



THE FACTORS AFFECTING WRITING SKILLS TO NON-DEGREE STUDENTS IN HIGHER LEARNING WITH REFERENCES FROM UNIVERSITY OF IRINGA

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Abstract

This study assesses the factors affecting certificate students at the University of Iringa in acquiring writing skills. The study employed case study design under the qualitative approach of data collection, whereby open-ended questionnaires in form of free comprehension writing were used to collect data. The purposive sampling technique helped to select ninety respondents from the communication skills class combining certificate students from community, journalism, and tourism. The content analyses was used to analyze the collected data. The finding revealed that several students were facing difficulties with writing skills caused by grammatical problems, including misuse of subject-verb agreement, tenses, prepositions, and spelling errors. Sentences' structural construction were found to be a challenge to non-degree students; hence, their essays' paragraphs were composed with rambling and fragmented sentences. For example, period was used to punctuate fragment sentences as complete sentences; semicolon was used interchangeably with the colon, and hyphen was used to punctuate even word that does not require the use of hyphen. Lastly, students faced difficulties on utilizing their cognitive and creative thinking in their writing process due to lack of English language proficiency. These problems affected the quality and credibility of students' essays. Some students' messages presented were found to be choppy, lacking proper flow of argument, leading to miscommunication between the student and reader. The ineffective written essays were found to be among the sources of lowering students' grades and performances. Generally, the study recommends that creative writing skills should be introduced as an independent course at the primary and secondary levels to enhance effective usage of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains in writing skills. This will enable learners to be equipped with writing skills from the elementary level of learning. Teachers and lecturers at all levels of learning

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should emphasize students the importance of learning grammar of the language and building habit of frequently practicing writing skills.

Keywords: Writing, writing skills, academic writing, grammar, language competence.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is among the four basic communication skills, which include speaking, reading, and listening skills. Writing is a complex and cognitively demanding practice. This is because the writer must think critically about choice of words, grammar, punctuation, and rules on types and reasons for writing a particular text. Students often face difficulties when given the assignment to write their idea, argue or justify their ideas in relation to the other scholars' ideas, and come up with argumentative logic and defensive statements. Grami (2010) explains that writing could be a difficult skill to learn or teach due to the fact that it is not a simple cognitive activity; rather, it is believed to be a complex mental production that requires careful thought, discipline, and concentration. This situation requires students to be committed to academic writing through frequent practice. Fareed, Asharaf, and Bilal (2016b) state that writing is considered an imperative skill for successful language development. Mitchal (2018) adds that writing is an incredibly complex cognitive task that demands its learner's academic history and personal interest in a particular linguistic, psychological, and cognitive phenomenon. Said (2018) is of the same opinion that writing is an important skill in the acquisition of English vocabulary and grammar that can be strengthened.

Students in higher learning face problems of effective writing skills. Thus Aliis, Haider, Aziz, and Rehman (2020) state that students face several challenges regarding English language skills, only in writing skills such as proper use of tenses and punctuation marks. Quality English writing skills play a great role in Tanzania because English is used as the medium of instruction in higher learning. Consequently, writing in English as one of their language skills enables students to share their ideas, understanding, arguments, and opinions with their lecturer through written communication. In addition, extensive and intensive comprehension writing for students in higher learning is crucial. However, in the setting of education, students are required to be equipped with competence and good writing skills proficiency in order to have successful students with good

performance. Students need to have an attitude about writing habits for their better achievement. Heshemian and Heidan (2013) argue that learning motivation is highly associated with students' good writing.

In addition, intrinsic motivation achieves better writing production. Ben and Borsali (2018) pointed out ten purposes of writing as follows: one, to express opinion; two, to describe places, things, or people; three, to arouse thinking and reflection; four, for entertainment; five, to convey information to readers; six, to help with analysis like cause and effects, challenges, or synthesis; seven, to convince readers; eight, to convince readers about opinions and point out their views; nine, to evaluate things; and ten, to obtain solutions for problems. Students do face challenges in writing because of poor understanding and application of proper English language rules. As such, they fail their exams or to express and defend their argument to their readers (Ben and Borsali, 2018). These reasons cause students fail to understand the appropriate rules of combining words to phrase sentences into comprehensive, and adequately developed paragraphs. Sugumlu (2020) students need to adhere to the process of writing, namely gathering information about the topic given by their instructor and drafting which help them to have a free presentation of ideas and knowledge they have read from different sources. The next step is to assess their draft, where they can detect different mistakes and errors. Finally, it is to make corrections, especially on lexical errors, syntactic errors, punctuation, and other grammatical errors. Thus Alfaki (2015) contended that the process of writing is generally a complex process where students need to master the usage of grammar, critical thinking, and elements of judgment. Al-hairly (2013) supports that most challenges encouraged by students in writing include, but are not limited to, grammatical devices, inappropriate word choice, incorrect spelling, and punctuation marks. Thus, learning how to write does not come instantly, but it is learned with effort and practice (Al-Hair, 2013). This reveals the importance of instructors assisting students during learning how to write academically.

Statement of the Problem

Writing skills in English are among four communication skills that have been taught and practiced at all levels of learning in the Tanzanian education system. The students have been taught and given several practices on improving their mastery of language into proper written

orthography of the English language. However, writing skills have been seen to be a challenge compared to other language skills for students who learn writing skills in English. This paper intended to investigate the problems that cause students to face writing problems in non-degree programs in higher learning despite the effort and initiatives taken by instructors during the learning process for quality and credible written texts.

Specific Objective

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i) To examine the causes of grammatical writing skills problems among certificate students in higher learning institutions
- ii) To investigate the effects of grammatical writing skills problems among certificate students in higher learning institutions

Rationale

This study will enable learners to recognize the causes of grammatical writing skills problems and their impacts on their writing skills practices. Also, the study will help the learners to improve writing problems and their effects. Furthermore, the finding will enable the institution to initiate introduce courses on writing skills in order to minimize and make students equipped with competence in writing. Moreover, this study aimed at assisting lecturers to understand the causes of students' difficulties in writing so they can exercise numerous strategies to support students in improving writing skills besides relying only on the content present in improperly written assignments, essays, or comprehension.

Literature review

Writing skills have been given great emphasis at all levels of learning in the Tanzanian education curriculum. Since it is viewed as among the most vital forms of education skills for reflection of a student's level of competence in writing through developing concepts and logical thinking in writing systems.

Despite this emphasis on the role of effective writing in different reviewed literature, it shows that students usually face difficulties in quality writing once attempting assignments or presenting the conceptualized ideas in a written system. Handayo (2012) studies Indonesian students' difficulties in

writing and found that students were burdened with social-cognitive and psychologically charged tasks. The students were lacking critical thinking, authorial voice, self-voice, and expert voice; also, the linguistic source and feedback were subjected to plagiarism. Abdullah (2015) found that Malaysian students studying in Austria had difficulties in adjusting to the new learning culture.

Lamprey and Atta (2013) found in their studies that Ghanaian postgraduate students had problems with citation of references in their academic writing. Yuen *et al.* (2015) investigated the academic writing difficulties of Iranian postgraduate students studying in Malaysia and found that they had writing challenges due to incompetence in the English language since Arabic was used in their daily lives while English was used as the medium of instruction only. This suggests that there is a close relationship between a student's mastery of a certain language and competence in writing in that particular language. For that case, Ansari (2012) mentioned that the EFL students' fairness in writing in a second language was caused by a variety of factors, such as second language instruction, lack of motivation from the first language to the second language, and phonological variability and anxiety. The students were found overwhelmed when asked to write on certain topics because they do not know how to start generating new ideas and organizing those ideas into well-understood paragraphs. Huwari, Al-Hasawneh (2013) explored the reason behind the weakness of writing among year one students at Taibah University and realized that students were faced with grammatical weakness, insufficient knowledge and understanding of writing rules, less practice, and educational background.

The same observation was made by Nacra (2010), who conducted a study at Batna University on the students' writing performance, where the result revealed that the majority of the students had poor writing skills because teachers assumed that the effect of the first language and lack of reading motivation and practices resulted in the students' poor performance in writing. The author added that difficulties occurred at the level of sentence, paragraph, and essay writing. Samina, Naeem, Hafiz, and Tariq (2021) declared writing an important art for students' successful academic attainment. However, students' writing problems in the English language have become a major problem for English teachers and learners in

elementary schools, particularly in writing accurate paragraphs and using tenses, grammar, syntax, and sufficient vocabularies (Samina *et* 2021).

Makdad (2019) examines the English academic writing problems faced by Arabic international students, and the results recommend that students tend to perceive all characteristics of academic writing to be difficult. Among the reasons faced by the learner were the student's poor identification of the difference between academic and general English writing, lack of background knowledge about writing academically, and problems in different linguistic elements (Makdad, 2019). Althobaiti & Elyas (2019) support that spelling is a major problem for the learners of a second language. Thus, spelling is a difficult task for Afghan students. In addition, Abdulkareem (2013) explains that one of the biggest problems is the spelling difficulties that most of the Arab students faced when there are interferences of native language, writing their native language words' spelling in a word, as well as the internalized Arabic language system of their language.

Language proficiency and motivation in learning how to write effectively are very virtuous, as Al Fadda (2012) explains that problems in writing academically are due to linguistic deficiency and students' attitude towards academic writing since they simply approach it with "negativities and misconceptions. Similarly, Al Badi (2015) investigates the possible factors that might result in poor academic writing by students who do library research projects, whereby the findings revealed that paraphrasing, referencing, and citations were reported to be the least problematic, which is contrary to Abdulkareem (2013), who asserts that students have problems in paraphrasing as their language is not proficient enough for such a technique.

Methodology

The study area

The study was conducted at Iringa University, which is located in the Iringa region in the Southern Highlands zone of Tanzania. The area was selected because the university offers both non-degree, undergraduate, and master's programs. Second, some of the students during the subject of communication skills, which is cross-cutting to all students at the university level, demonstrated features of writing problems from their assigned assignments. This influenced the researcher to select this certificate student

in order to understand in detail why these students face difficulties with writing skills despite being taught writing skills in primary, secondary, and higher learning.

Research approach sample size and sampling techniques

This study employed a case study design and qualitative approach to examine the detailed writing problems and their effects on certificate students in higher learning. The data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaires were designed in the form of free assignment writing whereby each student was given the freedom to choose a topic of interest and write an essay of two to three pages within one hour. The mode of data collected first enabled students to have the freedom to choose and write comfortably on the topic chosen since it was of interest to them. Second, it helped the researcher to collect the target data easier through reading students' essays and identifying common writing difficulties that students faced. A total of ninety students (90) were purposively selected from the classes of certificate in community development, tourism, and journalism who were attending the same class of communication skills.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed through a content analysis model whereby gathered and grouped according to subthemes which the researcher intended to find the common writing problems facing certificate students. The subthemes included linguistic problems, which were based on problems of grammar, subject-verb agreement problems, improper use of tense and pronouns, rambling sentences and punctuation mark application, fragment sentences, argument building, and critical thinking. Arguments were analyzed considering the student's ability to create points and discuss relevant examples in a logical manner of present events.

Presentation of Findings

Causes of grammatical writing skills problems

The writer categorized linguistic problems into three categories, namely grammar problems, writing sentence structure problems, and logical and critical thinking problems. These problems were identified from the essay written by the students. The following subsections represent and discuss

these categories of problems with the relevant evidence obtained from students' essays.

There are several grammatical problems that students face while practicing writing skills. These problems contribute to inefficient or poor performance of the students in the learning process due to poor presentation of their arguments, ideas, and logic through writing. Considering the multiple grammatical issues that cause writing to be difficult, this paper has analyzed only four aspects from student essays, as grammatical issues hinder effective writing skills. These aspects were subject-verb agreement, tenses, sentence construction, and use of punctuation. The following subsections present findings of each linguistic problem on how it is a barrier to effective writing skills for certificate students as follows:

Subject verb agreement

The study findings revealed that some of the students have a problem using indefinite pronouns anybody, everybody, somebody, nobody, none, everything, something, and anything in accordance with the agreement of singular or plural form. These problems were found in the essay written by one student about the 'Dangerous Snake. During analysis of that essay, it was found that the students used plural verbs where the sentence required a singular verb so as to agree with the indefinite pronouns which always takes singular form. For example, the following findings from sampled sentences written by the students in their essays show evidence of these challenges.

(a) "...somebody have killed the snake and leave it on the road.....".[×]

(b) "... Somebody has killed the snake and leave it on the road...."[√]

The verb in (a) is in plural form, while the indefinite pronoun has the total character of singular. The indefinite pronoun represents the third person singular; for that matter, it always agrees with the verb referring to the third person in singular mode. Some of the students were found mixing the use of these indefinite pronouns. For instance, the following extract was taken from one of those essays and analyzed:

"...everyone at the University of Iringa is required to observe the mission and vision of the university. Adhering to these will enable students to grow academically with high moral value and integrity. Everyone is required to

study in a team so as to meet his or her goal of being at the University of Iringa.....”

In the first place, the student used the indefinite pronoun correctly by taking a singular verb, contrary to the second time of use the student misused it when the verbs were in plural. It seems the student is not sure on the proper application of indefinite pronouns. What is actually applied is guessting. The other thing observed is the inability of the student to understand subject-verb agreement and how the base verb behaves as singular or plural once used in a given sentence or paragraph

Another area that was found to have problem was the use of a singular subject and singular verb. The findings show that students were confusing the formation of plurals in noun cases and verbs. The following sentences were taken as samples from the findings.

(a₁) “Most workers at the University of Iringa keeps the environment clean all the time.....”[x]

(a₂) “Most workers at the University of Iringa keep the environment clean all the time.....”[√]

From the findings above, show how students face difficulties on how to determine the function of a verb in the sentence if it agrees with the subject and other words in the sentence. For example the present tense ends with [-s] and [-es] used in the verb which is always in a singular form for the third person singular only, while in the first and second person, the base verb remains without taking an ending suffix. Referring to the sentence above, the student applied the rules used in forming simple plurals in nouns by adding [s] at the end of a given noun, which is contrary to the situation of subject-verb agreement where the insertion of [s] [-es] means the verb is singular in the third person. Since the word ‘workers’ was in plural form, for that matter, the verb was to be in plural ‘keep’, and not ‘keeps.’ Aniyanti and Fitriani (2017) support that grammatical cohesion and coherence terms are the major difficulties faced by students, besides paragraph organization, diction, and vocabulary.

In addition, the study observed that students face difficulties in differentiating the use of collective nouns, particularly when used as singular or plural in a sentence where it should justify its proper use in the context of subject-verb agreement. Several students in their essay were

found mixing singular with plural during application of collective nouns. The extracted data below from students' essays show evidence on how students face problems.

(c₁) ".....the community were working together to mobilize resources for the future development of their village....." [√]

(c₂) "..... the community win its goal every time due to effective cooperation of community members.(×) instead of ;

(c₃) "..the community wins its goal every time due to effective cooperation of community members ..." [√]

(d₁) ".....the team work hard all the time without unnecessary complain among themselves....." [√]

(d₂) "..... the team was work hard to rescue the environmental calamity facing their village....."[X] instead of;

(d₃) "..... the team were working hard to rescue the environmental calamity facing their village....." [√]

Following the finding presented in the sentences above, such as in extract (c₂), it presents the picture that community operates as a single unity, but the student was unable to recognize the actual function of the collective noun community in the entire sentence as singular, meaning referring to each member in the community. This might be influenced by the general rule that all collective nouns take singular form in subject-verb agreement; otherwise, the meaning of such collective nouns is clearly understood, and emphasizing the plural function will affect the verb to be in plural form. The same observation was identified: [d₂] was the collective noun "team" used, reflecting individual teams; thus, the controlling verb must operate in plural form, presenting that there was more than one team that was one word.

Improper use of tense

According to students' responses, it was found that students have problems using simple tense, past tense, and perfect tense accordingly. For example, that data below was extracted from one of the student's essays

a) Idd Amin have fought with Tanzania in 1979.....' (Past perfect tense) [x]

b) '.....Idd Amin fought with Tanzania in 1979.....) (Past tense) [v]

The verb underlined in the sentence (a) above is in the past perfect tense. Following the paragraph in which it was used, its function was to present that Tanzania had a war with Uganda, and the war was totally completed in the past and does not exist and not just completed in the past, as the sentence shows. The student was supposed to write, 'Idi Amin fought with Tanzania in 1979.....' Another observation was realized in the student's essay, where present *continuous* tense was used instead of *present tense* as follows. Findings extracted from students below show

'..... I am missing my mother' (Present continuous tense) instead of '..... I miss my mother' (Present tense).

Despite the student's knowledge and skills on present, past, present or past continuous tenses, it was observed that students had problems confusing the proper application of perfect tenses. These may be caused by different factors, such as students' English language background, influences of mother tongues, English tutors' teaching methods, and students' own attitudes towards learning and use of the English language.

Improper use of prepositions

The findings from students' essays evidenced that preposition use was among the linguistic aspects that hindered the accuracy of students' essay writing. For example, the problem below represents some of the improper use of prepositions revealed in the different essays.

"..... many people were not awareness and educated for effect and negative impact of drug abuse..."

The statement had some contradiction as follows;

- 1) The student used preposition for in steady of article "the effect of,," rather the student wrote '..... for effect and negative...'
- 2) The article the is used to justify that the effect of drug abuse use is well known in the community. The preposition "for" used to show how long or during of time has been taking by somebody; for example "We have been in Zanzibar for three years"
- 3) The student faced the problem of understanding the meaning of the word that carries the key concept words. For example, the student was supposed to choose the use of the border term effect, which

combines both negative and positive senses when doing something. The student was obligated to be straight about the use of the word **negative** since the topic was against the use of drug abuse. The action of using the two terms together distorted the quality and accuracy of the essay due to the misapplication of these words.

Spelling error

The result found that some of the students had problems spelling some of the words. The table below shows a list of words with spelling errors retrieved from the manuscript essays written by students were as follows:

s/n	Misspelled word	correct spelling
1	Manlnitrutions	Malnutrition
2	Correspondency	Correspondence
3	Facuty	Faculty
4	Enviromental	Environmental
5	Necessary	Necessary
6	Instition	Institutions

The assessed essay featured misspelling errors, which were caused by the student's incompetence or lack of English grammar knowledge on how words are written. Considering the national language policy says English will be used as a second language in our country and medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher learning.

Sentence structural problems

The study found that several students were unaware of proper rules of sentence construction and its function. Students faced difficulties in the construction of sentences, especially simple sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences, which resulted in the construction of rambling and fragmented sentences in their written essays. These problems will be analyzed in the following subsections.

Rambling sentences

The rambling sentence is commonly known as a long, constructed sentence without punctuation marks. This form of sentence consists of several independent clauses, which causes difficulties in grasping the main message of the given paragraph and sounds choppy. The rambling sentence occurs due to the student's lack of grammar rules of writing. The student's

text shows how simple and compound sentences turned into rambling sentences due to improper punctuation of sentence

Extract text from student's work

*"Lack of protection for examples(,)where ~~there~~ live ~~what they~~ sat; ~~about~~ their health also no one ~~is~~ care about ~~them~~ sometimes season of the year is very dangerous to their life ~~for example~~ rain water ~~which~~ can destroy a lot of thing like road, brigs house and sometimes the this may cause them to sleep near the road,(;) also ~~about~~ ~~their health~~ no one can provide any **protection** avoid disease and some people can rape them(.)"*

Rephrased sentence

"There is a lack of protection for people living in vulnerable conditions. For example, if one cares about their health, certain seasons of the year can be very dangerous for their lives. Rainwater can destroy many things, such as bridges and houses, which may force them to sleep near the road. Additionally, there is no one to provide protection against diseases, and some individuals may be at risk of being raped."

Following the original extract and the rephrased extract sentences, the researcher observed the following issues from students' essays:

- i) The student had a problem using punctuation, for instance, (,) and), as shown in the rephrased sentence.
- ii) The student's essay had consisted of redundant words such as "where...," "what they...," "them...," "for example...," and "about their health..."
- iii) The lack of proper statement punctuations and sentence structure makes it difficult for readers to follow the ideas. This can result in a loss of the main point, making it hard for leaders to grasp the overall message.
- iv) The unclear phrasing and incorrect grammar can lead to misunderstanding the intended message. For example, phrases like "Where there live what they sat" are confusing and may leave leaders unsure about what is being communicated.

Fragment sentences

The Factors Affecting Writing Skills to non-degree students in Higher Learning with references from University of Iringa

The findings from students revealed that some students had problems with composing complete, meaningful sentences. Reread the essay and reread the characteristics of fragment sentences. In this study, phrases, dependents, and subordinate clauses were termed "argument sentences since they are incomplete sentences. Some of the students displayed features of incomplete sentences, which were having information with understandable meaning but lacking the rule of proper sentence construction. For example, the following fragment sentences punctuated with a period (.) were extracted from students' essays where phrases and clauses used at the beginning of paragraphs for the purpose of introducing main points function as complete sentences. Refer to the extract below.

s/n	Extracted sample sentences	Rephrased sentences
1	'To raise the standard of living at the family. <i>Income generating activities help to raise the standard of living of women in rural areas.....'</i>	'To raise the standard of living for the family, income generating activities help to raise the standard of living of women in rural areas.....'
2	Source of income. <i>Beekeeping serves as the source of income to most of the beekeepers</i>	Beekeeping serves as the source of income for most beekeepers
3	Build social interactions. <i>The emergence of sciences and technology has enabled to Build social interactions which has increased accessibility to communication.....'</i>	The emergence of science and technology has enabled the building of social interaction which have increased accessibility to communication

The three extracts above express that some students lacked knowledge on the characteristics of a complete sentence. The complete sentence possesses a subject and predicate. These fragment sentences were required punctuated as shown in rephrased text alternatives in order to become complete and thoughtful sentences. Actually, these fragment sentences carried different functions in the entire sentence according to functions and types of phrases, as justified below.

s/n	Fragment(phrase)	Type
1	To raise the standard of living at (for) the family	Infinitive Phrase
2	Source of income	Noun Phrase
3	Build social interactions	Verb Phrase
4	Improve country's economic growth.	Verbal phrase

Improper use of punctuation marks

The punctuation marks are among the very important aspects of essay writing, since they control the quality of the essay in terms of making the paragraph meaningful and readable. In the essay written by the certificate students, it was revealed that some of the students were facing difficulties in the application of these punctuation marks. Some of the misused punctuations were the hyphen, semicolon, comma, period, and possessive cases.

The use of semicolon (;) instead of colon

The findings from the study show that several students interchanged the use of colons and semicolons in their sentences. The semicolon is used in the sentence to join two related independent clauses. For example, *Amina finished her homework; but Regina did not finish one* (x). The semicolon is wrongly used because the sentence with the coordinating conjunction "but" cannot be punctuated with a semicolon but rather with a comma (,) or omit the conjunction *but*, as it reads in the following revisited statement. *Amina finished her homework: Regina did not finish on time.* (v). The colons are used with complete sentences for the purpose of introducing explanations and joining ideas together. As opposed to a semicolon, which joins two related sentences. The finding observed that some students misused these two punctuation marks as shown in the extracted text below:

- a) *"The student need to work on three assignment; finding research tittle, writing concept not and preparing research proposal" (x).*
- b) *"The student need to work on three assignment: finding research tittle: writing concept note and preparing research proposal" (v)*

The sentence was wrongly punctuated with a *semicolon* since the following explanations in the sentence were not independent clauses followed by conjunctions that used to join the phrases in which the semicolons are applied. Thus the sentence was supposed to be written and punctuated by *a colon*, as shown in the re-corrected sentences (b) above

The use of a period (.) after a sentence fragment

The period always is placed at the end of a complete sentence and followed by a capital letter. The study data found that even fragment sentences were ended with periods, as presented in some of the sample data extracted from students' essays.

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s/n	Text extracted from student's essay	Rephrased text
1	<i>The civil and political right. Right to life liberty. (x)</i>	<i>The civil and political rights include the right to life and liberty</i>
2	<i>The civil and political right are the life to liberty of any nation. (√X)</i>	<i>The civil and political right are essential to the life and liberty of any nation</i>
3	<i>Incapacitation. The death penalty ensures that a convicted individual.....(x)</i>	<i>Incapacitation: The death penalty ensures that a convicted individual is permanent removed from society</i>
4	<i>Dignity and equality. In recognition of the inherent(x)</i>	<i>Dignity and equality: In recognition of the inherent work of all individuals</i>

The study found that several students introduced in point as a complete statement, while the main point was written in the form of a dependent clause that does not qualify to be termed a sentence, for example. *Dignity and equality. In recognition of the inherent personal, be respected by everyone. Everyone.* Sentence or topic: the paragraph was written in splinter contrary to the rules of writing skills. The same observation was made in *"The civil and political rights are the lifeblood of liberty of any nation." n.* These statements are wrongly punctuated with grammatical problems. The statement sounds to be a complete statement; however, it consists of grammatical cases of subject-verb agreement that cause the sentence to be a fragment lacking the entire meaning. For example, the civil and political right is singular; for that matter, the statement was to be *"The civil and political rights are the life to liberty of any nation."* Writing requires student mastery of practicing language in morphology, syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics. The combinations of linguistic aspects in a given language enable students' production of well-comprehended and structured essays.

Misuse of hyphen (-)

The findings also revealed that some of the students were unfamiliar with the proper application of hyphens. The hyphen punctuation usually is used to separate two compound words like "classroom," "minibus, and lunchbox" and not words like "unhappy. Unfortunately, the study found that the student's sentences that appeared at the end of the sheet were separated by hyphens, as shown in the extracted sample text from the student's essay.

Tanzania got her independence in 1961 from the British colony. After indepen-

nt Julius Kambarage Nyerere was selected to be the first President. President J.K.- Nyerere believed on self-reliance. He managed to unite the 120 tribes through the- Kiswahili Language. The was one of the greatest success of our president...

The result in the extract above revealed that the word *independent* was written as a compound word separated by a hyphen. The student wrote that because of a lack of space to insert the remaining spelling of the word independent," he decided to insert a hyphen to show continuation of the work. This caused to have unknown terms like 'independe- and -'nt.' President J.K.- Nyerere's name cannot be separated by a hyphen, as the student did with President J.K.- Nyerere. The hyphen in the name of J.K. Nyerere should be removed since it is unnecessary. Refer to the corrected, rephrased text below.

Tanzania gained independence from the British colonial rule in 1961. Afterward Julia Kambarage Nyerere was selected as the first president. President J.K. Nyerere believed in self-reliance. And successfully united the 120 tribes through the Kiswahili language. This was one of the greatest successes of this presidency.

Logical and Critical thinking in writing

Writing needs idea conceptualization of abstract cognitive thinking, organization into a logical manner, and then presentation in meaningful written form. The study analyzed the essay written by students based on how students were able to build arguments and present them in writing. The aim was to assess the student's mastery of writing skills.

The study analyzed students' ability to build arguments, follow the logic of events, and present relevant examples and how to criticize or synthesize their arguments. The result showed that several students had problems building arguments and examples and defending them with evidence in their essays. The study found that one of the students wrote about 'poverty in Tanzania' as a narrative event but no detailed example, like which region or district her people live under poverty live. The student failed even to cite the government reports on the status of the rate of poverty.

Another problem was how to connect one point and another. The main point was introduced without adequate development of the opening remark sentence; consequently, the main point carried the characteristic of

fragment sentences since a dependent sentence can be followed by a full stop. For instance, the extract below represents how arguments were introduced and discussed.

Extracted text from student's essay

Poor faming system. Many Tanzanian are poor because of poor faming system. This causes them to practice small scale of agriculture and harvoest only food for survoival and not surplus for business, the poor tools of faming does not support good production of their productions. Image the family need money to educate their children and food.

Rephrased paragraph

Many Tanzanians are poor because of inadequate farming systems. This situation forces them to practice small-scale agriculture, resulting in harvests that provide only enough food for survival and not a surplus for business. The poor tools of farming do not support good production of their crops. Imagine a family that needs money to educate their children and provide food.

From the extract above, the student's paragraph lacks information like what kind of tools are used for agriculture and what kind of seed the question of fertilizer is at least to support why the poor farming system exists. A student had to argue the present rate of poverty since there is a national database on this. Also, the student failed to describe the amount of food produced. This might be caused by insufficient reading knowledge of different sources and critical thinking on why poverty in Tanzania or challenges of agriculture. Another observation was made on the presentation of the main point, which was written in the form of a fragment statement as '**poor farming system.**' This phrase raises a number of general questions for a reader, such as to whom, where, and how. The second sentence in the paragraph addresses complete meaning since the sentence is a contraction following grammatical and syntactical rules of sentence formation, which require a very complete sentence to have a subject and predicate part.

The analysis realized that despite students being provided with free choice of topic to write and present their ideas and arguments, some of the students were faced with the problems of critical thinking and argumentation in writing. The majority of the students were faced with the problems of coherence, inadequate development of their paragraph, and

how to introduce a topic sentence in the entire paragraph. This caused the majority of the students to present topic sentences in the form of fragments followed by a full stop, semicolon, or colon, which were having sense but not presenting the complete required meaning according to the rules of sentence construction. For instance, the following part of the paragraph extracted from one of the students shows how new paragraphs were introduced:

Extracted paragraph

Pest and disease; this problem faced agriculture system in Tanzania, have faced by Pest and diseases in a crops because of climate changes.....

Rephrased paragraph

Pests and diseases poses play a significant challenges to the agricultural system in Tanzania, particularly in crop affected by climate change

The student joined the fragment sentence with a semicolon and started with a capital letter, which is incorrect according to the use of punctuation marks (for example, semicolons). The semicolon in the sentence has a function of joining two related independent clauses that present or carry the same topic or meaning. Actually, connecting independent clauses should start with a small letter. *Pest and disease: this problem faced the agricultural system in Tanzania...* Also, the words “*pest and disease*” are a phrase that does not qualify to be considered an independent clause. The statements were logically improperly punctuated, presented, justified, and analyzed due to insufficient student’s language knowledge, skills, and competence in presenting the argument properly in written form.

Extracted Paragraph

Lack of awareness and education; Due to lack of awareness on use of drug abuse, lead someone using drug abuses and cause many people to loss their health .The people were not awareness and educated for effect and negative impact of drug abuse and lead people to loss manpower in country.....

Rephrased paragraph

A lack of awareness and education about the dangers of drug abuse leads many individuals to misuse drugs, resulting in significant health problems. Many people are unaware of the negative impacts of drug abuse, which can ultimately lead to

loss of manpower in a country. To address this issue, it is crucial to implement educational programs that inform the public about the risks associated with drug use and promote lifestyle choices.

The extracted paragraph above has several grammatical issues that require polishing so that the student's essay is easily understood by the readers. First, the main topic sentence was introduced as independent, but in reality it is the dependent clause or fragment *"lack of awareness and education."* The writer could have introduced the topic sentence, maybe by saying, *"A lack of awareness and education about the dangers of drug abuse leads many individuals to misuse drugs, resulting in significant health problems.* Generally, the paragraph lacked sufficient clarity, coherence, and logical structure on the cause-and-effect relationship. The rephrased paragraph features elements of a well-developed paragraph.

Students faced difficulties in forming arguments in a logical manner; as a result, they were forced to construct sentences that were too long with several unnecessary words. For example, one of the students wrote the following sentences:

"Also source of tourism; Due to different environment, region to get different people from another place example. The people from Niger to Uganda, Tanzania to Kenya and other"

Typically, the structure of the sentence above shows the features of a complex statement, which makes it hard to understand the argument. The sentence requires more clarity, organization, and presentation of the message, which can facilitate easier comprehension of ideas by the reader. The phrase *"also source of tourism..."* is unclear since it lacks context where tourism is practiced. Also, the application of the example *"people from Niger to Uganda, Tanzania to Kenya, and others..."* The statement was poorly structured and introduced, thus making it difficult to grasp the expected meaning. It could be better if the examples were presented like *"people from Niger, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and others..."* The lecturer who marks students' work like this has a great possibility of not understanding the students' logical flow of ideas if he/she does not take time to read the whole paragraph and try to conceptualize the student's idea. The phrase *"Due to different environment, region to get different people from another place example"* lacks a direct expression of the message between people from

different regions because the narration does not indicate how those differences relate to tourism or influence tourism patterns.

Effective of writing difficulties

This paper found that students have ideas on what they should write, but language incompetence affected their effective writing skills. The English language in Tanzania serves as both a foreign and second language. The observation revealed that most of the certificate students were the second learners of the English language from different learning environments. Their background in the English language affected a lot their competence in mastering English writing skills. The essay showed students lack of vocabulary banks, being unfamiliar with some terms, especially spelling; thus, the word "*faculty*" was found miswritten as *facuty*. This aspect and other factors have hindered certificate students' ability to write effectively. However, some students' essays showed students' struggles to write their thoughts, which, on the side, led to incorrectly constructed sentences and essay paragraphs with choppy meaning. The extract below presents samples of students' efforts to write, but due to language proficiency problems, the essay produced was affected by a number of grammatical challenges.

Extracted text from student essay

Speaking skills, to journalist help to presentation for information to audience, presenting plan using language, word, new information from speakers for example like speaking skills in the social media in a very good manner language information , radio television and all publicity sources and technology communication.

Rephrased text

Speaking skills help journalists to present information to their audience using well-planned language. Effective speaking skills can be revealed in social media, where the journalist practices broadcasting in radio, television, and media of communication.

Actually, the paragraph above shows students' effects on cognitive thinking and generating ideas, but the problem raised during the presentation of abstract ideas into concrete written form it requires a combination of English rules applications like tense, punctuation, word classes, writing procedures, and other grammatical functions during writing.

Students' incompetence in writing skills affects their confidence in the learning process. Psychologically, students feel uncomfortable if they do not reach the target of learning, score low marks, and are corrected all the time. It reaches a time when some of these students develop an inferiority complex against those who are good at writing skills. For example, a student who wrote the texts (a) below being asked to read before other students may feel an inferiority complex since some students may laugh or joke at him or her because of the poorly written grammar.

- a) *"Lack of protection for examples, where there live what they sat; about their health also no one is care about them sometimes season of the year is very dangerous to their life." (Grammatical error)*
- b) *There is a lack of protection for people living in vulnerable conditions. For example, if one cares about their health, certain seasons of the year can be very dangerous for their lives." (Corrected)*

Another effect that may arise from the same text above is decreasing clarity and accuracy of the message. The lack of proper punctuation and sentence completeness makes it difficult for the lecturer to follow the flow of ideas during marking the assignment. This may result in a hard situation for the lecturers to grasp the main points or overall message. For a class of more than two hundred students where the lecturer may use skimming and scanning reading techniques during marking their assignment, there is a possibility of some of the students missing some marks due to their inconsistency, lack of clarity, and cohesion of their paragraph or whole essay. The statement 11(b) is well planned, organized, and presented, making the intended meaning clearly understood by the reader.

Students' essays written with several grammatical errors can significantly hinder active communication,, leading to confusion, frustration, and a lack of interest and commitment from lecturers to read the essay with motivational spirit. Thus, it is vital to ensure grammatical correctness so as to convey the message clearly and effectively. For example, the following statement has multiple grammatical problems, which may demotivate lecturers from concentrated reading of the whole essay.

'The student need to work on three assignment; finding research tittle writing, concept note and preparing research proposal.'

This text miscommunicate between the lecturer and student because of improper use of subject verb agreement. For example the lecturer can be in dilemma did the student want to mean “*The **students** need to work on three assignment.....*” or “*the student **needs** to work on three assignment.....*” .Also the statement has punctuation error’. *The student need to work on three assignment (:)* finding research tittle writing. Instead of being presented as ‘*the student need to work on three assignment (:)* finding research tittle writing

The student’s cognitive ability has a great possibility of affecting the ability to think, judge, and comprehend ideas during the writing process. Writing deals with the cognitive domain, which requires student conceptualization of ideas, translation and interpretation of ideas, writing, revisiting the written ideas, analytical skills, and making corrections where necessary. The students with weak or low thinking capacity might feel that writing is a boring, exhausting, and challenging activity. The findings found that limited writing practice habits of some of the students affected their writing ability. For example, students were given a free writing essay whereby each student had to choose a topic of their own interest and compose an essay of two pages. On the contrary, some students were not able to write two pages due to incompetence in self-expression. Those students who have a habit of writing practice are able to write and discuss ideas clearly.

Discussion of Findings

Writing skills depend more on student knowledge of the proper understanding and application of grammar rules and syntax. Morphology, vocabularies, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. The paragraph written by the students featured the fact that some students lacked knowledge on the application of articles, conjunctions, and synonyms. These challenges affect the quality of their paragraph. Thus, Muhammad and Hermin (2015) have the same opinion that students learn several subjects, such as syntax, grammar, and vocabulary, in writing class, which will help them to produce good foreign language writing.

These students were affected by either their mother tongue or Kiswahili, which is their national language which they had competence and confidence compared to English. Andrew (2019) states that backgrounds on which there was at first imposed to learn the English language due to user-unfriendliness in terms of teaching and learning materials, learning

environment, and teacher's competences, knowledge, and skills in using teaching methods affect learners of a new language. Muhammad and Ahmed (2015) support that some teachers teaching English in schools lack modern means and methods of teaching language writing skills.

Language diversity in terms of morphology and phonology between the two languages has made the students have problems in spelling and writing. For example, Kiswahili words are pronounced the same and written in the same sound that is heard in the ear of the learner, which is professionally known as the phonological sound. On the contrary, in English the way words are written and pronounced is quite different. These differences cause students to misspell some of the words when using them in writing activities. The challenge was also revealed in the study of Sawalmeh (2013), who found that spelling is an error combining letters to form a word. From the analysis result of this paper, it was revealed that some students faced problems related to spelling errors, which led them to misspell words, consequently affecting the accuracy and correctness of their essays.

Generally, the paragraph presented above has multiple grammatical problems. The paragraph has one sentence consisting of four or more sentences fused into one long sentence. The rambling complex compound sentence caused the required content not to be understood by the lecturer more easily. The lecturer who marks such assignments is required to work hard to interpret the meaning of the sentence, which increases cognitive load as a result of mental exhaustion and reduces overall comprehension of students' works. Also, the sentences were illogically presented with unnecessary words; thus, the reader needs to take time to grasp and connect ideas in order to understand the purpose of the whole sentence. The use of complex and complex compound sentences requires students who have knowledge and skills on the types of sentences and proper use of punctuation marks. The students were unaware of how to join simple sentences into compound sentences, compound sentences with dependent clauses, and come up with a correct complex or complex compound sentence. Wati (2021) supports that punctuation marks play a very essential role in academic writing. The role of punctuation marks is perceived as very crucial to comprehend the meaning of the written text. Especially in forming combined sentences at different levels without making the paragraph confusing and misunderstood.

The infinitive phrase sounds meaningful sentence, though it lacks the requirements of a sentence, thus causing students to use it as the sentence. However, fragment sentences have the possibility of creating different questions, answers, meanings, and connotations for readers of their essays, like *“What was the source of income?”*, *“To whom?”*, or *“Who raised the standard of life?”* and *“What raised the standard of living?”* These incomplete sentences caused the students' essays to sound unprofessional. The students were also in a position to lose their marks on a given assignment due to improper sentence constructions. Gayo & Widodo (2018) state that to write good English, several aspects of the language must be taken into consideration, namely morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatism.

In this study, students were found to be faced with the cognitive challenges and linguistic comprehension problems that are associated with a number of factors, like the learners' background in the English language, ability to learn, ability to adapt to a new language, age, and anxiety may affect the learners' writing skills. Andrew (2019) states that students face a number of writing difficulties at different levels of their study. These challenges can usually be categorized into cognitive, psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical problems. The study acknowledged that the student had an idea to present and understand the effect of the global crisis of drug abuse in the community but failed to present it in a logical manner. Thus, Gayo & Widodo (2018) support that many English Foreign Language learners encounter writing difficulties linked to cognitive ability and English. Consequently, Rositasari, Saraswati, Larasati, and Warnia (2024) argued that good writing requires daily practices for improving writing skills.

The study analysis revealed some students wrote too long paragraphs or texts of two or more, but in reality the paragraphs consisted of repetition of some words, which are not necessary. The student has a great possibility of scoring low marks despite having written a long essay of more than two pages since writing skills are about quality and not quantity. Also, there is a great possibility for students who learn English as second and foreign languages to be wrongly judged as less intelligent due to their poor language skills. The lecturers need to consider other factors like language background and proficiency of the student in the marking scheme. This can help to balance students' performance; otherwise, there is a great possibility of students failing in their academic writing. Muhammad and Almas (2016)

argue that writing is a reflective activity that requires thinking of ideas, relevant knowledge, and mastery of vocabulary, since writing is more difficult than speaking, as speaking takes place in a natural environment while writing takes place in an artificial environment and requires learning of vocabulary and grammar.

The study found that improperly written essays affect the credibility of the message and persuasiveness to readers. The researcher faced difficulties during reading and analyzing the essays due to a series of grammatical problems undermining the credibility of the students' work. Those grammatical problems affected the flow and tone and finally weakened the intended arguments. The situation caused the researcher to take time off from reading the essay, struggling to connect ideas and come up with a clear argument intended by the students.

Conclusion

A student's mastery of writing skills in English depends on language competence ability and writing practices. In conclusion, the study realized that factors that affect non-GRE students' writing were caused by four aspects: First, grammatical problems, which include improper use of tenses, insufficient knowledge of subject-verb agreement, improper application of prepositions, and spelling errors; second, sentence structural problems, where several essays are characterized by rambling sentences and fragment sentences due to students' lack of knowledge and skills use of punctuation and classification; third, improper use of punctuation marks such as periods, semicolons, and colons; and fourth, students' lack of logical and critical thinking in writing. The lack of logic caused their essay to lack depth analytical points, provision of evidence, adequate development, and cohesion of ideas. The student's incompetence and other problems affected the quality of their written essay. For example, most of the students' essays' messages were too difficult to be understood by lecturers or any reader due to long, complicated clauses. Students with writing problems are likely to be affected by psychological embarrassment and inferiority complexes, which affect their confidence during presentations of work occupied with linguistic and grammatical errors. Lack of writing skills affects students' performance through losing grades during evaluation due to awkward writing and disrupting the flow of the message. Lastly, the poorly written essay affects the credibility of the essay's quality as a result of frequent

grammatical errors, which weaken the argument and make it hard to convince the reader of the viewpoint presented... Thus, well-organized, planned, written, and presented essay writing enables students to have good performances in a class.

The study recommends that there is a need to put more emphasis on students' mastery of writing skills at the primary and secondary levels, which builds a good foundation of understanding of how to write English words spellings, and other rules according to the English language. The students need to develop habit of reading different literature, which will empower them with knowledge of understanding English vocabularies and spelling and practice writing skills instead of working under the supervision of lecturers all the time.

Lastly, it is recommended that the creative writing courses should be introduced at all levels of learning for the aim of enabling students to equip themselves with knowledge and skills in writing in English. Creative writing enhances students' effective use of the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains during practices of writing skills.

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