic grammar rules rather than mere inexperience.

2. Tense Errors (28% of all errors)

Tense mistakes were the second most common problem, particularly with past and present tenses and tense consistency. Example:

- Student wrote: "Yesterday I wake up early, eat my breakfast, and go to school."
- Should be: "Yesterday I woke up early, ate my breakfast, and went to school."

3. Article Misuse (18% of all errors)

Problems with definite (the) and indefinite (a, an) articles appeared frequently. Examples:

- Student wrote: "He is a honest man who helps people."
- Should be: "He is an honest man who helps people."

- Student wrote: "Education is important for the society."
- Should be: "Education is important for society."

4. Preposition Errors (12% of all errors)

Students frequently chose inappropriate prepositions or omitted required ones. Examples:

- Student wrote: "She discussed about the topic with her friends."
- Should be: "She discussed the topic with her friends."
- Student wrote: "I am interested on becoming a teacher."
- Should be: "I am interested in becoming a teacher."

5. Faulty Sentence Structure (7% of all errors)

While less frequent, structural problems were often most disruptive to communication, including run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and unclear idea relationships. Examples:

- Student wrote: "Teaching is a noble profession. Which requires dedication and commitment."
- Should be: "Teaching is a noble profession that requires dedication and commitment."

Discussion of Findings

Results align with previous research on Nigerian ESL students' grammatical weaknesses. The persistence of subject-verb agreement, tense, and article errors across NCE levels suggests current grammar instruction methods are not effectively helping students internalise fundamental rules.

The dominance of subject-verb agreement errors (35%) among future English teachers is particularly concerning. If prospective teachers have not mastered this basic concept, they cannot teach it effectively to primary and secondary students. The interplay between mother tongue interference, limited standard English exposure, and traditional teaching methods creates conditions for persistent errors that may continue into professional practice.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined grammatical errors in NCE students' written English at Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin. Analysis revealed five major error categories reflecting systematic difficulties with foundational grammar rules. The persistence of fundamental errors among prospective English teachers suggests current methods are not achieving intended goals.

Recommendations

1. Revolutionise Grammar Teaching Methods: Move away from rule-memorisation approaches toward more communicative, context-based methods that demonstrate how grammar functions in real communication.
2. Implement Intensive Remedial Support: Establish mandatory grammar clinics or remedial programmes, particularly for first-year students, focusing on the most common error patterns.
3. Emphasise Extensive Reading and Regular Writing Practice: Provide more exposure to well-written English and structured essay assignments with peer review components.

4. Use Students' Errors as Teaching Tools: Incorporate actual student errors into classroom discussions and exercises to help students recognize their own difficulty patterns.

5. Overhaul Curriculum Content: Critically examine grammar content in curricula, shifting focus toward meeting students' actual communicative needs rather than covering traditional grammar topics.

6. Invest in Teacher Professional Development: Train English language instructors in modern, communicative approaches to grammar teaching.

The challenges revealed are significant but not insurmountable. With focused effort, appropriate resources, and genuine commitment to change, NCE students can develop the grammatical competence needed to become effective teachers and confident English users.

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