






Lexical Errors in English Language Writing – The Case of selected Senior High School students in the Ashanti Region of Ghana



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ABSTRACT

The present study analyses the lexical errors committed by students in their written output. Using the Quantitative approach, it examines the lexical errors of students selected from each of the three-layered categories (A, B, and C) of Senior High schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. A sample of 824 out of 2713 students was arrived at through Yamane's sample size determiner. The sample was selected through the systematic random sampling strategy. A model based on Corder's Error Analysis theory was used to analyse the data. The results revealed that the students committed lexical errors in varying frequencies. Lexical errors identified from the essays were wrong word selections, literal translation, omission, misspelling, punctuation, capitalisation, modification, collocation, and morphological/word formation errors. Punctuation errors had the highest occurrence whereas literal translation errors had the least occurrence. The findings also revealed that lexical errors in the students' output affected clarity and hindered effective communication by causing confusion, misinterpretation, and distortion of the intended messages. The study recommends that English language teachers should employ practical teaching and error correction strategies to address the writing challenges of students. Students should keep track of their learning; identify their weaknesses and relate such to their teachers for redress.

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INTRODUCTION

English language as a subject of study has long been an official language of education in Ghana. The language-in-education policy prescribes and promotes the mother tongue in the first three years of schooling.¹ Ghana's language in education policy prescribes the English language for instruction from primary four onwards. Consequently, secondary and tertiary education in Ghana has always been

¹ Gladys Nyarko Ansah, "Re-Examining the Fluctuations in Language in-Education Policies in Post-Independence Ghana," *Multilingual Education* 4 (2014): 1–15.

practiced in English with regional Ghanaian majority languages acknowledged as subjects of study.²

Most ESL contexts that use the English language as a medium of instruction in schools appear to emphasize the development of the English language. In Ghana, the situation is not in any way different. English is treated as a ‘compulsory’ subject at almost all levels of pre-tertiary education. It is thus considered a ‘core’ subject and a major determinant of student success in pursuing higher education. All learners are therefore expected to acquire and use the English language if they are to be successful in their education.

Effective communication remains a hallmark feature within any speech community. While communication encompasses more than just linguistic exchanges, Gumperz asserts that language remains the predominant mode of interaction within any given speech community.³ Scholars such as Hourani, Richards, and Renandya view writing as a dominant form of language-based communication.⁴ They contend that mastering this mode of expression constitutes a challenge in first and second languages. Corder confirms that though indispensable, writing is considered the most difficult aspect of the language abilities and skills students need to acquire.⁵ The link between academic literacy and tertiary education cannot be underestimated.⁶ Many students are usually found deficient when they have to express themselves in the English Language, especially in writing. Mastering writing skills is a tedious exercise that is considered the most complicated skill since it demands adequate concentration, conscious efforts, and practice in all its processes: composing, developing, and finalizing.⁷ These errors in the writing of L2 students are frustrating and disheartening for both teachers and students.⁸ The challenging and complex nature of writing in a second language has spurred significant research interest in analysing the sources, types, effects, and correction of errors associated with writing.⁹ Li and Lin posit that students’ writing proficiency in a language reflects their overall language proficiency.¹⁰ Studies reveal that the written output of university students is saddled with varying forms of grammatical and lexical errors.¹¹ These studies also indicate that the situation is no better at the pre-tertiary level. Several studies on error analysis have been conducted within the Ghanaian education context, specifically on Ghanaian universities.¹² However, comprehensive analyses of errors in students’ writing in Ghanaian Senior High schools are rare.

The present study adopts Corder’s error analysis theory to investigate lexical errors in the English language writing of selected students at the pre-tertiary level in Ghana. This study examines the types and frequency of Lexical errors and their communicative impact.

² Elizabeth J Erling et al., “Medium of Instruction Policies in Ghanaian and Indian Primary Schools: An Overview of Key Issues and Recommendations,” *English as a Medium of Instruction in Postcolonial Contexts*, 2018, 18–34.

³ John Gumperz, “The Speech Community,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 9, no. 3 (1968): 381–86.

⁴ Taiseer Mohammed Hourani, “An Analysis of the Common Grammatical Errors in the English Writing Made by 3rd Secondary Male Students in the Eastern Coast of the UAE” (The British University in Dubai, 2008); Jack Richards and Willy Renandya, *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2002).

⁵ S. Corder, “Error Analysis and Remedial Teaching,” 1974.

⁶ Joseph Benjamin Archibald Afful, “Academic Literacy and Communicative Skills in the Ghanaian University: A Proposal,” *Nebula* 4, no. 3 (2007): 141–59.

⁷ Zahoor Hussain et al., “An Error Analysis of L2 Writing at Higher Secondary Level in Multan, Pakistan,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business* 4, no. 11 (2013): 828–44.

⁸ Joy Reid, “Eye” Learners and ‘Ear’ Learners: Identifying the Language Needs of International Students and US Resident Writers,” *Grammar in the Composition Classroom: Essays on Teaching ESL for College-Bound Students*, 1998, 3–17; Richards and Renandya, *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*.

⁹ Charles Owu-Ewie and Miss Rebecca Williams, “Grammatical and Lexical Errors in Students’ English Composition Writing: The Case of Three Senior High Schools (SHS) in the Central Region of Ghana,” *Sino-US English Teaching* 14, no. 8 (2017): 463–82.

¹⁰ Hong Li and Qingying Lin, “The Role of Revision and Teacher Feedback in a Chinese College Context,” *Asian EFL Journal* 9, no. 4 (2007): 230–39.

¹¹ P B Mireku-Gyimah, “Do Students of Mining and Allied Engineering Programmes Have Any Problems in English?,” *Ghana Mining Journal* 10 (2009); Benjamin Amoakohene, “Error Analysis of Students Essays: A Case of First Year Students of the University of Health and Allied Sciences,” *International Journal of Higher Education* 6, no. 4 (2017): 54–68.

¹² Amma Abrafi Adjei, “Analysis of Subordination Errors in Students’ Writings: A Study of Selected Teacher Training Colleges in Ghana,” *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 8 (2015): 62–77; Mireku-Gyimah, “Do Students of Mining and Allied Engineering Programmes Have Any Problems in English?”; Edward Salifu Mahama, “Ghanaian English and Its Implications for Academic Writing: A Case Study of English on the Navrongo Campus of University for Development Studies, Ghana,” *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 11 (2012): 56–63; L A Anyidoho, “Analysis of the Writing of Final Year University Students,” *Ghanaian Journal of English Studies* 1 (2002): 58–72.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

ERROR vs MISTAKES

Corder defines errors as a breach of the 'code'. An error occurs when a deviation arises in the learner's output resulting from a lack of knowledge or competence. Errors symbolise the learner's idiosyncratic or non-native version of the language.¹³ Essentially, errors are ill-formed productions of the target language. Corder posits that a learner's errors provide evidence of the language he or she uses which is significant in three ways: tells the teacher about the extent of achievement or progress based on the goal of teaching (teacher's self-assessment); provides evidence to the researcher on how a language is learnt, strategies learners employ in the discovery of language, and are devices that aid learning. They provide ways by which learners test their hypotheses about the nature of the language they learn. Errors are important components of human language learning, and as Shaffer puts it, errors do not only provide feedback for the language learner.¹⁴ Errors also provide insights into the processes that govern second language acquisition; knowledge that helps to improve language instruction in the classroom.¹⁵ Corder concludes that errors are not to be seen as 'inhibitions' but rather as evidence of the learner's strategies of learning, which play critical roles in the development of the target language.¹⁶

Some errors may result from memory lapses, physical states such as tiredness and frustration, and other psychological conditions such as strong or weak emotions. Corder refers to these forms as 'adventitious artifacts of linguistic performance which do not reflect defects in the knowledge of one's language', hence learners can correct them with much assurance.¹⁷ Such errors are usually unsystematic, products of chance circumstances, and associated with performance rather than competence. Smith and Miller refer to such errors of performance as 'mistakes.'¹⁸

Corder defines error analysis in language teaching and learning as the study of the unacceptable forms produced by learners of a language, especially a foreign language.¹⁹ In his opinion, James established that error analysis refers to determining the incidence, nature, causes, and consequences of unsuccessful language.²⁰ Additionally, describes error analysis as the procedures used to identify, describe, and interpret learners' errors. It does not only focus on identifying errors but also provides reasons for their occurrence. According to, Shaffer, errors present insight into the processes that govern second language acquisition and knowledge that helps to improve language instruction in the classroom.²¹ Corder emphasizes that error analysis provides feedback to students as a means to improve their linguistic proficiency.²²

Classification of Errors

Errors are of different types and are classified in several ways. We may look at them broadly from two angles: the linguistic items involved in the error and the communicative functions of the errors. Linguistically, errors may be classified into phonology/pronunciation, syntax, morphology, semantics, and lexicon/meaning and vocabulary. They may also be looked at from the surface structure of the sentence or expression altered by the error. This may come in the form of omission (I am boy), regularization errors (two sheeps), double markings (We didn't went / They couldn't ate). Also, forms of misinformation categorized into regularization errors. Examples include (two mans, this dogs, those dog) as well as misordering errors (always I eat, where you are sleeping?).

Corder also classifies learners' errors into four main categories: omission, selection, addition, or mis-ordering of some elements.²³

¹³ S Corder, "Introducing Applied Linguistics" (Penguin, 1973).

¹⁴ Stephen Pit Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁵ D Shaffer, "If and How to Correct Errors," *The Internet TEFL Journal* 56 (2005).

¹⁶ Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*.

¹⁷ Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*.

¹⁸ Frank Smith and George A Miller, *The Genesis of Language*, 1966.

¹⁹ Corder, "Introducing Applied Linguistics."

²⁰ Carl James, *Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis* (Taylor and Francis, 1998).

²¹ Shaffer, "If and How to Correct Errors."

²² Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*.

²³ Corder, "Introducing Applied Linguistics."

Omission appears when a student leaves a required item for the utterance he/she constructed.²⁴ In the example *'there is boy over there'* for instance, the sentence leaves out the article *'a'* which should be added before the word *'boy'*. Other examples include *'I am girl'*, etc.

Selection refers to the instance where the learner selects an incorrect element. This may be evidenced in the learner's use of wrong words (WW) in specific structures.²⁵ Examples of these errors include *'My mum is oldest than me'*, and *'I want that she goes home'*.

Addition error occurs when a learner adds unnecessary elements to his/her utterance/output. Mis-ordering involves misplacing an item or putting it in the wrong place as shown in the examples: (always I eat, where you are sleeping). Indeed, Ellis argues that "classifying errors in these ways enables us to diagnose learners' learning problems at any stage of their development and determine how changes in error patterns occur over time".²⁶

Accordingly, Erdoğan makes further clarification based on Ellis' categorisation and provides such practical examples as expressed below:

Table 1 : Categorisation of errors (Ellis, 1997)

NATURE OF ERROR	EXAMPLES
Omission	
Morphological omission	*'A strange thing happen to me yesterday'.
Syntactical omission	*'Must say also the names?'
Addition:	
morphology	*'The books is here.'
In syntax	*'The London'
In lexicon	*'I stayed there during five years ago.'
Selection	
morphology	*'My friend is oldest than me.'
In syntax	*'I want that he comes here.'
Ordering:	
In pronunciation	*'fignisicant for 'significant'; *prulal for 'plural''
In morphology	*'get upping for 'getting up''
In syntax	*'He is a dear to me friend.'
In lexicon	*'key car for 'car key''

The second way to classify errors is by looking at the communicative functions. In this way, we focus on the effect of the errors on the decoder (listener, reader or hearer) or communication process. Burt indicated two types: Global errors (those that affect overall sentence organization and significantly hinder communication) and Local errors (those that affect a single part of the sentence, creating little defects in communication).²⁷ They further assert that global errors may take specific forms of phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or even paragraphs.²⁸ Erdoğan also distinguished between Global and Local errors when he indicated that global errors might hinder communication by preventing understanding of the intended meaning; Local errors according to him, might not stop comprehension of the intended meaning, but merely cause a slight breach in a single part of the 'sentence' concerned in ways the listener assumes a correction of the sentence.²⁹

²⁴ Rod Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁵ Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition*.

²⁶ Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition*, 98.

²⁷ Marina K Burt, "Error Analysis in the Adult EFL Classroom," *TESOL Quarterly*, 1975, 53–63.

²⁸ Burt, "Error Analysis in the Adult EFL Classroom."

²⁹ Vacide Erdoğan, "Contribution of Error Analysis to Foreign Language Teaching," *Mersin Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2005).

Specific examples of both Global and Local errors are provided below:

Global: "** I like bus but my mother said so not that we must be late for school.*" and

Local: "** If I hear from her, I would let you know.*"

Finally, Ellis describes global errors as ‘serious’ since they are more likely to interfere with the intelligibility of what someone says. Thus, Global errors violate the overall structure of a sentence and make processing difficult.³⁰ An example of an error that may be said to have a global effect is ‘*The policeman was in this corner whistle*’

Local errors on the contrary only affect a single constituent in the sentence (verb/noun) and are less likely to create processing challenges.

Steps in Error Analysis

The studies of Corder and later Barkhuizen outlined major steps in error analysis. Essentially, the major steps in carrying out error analysis involve the following:

Collection/sample of learner errors

The collection of learner samples constitutes the first step in EA. The researcher has to decide what samples of the learner’s language should be used for the analysis and how to collect them. Ellis identifies three broad types of EA based on the size of the sample. Samples may range from massive (collecting several samples of language use from a large number of learners to compile a comprehensive list of errors to represent the entire population) to specific (one sample of language use collected from a limited number of learners). The incidental sampling (one sample of language use that a single learner may produce).³¹ This stage determines the size of the sample, the medium of the sample (oral or written), and the homogeneity of the sample (background, age, and location). Ellis prescribes two main factors a researcher may consider when deciding on the sample.

Table 2- Factors to consider when collecting samples of learners’ language

Factors	Description
A – Language	
Medium	Learner production: oral/written
Genre	The form of conversation, lecture, essay, a letter, etc.
Content	The topic the learner is communicating about.
B – Learner	
Level	Elementary, immediate, or advanced
mother tongue	The learner’s L1
language learning experience	This may be classroom or naturalistic or a mixture of the two

Identification of errors in the sample

This step involves checking the consistency of the learner’s performance either in writing or speech. Consistency and the learner’s ability to self-correct are indicators for checking whether a form of deviation is a mistake or an error.

Ellis opines that attention should be paid to determining the variety of the target language that should serve as the standard/norm.³² The researcher decides on the standard written dialect (American or British) as the norm. Corder posits that from the onset, "every sentence is regarded idiosyncratic until shown otherwise".³³ An ill-formed sentence relative to the TL rules is 'overtly idiosyncratic' while a sentence superficially well-formed but fails to reflect the learner’s intention is 'covertly idiosyncratic'. Corder again indicates that the best way to identify the presence and nature of an error is to interpret the

³⁰ Rod Ellis, “Does Form-Focused Instruction Affect the Acquisition of Implicit Knowledge?: A Review of the Research,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 24, no. 2 (2002): 223–36.

³¹ Ellis, “Does Form-Focused Instruction Affect the Acquisition of Implicit Knowledge?: A Review of the Research.”

³² Ellis, “Does Form-Focused Instruction Affect the Acquisition of Implicit Knowledge?: A Review of the Research.”

³³ Stephen P Corder, “Error Analysis, Interlanguage and Second Language Acquisition,” *Language Teaching* 8, no. 4 (1975): 201–18.

learner's utterance. He adds that interpretation of the errors could reveal the main differences between 'what a learner wants to say' and 'what a learner has said'.³⁴

Description of Errors

This stage of EA takes place after the identification step. The description of foreign learners' errors is a prerequisite for a good explanation of errors. Description of learner errors, according to Ellis, involves a comparison of the learner's idiosyncratic utterances with a reconstruction of those utterances in the target language.³⁵ It includes paying attention to the surface properties and focusing on observable, surface features of learner errors. Ellis proposes two important ways by which errors can be described. One way is to gather all errors that relate to, for instance, verbs, and identify the different kinds of verb errors in the sample.³⁶ We may also identify general ways learners' language/utterances differ from reconstructed target-language forms.

The description of errors is important since it instinctively explicates all that is unstated to substantiate an individual's instinct, serves as a prerequisite for counting learners' errors, and helps to create categories and subcategories for developing a comprehensive taxonomy of L2 errors.³⁷

Explanation of Errors

Rod opines that "explaining errors involves determining their sources to account for why they were made".³⁸

Evaluation of errors

This is the final and conclusive stage in Error Analysis. The stage involves the evaluation of learner errors to determine the degree to which these errors influence the intelligibility of what a learner says. Ellis describes that errors may be evaluated as Global or Local depending on the levels at which they interfere with learners' utterances.³⁹

METHODOLOGY

This study is situated within the quantitative research design. It is a multi-site case study that involved three-layered categorization of Senior High school students in the Ashanti region- A, B, and C as postulated by Ghana Education Service. The study used 824 students, representing A=295, B=278, and C = 251 as sample size. The sample size was obtained through the sample size determiner proposed by Yamane: $[(n=N/1+N(e)^2)]$.⁴⁰ Documents in the form of written essays were the main data collection instruments used. Second-year students (General Science, General Arts, Business, Home Economics, Visual Arts) were used since they constituted the medial levels of Senior High Education and were the most stable of all year levels in Ghanaian schools. Secondly, they were believed to have covered most of the content and had at least a year to complete their SHS program. The researchers believed that identifying their errors would help teachers implement remedial activities to help improve their linguistic performances before they complete their secondary education.⁴¹ The systematic random sampling strategy was used to select actual participants from each school. In each of the five-course areas that participated in the study, scripts written by the first, sixth, eleventh, sixteenth, twenty-first, etc students were selected from each of the classes in each school. The participants were given three essay topics; each student was expected to write between 200 and 250 words on any of these topics. The topics were:

1. *My first day at school*
2. *How I prepare my favourite dish*

³⁴ Corder, "Error Analysis, Interlanguage and Second Language Acquisition."

³⁵ Ellis, "Does Form-Focused Instruction Affect the Acquisition of Implicit Knowledge?: A Review of the Research."

³⁶ Ellis, "Does Form-Focused Instruction Affect the Acquisition of Implicit Knowledge?: A Review of the Research."

³⁷ Mohammad Hamad Al-Khreshah, "A Review Study of Error Analysis Theory," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research* 2 (2016): 49–59.

³⁸ Rod Ellis, "Analysing Learner Language" (Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁹ Ellis, "Does Form-Focused Instruction Affect the Acquisition of Implicit Knowledge?: A Review of the Research."

⁴⁰ Taro Yamane, *Statistics an Introductory Analysis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

⁴¹ Owu-Ewie and Williams, "Grammatical and Lexical Errors in Students' English Composition Writing: The Case of Three Senior High Schools (SHS) in the Central Region of Ghana."

3. *An experience I will never forget.*

These topics were selected because the researchers did not want topical knowledge to interfere with language competency. These topics had been taught by English language teachers in participating schools and were selected due to the flexibility they provided for participants to express themselves. The writing session was preceded by a discussion of the essay topics. Students were asked to write in their classrooms while English language teachers served as invigilators to minimize the tension that could influence the ability of students to write. Participants were asked to complete their writing within one hour. Participants were further given additional time (ten minutes) to read over their essays to make any corrections they could find. This ensured proper classification of deviations found in the texts as ‘mistakes’ or ‘errors’. All forms of ‘flaw(s)'/deviations allowed to remain in the texts were considered errors by the researchers since they were deemed beyond the participants’ recognition and correction. Ethical procedures were observed: informed consent, the right to withdraw, and anonymity.

Data Processing and Analysis

Error Analysis

A model adapted from Corder; Owu Ewie and Williams was used in analysing students’ errors. Each essay was examined by paying close attention to the words, sentences, meaning potentials, and the relationships between the structures in the essays. Instances of omission, addition, selection, and ordering errors were identified. Further, the errors were examined and grouped into categories. Categories were assigned codes based on the characteristics of the errors. Errors were counted to determine their frequencies. After quantifying the errors into frequencies, they were converted into percentages and displayed on frequency distribution tables. The figures were later displayed as bar and pie charts for better appreciation. This was then followed by a description and discussions of the forms of errors identified in the study.

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section involves a presentation and discussion of findings gathered from the analysis of students’ essays. The errors were categorised based on the identification and description of errors as presented in the literature.

Various forms of Lexical errors SHS students commit in their L2 Writing

Lexical Errors

A lexical error usually involves inappropriate direct translation from the learner's native language or wrong lexical items in the second language. For example, *this is the home that my father built*, and *the clock is now ten*. In this study, a total of 4818 lexical errors were identified from all three schools.

The lexical errors were examined under two main categories: Those caused by homophone problems (words that have different spellings but have almost the same pronunciation), and those caused by inappropriate or misuse of the word (semantic lexical errors). Lexical errors had different sub-categories such as wrong word choice, omission, wrong modification, collocation errors, wrong word formation, spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation. The errors included others such as inappropriate collocations that operate at the phrasal level, the researchers counted individual cases of lexical errors at the word, phrasal, and sentential levels:

Below is a summary of all lexical errors that were recorded from all three schools (A, B, and C)

School	Number of Errors	Percentage
School A	1050	21.79
School B	1944	40.35
School C	1824	37.86
Total	4818	100

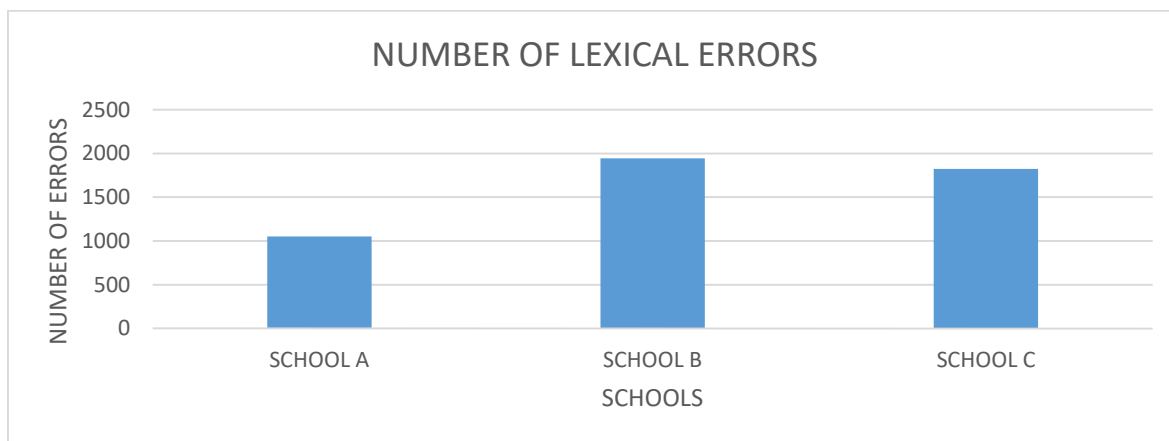


Fig. 1: Lexical Errors (A, B, and C)

Wrong Word Choice

This involves such instances when wrong or inappropriate lexical items are used by the students. This affects the meaning expressed in the entire sentence. This was seen when inappropriate words were used by students in their writing. Some students could not identify or choose the right forms to reflect their thoughts.

264 errors representing 5.47% of total lexical errors were recorded from all three schools in this study. Particular examples of wrong word choice in the texts were:

When Mr. and Mrs. **held** that their son Christopher had joined bad group...

(When Mr. and Mrs.... **heard** that their son Christopher had joined a bad group, ...)

...but I paid **death** ears to the sound

(...but I paid **deaf** ears to the sound)

On my way I saw some of my friends in a car **hearding** for the party so I sat in and we drove off.

(On my way, I saw some of my friends in a car **heading** for the party so I sat in and we drove off)

On that **faithful** 6th March.

(On that **fateful** 6th March. (fateful)

Some of the seniors came round taking our **staffs** and other things.

(Some of the seniors came round taking our **stuff** and other things)

My first day at school **thought** me a very big lesson in this life.

(My first day at school **taught** me a very big lesson in this life)

From that **they** I learnt my lesson for which I will never forget in my life till I die.

(From that **day**, I learnt my lesson...)

My father asked him what brought him **hear**...

(My father asked what brought him **here/there**)

They went home and told my dad that I spent the **hole** night with my boyfriend....

(They went home and told my Dad that I spent the **whole** night with my boyfriend...)

Most of the errors in this category were homophone-induced consisting of words with similar pronunciation but different spellings and meanings. Students had difficulties differentiating between words whose sounds seemed similar. Though these usages had little syntactic challenges, they had serious

semantic difficulties especially since they influenced the meaning potentials of the entire constructions in which they were found.

School	Number of Errors	Percentage %
School A	66	25
School B	108	40.91
School C	90	34.09
Total	264	100

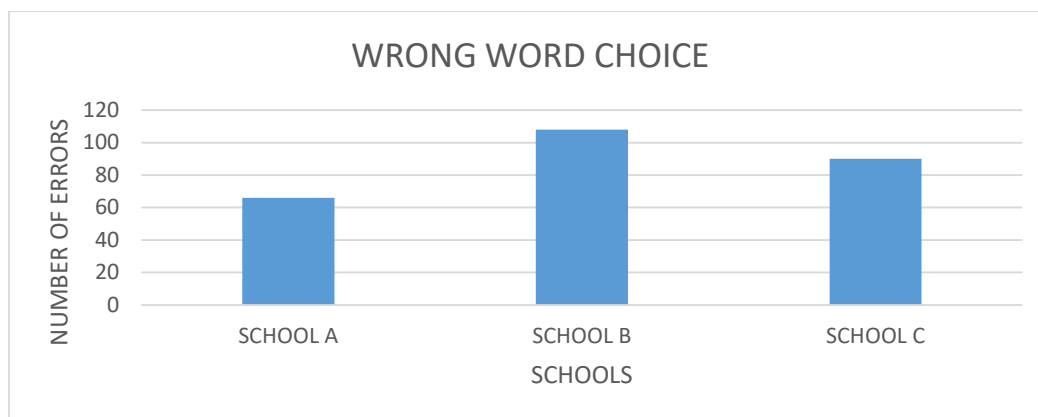


Fig. 2: Wrong Word Choice (A, B, and C)

Literal Translation Errors

Literal translation refers to situations where learners translate their language directly into English and use incorrect word choices or structures. These situations usually arise when students cannot fully appreciate possible differences in the two languages they might have come into contact with. Even though most of the errors in this category seemed to have interlingual (mother tongue) influences, they were classified as intralingual errors. Shin and Joo found that similar examples of literal translations were used by Korean learners. For instance, a student from a Korean background was likely to produce the construction, “*I ate my medicine.*” When the student meant to say that he/she *drank his medicine*. Similarly, a Turkish student might say “*Many people live this problem.*”⁴²

Seventy-eight (78) literal translation errors representing 1.62 % of lexical errors were recorded in this study. Most of these errors came in forms such as idiomatic expressions, exaggerations, etc. Below is a summary of literal translation errors that were identified in this study.

School	Number	Percentage
A	24	30.8
B	30	38.5
C	24	30.7
Total	78	100

Instances of literal translations manifested in varying forms such as exaggeration, wrong use of adverbs, double negatives, repetitions, and other forms of literal expressions that appeared to deviate from the target language. In the examples below, students used words and expressions that appealed to the senses of readers literally, most of which had close equivalences in the local dialects rather than the target language.

⁴² S Shin and Alice Joo, “Lexical Errors in Korean-Australian Heritage Learners’ Compositions,” *Journal of Korean Language Education* 26 (2015): 129–62.

Use of the words and expressions ‘fastly’, ‘shed a barrel of tears alone’, ‘decided to joy till no more joy to joy’, ‘tear’ and ‘run down a book’, all had literal insinuations attached to them.

‘I shed a barrel of tears alone’. In the statement, the student appeared to have directly borrowed the literal meaning of the statement from L1 into the L2 (English language). The use of the word ‘alone’ makes the statement literal since it renders the statement an example of exaggeration.

‘I saw my father coming with the car so I had to **fastly** prepare my stuff to meet him’. The use of the words ‘fastly’ and ‘stuff’ are examples of direct translation from the L1 to the L2. Appropriately, the student should have used the words ‘**quickly**/hurriedly and things’ to make the meaning stand out clearly in the context.

You will then tear the tomato paste and add it to the stew. The use of the word ‘tear’ is inappropriate. Tearing suggests *ripping apart*. The intended meaning of the word as used in the sentence is expected to be ‘scoop’. However, the student uses ‘tear’ which suggests a clear distortion and makes unclear the specific stage in the process of preparing the stew.

Most of these usages appeared rather embellishing and created distortions in their meanings.

Sentence Incompletion / Fragment Sentences

Errors of omission occur when lexical items expected to be present to make structures complete are omitted. Such errors affect the senses that are expressed in the constructions, especially when there is the omission of key lexical elements in the sentence. This, according to Shin and Joo happens when the missing or incomplete items, though important for complete understanding, are considered insignificant in the student’s mother tongue.⁴³ 324 errors of omission representing 6.72% of total lexical errors were identified in this study. It was observed that these lexical items varied in their forms ranging from modals, nouns, adjectives, determiners, adverbs, etc.

Examples

The old woman told Solomon that God ...bless him and Solomon responded “Amen”.

*(The old woman told Solomon that God **would / should** bless him...)*

It was on the 27th November that I

(It was on the 27th day of November that I ...)

The photos was my mother.

*(the photos were **those** of my mother..)*

In all the examples above, students failed to complete their sentences. The constructions had lapses which affected comprehension.

Table 6: Sentence Incompletion / Sentence Fragments		
School	Number of Errors	Percentage
School A	90	27.78
School B	126	38.89
School C	108	33.33
Total	324	100

⁴³ Shin and Joo, “Lexical Errors in Korean-Australian Heritage Learners’ Compositions.”

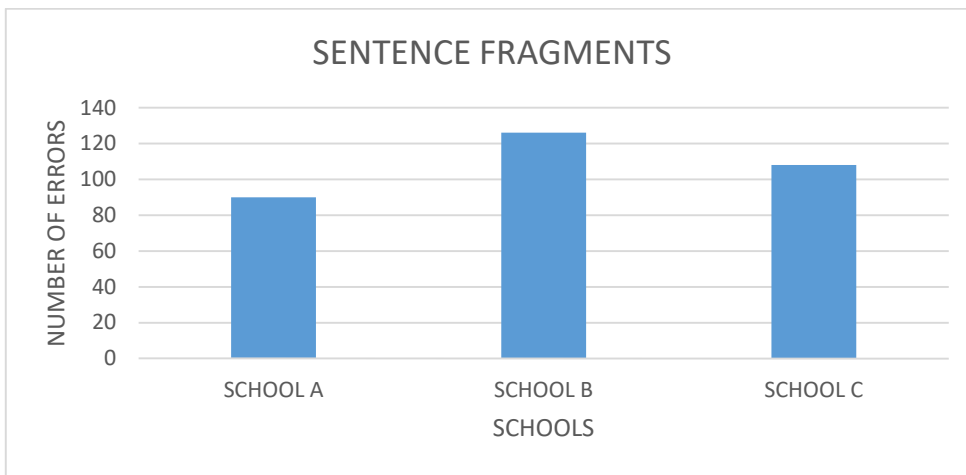


Fig. 3 – Sentence Fragments (A, B, and C)

Orthographic and Para-orthographic errors

Orthography refers to the conventional spelling system of a language. Generally, it relates to the standardized procedure of a writing system which includes spelling, pronunciation, word break, emphasis, capitalization, etc. Effective written communication depends to a large extent on the writer’s ability to faithfully engage these orthographic features to ensure greater success in communication.

However, ThambiJose asserts that most writers especially those from non-native contexts, tend to struggle with these aspects of writing: spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation in their writings, both in and out of school.⁴⁴ He further opines that orthographic errors are **cognitive errors** that consist mainly of substituting a deviant spelling for a correct one, especially when the writer does not know the appropriate form of spelling of a particular word, forgets, or misconceives it.⁴⁵

Generally, it results in a string that is phonologically identical or very similar to the correct string of letters that constitute the word. For example, ‘*prefre*’ instead of ‘*prefer*’.

Proper names, infrequent words (uncommon words), and borrowed words, the spelling of which depends upon the phonemic/phonetic representations in the language. For instance, ‘*datum*’ may be represented as ‘*datem*’, while ‘*smoked*’ may be presented as ‘*smocked*’. In this study, 708 spelling errors representing 14.7% of overall lexical errors were recorded. The following are examples of orthographic (misspelling) errors extracted from the data.

Spelling Errors

As I was there, my tummy was **chunning** and so I knew I was hungry.
 (As I was there, my tummy was **churning** and so I knew I was hungry)

Unfotunately – **unfortunately** Smocking – **smoking** Regrated - **regretted**
 Stoped – **stopped** Hapinsed – **happiness** Unknowligly – **unknowingly**

School	Number of Errors	Percentage
School A	132	18.64
School B	276	38.98
School C	300	42.37
Total	708	100

⁴⁴ Franklin S ThambiJose, “Orthographic Errors Committed by Sophomore Students: A Linguistic Analysis,” *Mediterranean Journal Os Social Sciences* 5 (2014).

⁴⁵ ThambiJose, “Orthographic Errors Committed by Sophomore Students: A Linguistic Analysis.”

This is represented graphically on a bar chart below

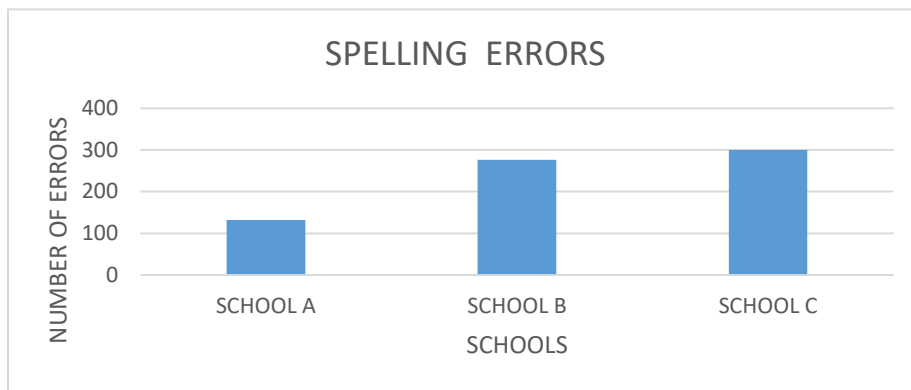


Fig. 3 Spelling Errors (A, B, and C)

As indicated earlier, besides the general description of orthography as all the effects of writing, other linguists make distinctions between orthography and para-orthography. Para-orthography has been described as the set of graphic symbols and conventions of a writing system that helps to convey linguistic messages or information more systematically and precisely than words or sentences.⁴⁶ The orthographic system deals with the linguistic system such as spelling, words, phrases, clauses, etc. It refers to the spelling or writing system of language.⁴⁷ Thus, orthographic elements are supported by para-orthographic elements such as punctuation, spacing, capitalization, font variations, and page layout to enrich communication. In this study, several instances of para-orthographic errors were also identified.

Para-orthography errors manifested mainly as punctuation and capitalisation errors. There were instances of wrongly placed punctuation marks and omission of punctuation marks. Capitalisation errors mainly manifested in improper usage. Words that did not require any form of capitalisation were capitalised, whereas those that required capitalisation were denied. In all, 1944 errors of punctuation representing 40.34%, and 858 errors of capitalisation, representing 17.8% of total lexical errors were registered in this study. Orthographic and para-orthographic errors altogether constituted the largest proportion 3510, representing 73% of lexical errors in the study.

Punctuation Errors

Punctuation refers to the use of standardized marks to separate words into phrases, clauses, and sentences.⁴⁸ Generally, punctuation serves two major purposes in constructions - to bring together and to separate them. More recently, five major purposes for punctuation have been identified: to terminate and separate, to combine and separate, to introduce, to enclose, and to indicate an omission that contributes to the internal organisation of a text. The following are examples of errors of punctuation that were gathered from the data:

Later this lockdown was converted into a nationwide lockdown...
(Later, this lockdown was converted into a nationwide lockdown...)

On his way he met an old woman who was carrying a very heavy load on her head.
(On his way, he met an old woman who was carrying a very heavy load on her head)

...and send it to the old woman house...
(...and sent it to the old woman's house...)

⁴⁶ Samjjhana Ghimire, “ Developing Writing Skills through Paraorthographic Texts ” (Department of English Education, 2015).

⁴⁷ Ghimire, “ Developing Writing Skills through Paraorthographic Texts .”

⁴⁸ Bruce Cronnell, “Punctuation and Capitalization: A Review of the Literature,” 1980.

Table 8: Punctuation Errors (A, B, And C)		
School	Number Of Errors	Percentage
School A	510	26.23
School B	690	35.49
School C	744	38.27
Total	1944	100

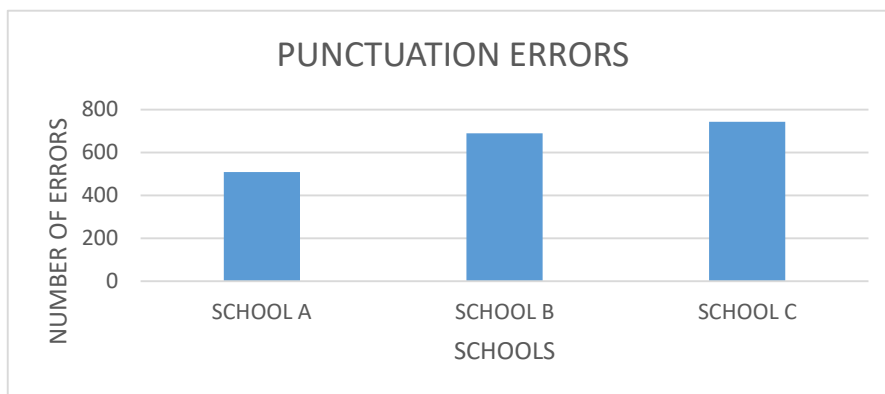


Fig. 4: Punctuation Errors (A, B, and C)

Capitalisation Errors

Cronnell describes punctuation and capitalisation as basic, surface-level features of written communication since they constitute an integral part of sentence patterns.⁴⁹ Certain rules guide proper capitalisation in every context of use in the English language.⁵⁰ Proper nouns and first words in sentences begin with capital letters. Capitalisation rules require the first letter of certain words to be capitalised, the pronoun *I*, the first word of a sentence, and proper nouns such as names should be capitalised. Generally, the names of people, places, titles of works, nationalities, languages, and institutions like companies, historical eras, days, months, holidays, initials, and acronyms should be capitalised irrespective of their positioning in constructions. However, words in the middle of sentences that do not fall within the categories described above are not expected to be capitalised.

It was observed in this study that most of the students committed varying forms of capitalisation errors. The instances varied from the combination of small and capital letters, the use of small letters when beginning sentences, capitalising in the middle of sentences, etc.

Combination of small and capital letters:

On our way to kumasi My mom called me and ask me ...
(On our way to Kumasi, my mom called and asked me ...)

Use of small letters when beginning sentences, capitalising words in the middle of sentences when words were not proper nouns, etc

'there were students performing the adowa and agbaza dance which was so entertaining'. *(students were performing the Adowa and Agbaza dance which were so entertaining).*

kwadwo Proper nouns take capital letters. *(Kwadwo)*

Other instances when capital letters were written in the middle of sentences were:

my birthday was so special Because mum took that opportunity to explain to me why they delayed.
(My birthday was so special because mum took that opportunity to explain to me why they delayed)

⁴⁹ Cronnell, "Punctuation and Capitalization: A Review of the Literature."

⁵⁰ Rachel MagShamhráin, "Between the Lines: Punctuation in English Translations of Die Marquise von O..." *Oxford German Studies* 52, no. 4 (2023): 454–80.

Wrong use of capital letters such as the letters ‘C, O, d as in DOCTors, etc)

In other instances, students spelt some proper nouns, especially, names of persons with small letters. For instance, the name ‘*solomon*’ was spelt with small letter ‘s’ several times in the following constructions.

christopher on the other hand went for robben...

(Christopher on the other hand went on a robbing spree...)

The team ‘real madrid’,

(The team ‘Real Madrid’, ...)

Below is a display of the summary of capitalisation errors identified

School	Number of Errors	Percentage
School A	66	7.69
School B	456	53.15
School C	336	39.16
Total	858	100

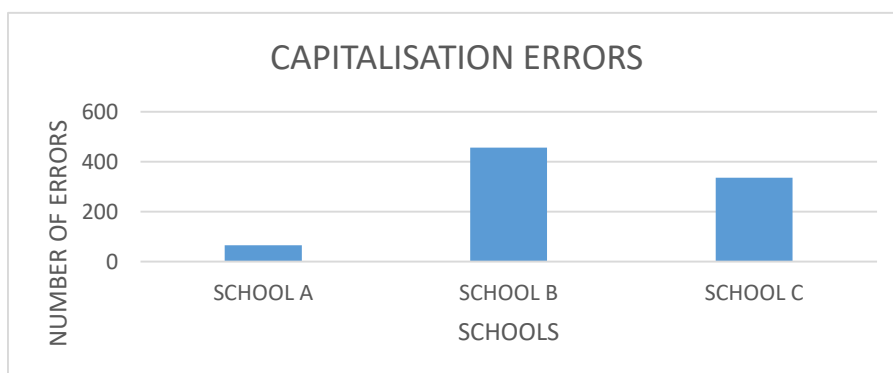


Fig. 5 Capitalisation (A, B, and C)

Modification Errors

Errors in this category were generally identified when a lexical item was needlessly used, repeated, or even paraphrased in a given context. 276 (5.7%) errors of redundantly used words or wrongly used modifications were identified in this study. In the examples that follow, students used words that were either redundant or wrongly modified.

*Though it was my first time **but** that never spoilt my mood. (use of ‘but’ in the second part of the sentence is not appropriate. This is because, ‘though’ caters for the effect altogether) addition error of conjunction. The correct form should be*

(Though it was my first time, that never spoilt my mood)

*“Mother, am no more a kid **again**”. (Use of **again** is redundant in this structure since). addition error of adverb*

(Mother, I am no more a kid)

School	Number of Errors	Percentage
School A	84	30.44
School B	96	34.78
School C	96	34.78
Total	276	100

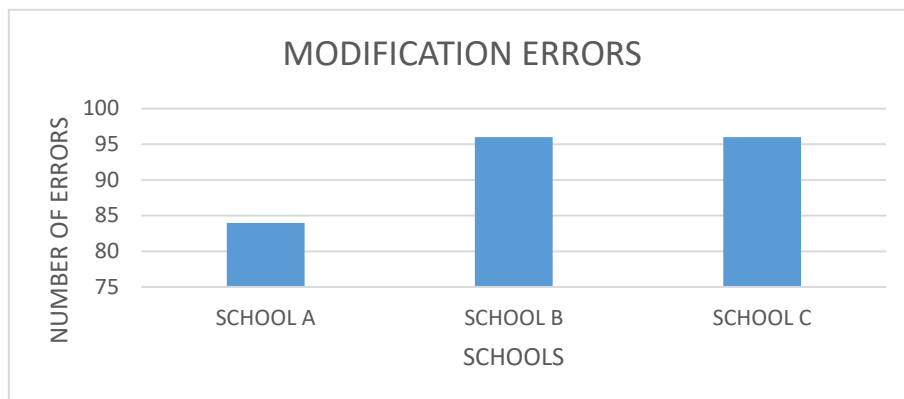


Fig. 6: Modification Errors (A, B, and C)

Collocation Errors

Collocation refers to a word or phrase frequently used with another word or phrase and sounds natural and correct for native speakers.⁵¹ Inappropriate collocations though may not be wrong, may be infelicitous. A total of 174 errors of collocation representing 3.6% were identified in this study. Examples from the data include the following:

*But this experience never get **deleted** from my memoires... (Use of **deleted** in this instance is faulty- 'removed' will be appropriate).*

*(But this experience never gets **removed** from my memories...)*

*Both teams played very **good** during... first half of the game. (very **well**- teams played collocate better with the adverbial 'well' than with the word 'good').*

*(Both teams played very **well** during... first half of the game)*

School	Number Of Errors	Percentage
School A	30	17.24
School B	78	44.83
School C	66	37.93
Total	174	100

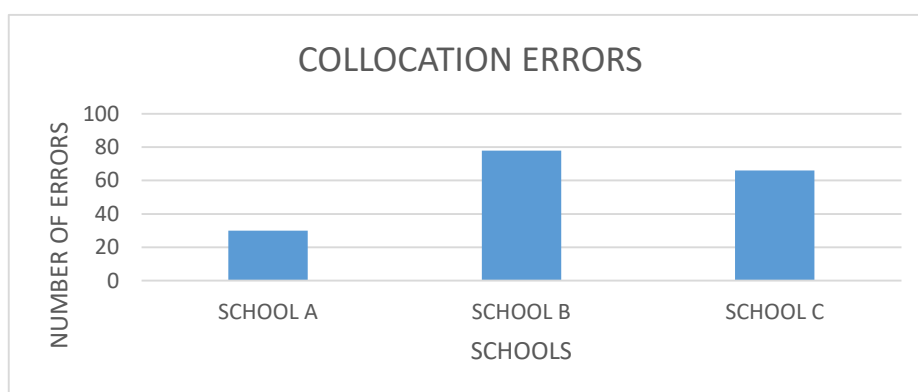


Fig. 7: Collocation Errors (A, B, and C)

Word Formation / Morphological Errors

Lexical errors in this category constituted instances when learners resorted to using words that placed them in the wrong word classes/parts of speech, and thus affected the meanings intended. An instance

⁵¹ Saengchan Hemchua and Norbert Schmitt, "An Analysis of Lexical Errors in the English Compositions of Thai Learners," *PROSPECT-ADELAIDE*- 21, no. 3 (2006): 3.

in practical usage is when a student who intends to use a noun in a sentence such as ‘apology’, ends up using the verb form of that noun such as ‘apologise’. Other examples of such errors may include the morphological realisation of certain affixes to root/base words to represent different concepts. Errors of such nature are classified as errors of word formation.

Students had difficulties determining the role morphemes play when added to certain words. Students erroneously added or deleted certain morphemes which resulted in distortions in the presentation and meanings of those words. Examples included the addition of the suffix ‘-ise, -ful’. Addition of the prefix ‘re-’, as well as deletion of the suffix ‘-ian’ and the plural marker ‘-s’, etc. A total of 192 errors, representing about 4% of total lexical errors were gathered from the study.

Specific examples from the texts include the following:

*Because of Christopher **disrespectful**, their parents Mr and Mrs Owusu **advicing** him to change over a new leaf (structure is erroneous).*

*(Because Christopher was **disrespectful**, their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Owusu **advised** him to change over a new leaf)*

*Then the family of my mother came and ask **for apologise** then we forgive (apology).*

*(Then the family of my mother came and asked **for an apology**.....)*

*...and brought some soft drinks to the tourism site which will quench our **thirsty** and **hungry**. (thirst and hunger).*

*(...and brought some soft drinks to the tourism site which will quench our **thirst** and **hunger**)*

*Since this day is a **rememberable** one because of the things I saw in the school. The addition of the prefix ‘re-’ to the form **memorable**, constitutes an error in word formation*

*(Since this day was a **memorable** one as a result of the things I saw in the school)*

Table 12: Word Formation/Morphological Errors (A, B, And C)		
School	Number of Errors	Percentage
School A	48	25
School B	84	43.75
School C	60	31.25
Total	192	100

Below is a graphical presentation of the errors on a bar chart

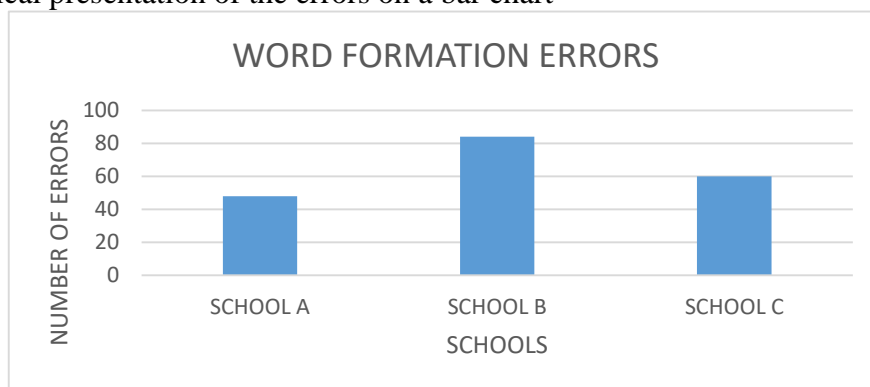


Fig. 8: Word Formation Errors (A, B, and C)

Frequency of Lexical errors committed by SHS students in selected schools

Lexical errors and their frequencies as occurred in written texts (essays) from all three schools.

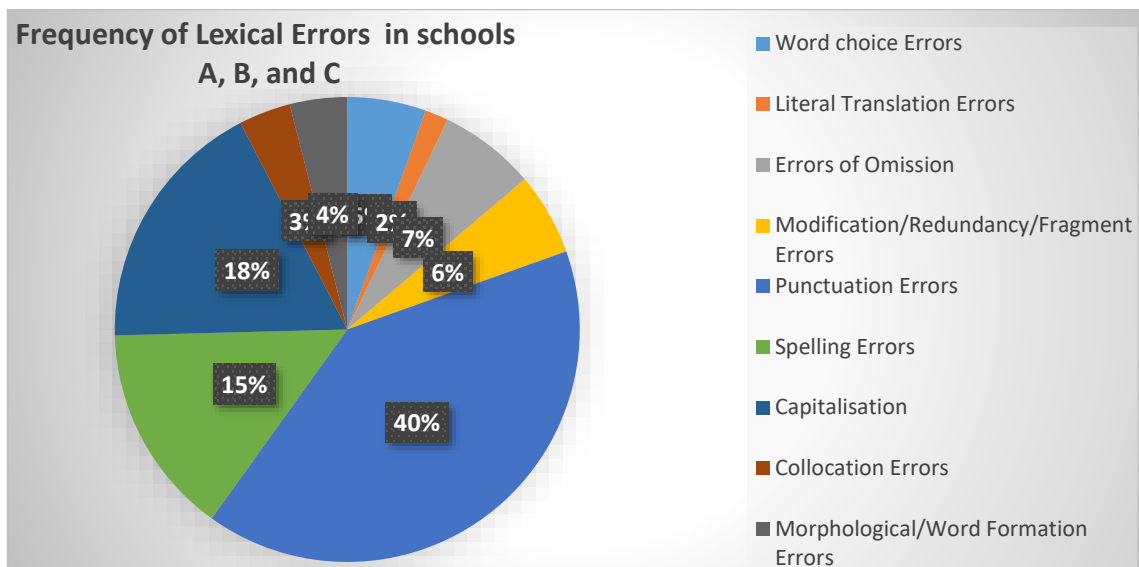


Fig. 9 - Frequency of Lexical Errors in the three schools (A, B, and C)

Out of 4818 errors classified as lexical errors, punctuation errors had the highest occurrence. This was followed by capitalisation, spelling, omission, modification/redundancy, word choice, morphology/word formation, literal translation, and collocation errors.

Communicative Impact of errors committed by students in this study

This question examined the communicative impact of the errors on their composition writing. Lexical errors were classified under two major categories: those caused by homophone problems (words with different spellings but have almost the same pronunciation), and those caused by inappropriate usage or misuse of the word (semantic lexical errors). As indicated earlier, lexical errors had different sub-categories such as wrong word choice, omission, wrong modification, collocation errors, wrong word formation, spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation. These errors manifested as over-generalisation, ignorance of rule restrictions, and incomplete application of rules creating undeveloped structures. The descriptions below indicate the effects of these errors:

When Mr. and Mrs. **held** that their son Christopher had joined bad group...
 (When Mr. and Mrs. ..., **heard** that their son Christopher had joined bad group...)

In this construction, the student employed the use of the verb ‘held’ instead of the appropriate word ‘heard’ which makes the construction unclear and confusing. The verb ‘held’ does not convey the intended meaning as intended in the construction. Rather, ‘heard’ seems appropriate since it suggests ‘hearing’ and clarifies the fact that Mr. and Mrs. ... received information about their son’s involvement with a notorious peer group, ensuring the sentence makes logical sense.

Some of the seniors came round taking our **staffs** and other things.
 (Some of the seniors came around taking our **stuff** and other things)

Similarly, the word ‘*staff*’ denotes a body of employees who work for an organisation (plural *staff*). The student’s use of the word ‘*staffs*’ is considered inappropriate since it appears to distort the intended meaning of the said construction. Thus, the use of *staffs* renders the sentence obscure and creates confusion. Communicatively, the student should have used the word ‘*stuff*’ to suggest ‘items/belongings’ to make entire construction clearer and help achieve effective communicative competence in the construction.

Additionally, the redundant use of the preposition 'to' in the construction below constitutes incorrect rephrasing which disrupts the flow and clarity of the construction.

After sometime, we went to for break to enjoy ourselves with the food and drinks we went with. ('to' is redundant) addition error of preposition

(After sometime, we went for/ on break to enjoy ourselves with the food and drinks we went with)

Removal of the preposition 'to' from the construction eliminates redundancy and corrects the awkwardly constructed sentence, thereby making the sentence easier to understand.

Again, the wrong selection of the words 'thirsty' and 'hungry' as used in the context, negatively impacts communication, rendering it ineffective:

...and brought some soft drinks to the tourism site which will quench our thirsty and hungry. (thirst and hunger).

(...and brought some soft drinks to the tourist site which will quench our thirst and hunger)

Thus, the communicative impact of the error in the phrase 'quench our thirsty and hungry' instead of 'quench our thirst and hunger' by the student is significant. It is clear from the example above that the student used adjective phrases (thirsty and hungry) when he should have used the noun forms (thirst and hunger). This situation affects the grammaticality of the construction, making it unclear and disrupting the flow of information. Use of the correct forms (thirst and hunger) in the context above, improves clarity and readability which ensures much clearer and more effective communication.

In all, lexical errors identified in the students' texts influenced communication negatively by distorting intended meaning, causing misinterpretation and ultimately resulting in confusion. Thus, lexical errors affected clarity of the message and hindered effective communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that English language teachers employ practical approaches to teaching writing to improve their students' writing competencies. It is again recommended that English language teachers set time aside to discuss commonly occurring errors with students. Additionally, English language teachers should expose their students to authentic writing experiences to increase their stock of vocabulary and to write coherently. Students should make conscious efforts to identify their weaknesses in learning and work on them. This paper investigated lexical errors in narrative essays, future studies could employ different genres to compare similar or contrastive results. Additionally, sources of the errors found in this study and their implications for English language teaching and learning could be investigated.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study looked into lexical errors committed by students in pre-tertiary school contexts in Ghana. The main objective was to investigate the nature of lexical errors, their frequencies, and the impact they have on communication. The study had the context of three Senior High schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. A total sample of 824 written essays were selected from students in three participating schools using systematic random sampling. It was found that students committed varying frequencies of lexical errors. Wrong word choice, literal translation, omission, misspelling, punctuation, capitalisation, modification, collocation, and morphological/word formation errors were recorded from students' essays. Punctuation errors occurred the most (40%) whereas literal translation had the least occurrence (2%). The study revealed that lexical errors affected clarity and impacted communication negatively by causing distortion, confusion, and misinterpretation of the intended messages.

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