



Error Analysis of English Language Compositions of JHS Two (2) Students in The Effutu Municipality

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ABSTRACT: This study examined errors in English language compositions of Junior High School (JHS) two (2) students in the Effutu Municipality and explored teachers' perspectives on the causes and solutions to these errors. The study was grounded in the positivist research paradigm, which is a research framework assuming a single, measurable reality where objective truths can be discovered through quantitative methods. A quantitative approach was employed in the study. This study employed a descriptive survey design to explore the types and frequency of errors in student essays within the Effutu Municipality. Using a multi sampling technique, 210 students and six English teachers were selected. Errors in student essays were categorised into mechanical, grammatical, and lexical types, and analysed using frequency counts and percentages. Findings revealed that mechanical errors were most prevalent, accounting for 67.1% of all errors, with spelling (25.3%), capitalization (21.1%), and punctuation (20.7%) being the most common. Grammatical errors represented 25.1%, particularly tense (13.6%) and subject-verb agreement errors, while lexical errors were least frequent (7.8%). Female students (54.7%) made more severe errors than males (45.3%), especially in tense, spelling, and punctuation. Age was also a factor: students aged 12–15 (56%) produced more moderate to severe errors compared with those aged 16 and above (30%) and those aged 9–11 (14%). Teachers attributed these errors to interlanguage and intra-language interference, limited reading exposure, and variations in parental educational background. Suggested solutions included peer modelling, peer tutoring, guided writing, and the use of interactive teaching and learning resources. The study recommends integrating peer review and guided writing strategies, alongside improved resource provision, to reduce writing errors and strengthen students' English proficiency in the Effutu Municipality. Besides, given that female students and those aged 12–15 made more severe errors, the study recommended that teachers provide differentiated support tailored to the needs of these groups. Peer mentoring systems, where stronger students support weaker ones, could also be introduced.

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Writing, Errors, Spelling, Capitalization, Agreement, Subject-Verb, Moderate, Effutu Municipality.

INTRODUCTION

Writing error-free English is crucial for academic tasks, especially in exams like BECE and WASSCE. Mastering this in a foreign language is challenging due to English's complexities. Researchers argue that writing is a communication process that requires clear organization and expression to avoid misunderstandings. Learners must continually update their knowledge of English rules to maintain clarity (Hyland, 2019).

Writing in English as a second language requires linguistic and cognitive skills. Erkan and Saban (2011) note that errors—grammatical, lexical, and mechanical—are inevitable and stem from misunderstandings or limited vocabulary. Analyzing these errors is vital for improving writing skills through targeted instruction.

Error analysis is central to language learning. Corder (in Brown, 2000) views errors as insights into language acquisition. By analyzing errors, educators can identify student struggles and tailor teaching methods to enhance writing quality and understanding of second language acquisition.

Errors often arise from difficulties in idea generation, organization, and vocabulary use (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021). While errors were traditionally seen negatively, modern views suggest using them as teaching tools (Wilder, 2013). Addressing errors helps students develop stronger writing skills, essential in Ghana where English is the primary instruction medium (Alsher, 2021). ESL writing errors stem from inter-lingual and intra-lingual factors (Kaweera, 2013). Inter-lingual transfer occurs when students apply native language rules, while intra-lingual transfer arises from incomplete English understanding. Junior High School students in Ghana often face both challenges. Teachers should provide targeted instruction, practical exercises, and constructive feedback to help students improve their writing skills, crucial for academic and career success.

Statement of the Problem

JHS 2 students in the Effutu Municipality struggle with writing, facing issues in grammar, word usage, sentence structure, spelling, and idea organization. Javaid (2017) notes that these deficiencies hinder effective written communication, crucial for academic success. Students are expected to produce coherent, grammatically correct sentences and organize ideas well. Despite English instruction, feedback, and workshops, poor writing persists, indicating that current teaching methods may not meet their needs.

Writing proficiency is vital for academic success and communication. Globally, ESL learners often make errors in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling that affect clarity (Isma et al., 2023; Abdullah et al., 2021). Research shows difficulties with subject-verb agreement, verb tense, articles, and spelling mistakes, highlighting the need for targeted instruction.

In Ghana, most research has focused on SHS students' writing. Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) found frequent grammatical errors among SHS learners. Other studies have addressed similar issues but primarily at the SHS level.

Research on JHS writing is limited. Dadzie and Bosiwah (2015) identified various spelling errors and performance disparities among JHS students in Cape Coast. Awunor (2021) also noted errors in spelling, concord, and punctuation, linking them to inadequate teaching and home responsibilities.

However, two key gaps exist: a lack of research on JHS 2 students, a critical transitional group, and no studies specifically addressing writing errors among JHS 2 students in the Effutu Municipality. Additionally, few studies connect student writing analysis with teachers' insights on error causes and solutions.

This study aims to fill these gaps by examining common writing errors among JHS 2 students in Effutu and exploring teachers' perspectives on these issues and potential remedies, contributing to both scholarly understanding and effective instructional strategies.

Objectives

1. Identify the types of recurrent errors made by JHS 2 students in their English language essays in the Effutu Municipality
2. Determine how demographic variables describe the occurrence of errors in English Language compositions among JHS 2 students in the Effutu Municipality

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What types of errors do JHS 2 students in Effutu Municipality make in their English language compositions?
2. How do demographic variables describe the occurrence of errors in English language composition among JHS 2 students in the Effutu Municipality?

Significance

These findings can guide the development and implementation of evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at enhancing English writing skills in JHS. The findings of this study hold practical significance for teachers, educators, and instructional designers involved in English language instruction. Through an in-depth examination of errors in English composition, this study expands the existing body of knowledge on the types of errors commonly made by JHS students.

Delimitation and Scope

The research focused exclusively on a selected sample of JHS 2 students from schools within the Effutu Municipality, Winneba, categorised by their educational circuits (West circuit, East circuit and Central circuit). Additionally, the scope was limited to analysing errors in English composition writing, excluding errors in other languages or in writing tasks from other subjects.

Theoretical framework

The Interlanguage theory, proposed by Larry Selinker in 1972, suggests that second language learners make systematic errors that don't align with their native or target languages. These errors indicate the development of a unique linguistic system called "interlanguage," which represents a transitional stage in second language acquisition, marked by inconsistencies in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary.

According to this theory, errors are not random; they reflect the learners' evolving interlanguage rules. By analyzing the errors of ESL JHS students, teachers can understand their interlanguage systems and design targeted interventions for specific challenges. For instance, persistent subject-verb agreement errors may highlight underlying patterns in their interlanguage, allowing for focused practice and feedback.

The theory also posits that errors are a natural part of language acquisition. As learners progress, they experiment with new structures and internalize language rules. Examining these error patterns helps teachers adapt their instruction to better support students' language development.

Factors Influencing Error Production

Error production in second language writing is influenced by linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors. Linguistic factors include language transfer and interference, where learners apply their first language structures to the target language, leading to errors (Selinker, 1972; Brown, 2014). Cognitive factors, such as working memory capacity and attentional control, affect writing accuracy and fluency (Skehan, 2018). Learners with better working memory manage complex structures more effectively, while high cognitive load can increase errors (Ellis, 2010).

Sociocultural factors, including exposure to the target language and authentic practice opportunities, are crucial for writing proficiency (Kormos, 2016). Access to native speakers and meaningful tasks enhances accuracy. Corrective feedback from teachers and peers helps learners internalize correct forms and reduce errors (Ferris, 2011). Instructional practices that emphasize grammar and vocabulary positively influence accuracy (Long, 2014).

Error production results from the interaction of these factors, which can vary among individual learners. Motivation and learning goals also shape error patterns (Norton, 2013). Understanding error production requires considering these interconnected influences. Empirical studies highlight these factors, such as Kormos and Trebits (2012), who found that focused feedback reduces grammatical errors, and McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007), who showed that higher working memory correlates with better writing accuracy and fluency.

Factors Influencing Error Production

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Error Analysis in Basic School Education

Error analysis in JHS education reveals students' writing challenges, including grammatical, spelling, vocabulary, and sentence structure issues (Sasi & Jiin, 2021). These insights underline the need for targeted instructional interventions to improve writing proficiency.

Research consistently identifies common errors and factors influencing them. Zhan (2015) found frequent mistakes in sentence structure, vocabulary, and verb forms among Chinese elementary students, emphasizing the importance of scaffolding and authentic writing tasks. Graham (2013) noted that JHS students struggle with planning, organizing ideas, and sentence structure, highlighting the need for explicit writing instruction.

These studies collectively identify error patterns and challenges in JHS writing, suggesting targeted interventions like explicit instruction, scaffolded support, and focused feedback to enhance writing skills. Error analysis informs instructional practices that prioritize effective teaching strategies, contributing to improved writing proficiency and academic success.

Empirical Review of Methods Used in Error Analysis

Research on error analysis among ESL learners employs various methods based on study scope and objectives. Quantitative designs are common for identifying specific grammatical errors. For instance, Abdullah et al. (2019) analyzed essays from 77 Malaysian Year 6 pupils, focusing on verb-related mistakes through purposive sampling and error frequency analysis. In contrast, Brown and Myles-Vollan (2013) used a mixed-methods approach to examine a college-level ESL student's writing, combining quantitative error categorization with qualitative insights into verb error causes, highlighting pedagogical implications.

Ibatova (2019) applied a qualitative case study to analyze error patterns in Russian-speaking ESL students' writing at Tyumen Industrial University, using a modified error classification manual to explore linguistic challenges. These methodologies yield unique insights into error patterns, with effectiveness varying between broad quantitative and focused qualitative analyses.

In Africa, error analysis research has assessed ESL learner proficiency and the impact of teacher errors on students. Nel and Swanepoel (2011) conducted a qualitative study at the University of South Africa, revealing that non-native English-speaking teachers often pass on errors, adversely affecting student proficiency. This underscores the need for improved teacher training.

Conversely, Draper and Spaul (2015) used quantitative methods to analyze fluency among Grade 5 ESL learners in rural South Africa. Together, these studies demonstrate that diverse research designs provide valuable insights into error analysis, informing educational practices.

Thus, employing a mixed-methods design in this study is logical, enhancing the comprehensiveness of findings. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches allows for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by JHS 2 students in the Effutu Municipality. Qualitative insights from teachers contextualize quantitative data on error types and frequency, ensuring triangulation of data and enhancing the validity of the findings.

The Importance of English Composition Writing

English composition is vital for students' academic and professional success. Strong writing skills enhance communication, critical thinking, and knowledge construction (Hyland, 2019). Proficiency in writing enables students to articulate ideas, engage in academic discourse, and construct persuasive arguments (Kroll, 2003). These skills are essential for success in higher education and various professions (Connor & Mbaye, 2017).

A solid foundation in English composition equips students for effective written communication, crucial for academic achievement. Writing allows students to demonstrate understanding, analyze information, and present coherent arguments (McWhorter, 2019). Research shows a positive link between writing proficiency and academic success (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Moreover, composition writing develops critical thinking skills. Engaging in writing requires organizing thoughts, analyzing information, and crafting logical arguments (Hillocks, 2011). This process teaches students to evaluate evidence and synthesize information, skills applicable in various contexts (Flower & Hayes, 1980).

Writing also enhances language proficiency. It provides opportunities to practice grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, leading to mastery of English (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Through consistent writing, students encounter diverse vocabulary and structures, broadening their linguistic range (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014).

In the professional world, effective writing is indispensable. Clear communication is crucial in drafting reports, emails, and memos (Kaweera, 2013). Strong writing signals professionalism and competence, with employers valuing employees who can communicate effectively (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Empirical research supports the significance of writing. Graham and Perin (2007) found that explicit writing instruction leads to higher academic performance. A meta-analysis by Troia et al. (2006) showed that systematic writing instruction improves skills and positively impacts academic success.

In summary, English composition writing is essential for academic and professional success. It fosters effective communication, critical thinking, and language proficiency, equipping students with skills necessary for their educational and career journeys. Prioritizing writing instruction is crucial for enhancing these skills and promoting overall student success.

Background on ESL Writing in Africa

ESL writing in Africa is complex. English, used widely in former British colonies, serves as the medium of instruction and in business. Most Africans are not native speakers, leading to varied English proficiency and challenges in ESL writing.

Cultural and linguistic diversity complicates English usage. Different countries have unique norms affecting comprehension and writing. Despite these issues, initiatives to improve ESL writing, such as language policies and teacher training, have emerged.

In Ghana, English is an official language, crucial for academic and professional success. However, many students struggle with ESL writing due to a lack of resources and qualified teachers. Cultural differences in grammar and writing conventions also hinder their ability to write effectively in English.

Research Paradigm

The study was grounded in the **positivist research paradigm**, which is a research framework assuming a single, measurable reality where objective truths can be discovered through quantitative methods. (Morgan, 2019; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

Research Approach

This study used the quantitative approach, as the data collection procedures incorporated numerical measurements of the study variables

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design to explore the types and frequency of errors in student essays within the Effutu Municipality.

Population

The target population consisted of JHS students and teachers of English from 27 public schools in the Effutu Municipality. However, the accessible population was specifically 1058 JHS 2 students and 31 English Language Teachers within the Effutu Municipality.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 210 public Junior High School (JHS 2) students and 6 English language teachers from six (6) public schools within the Effutu Municipality.

Instruments

Teacher made English writing test and a semi-structured interview guide were used to collect data for this study.

Data Collection

To assist with the research, the researchers sought the help of two MPhil students from UEW as research assistants. Their role was to administer the research instruments and ensure simultaneous responses from all participants, especially the students, to prevent data contamination. The assistants underwent a one-day training session, each lasting 60 minutes. Once they were well-versed in their roles, the researcher assigned each assistant to a classroom for the study. The researcher informed the school heads and English teachers about the researcher's roles through a letter from the Municipal Directorate of Education. The researcher took on the supervisory role, visiting each classroom to ensure that the trained assistants adhered to the established protocols.

Before commencing the research, the researcher held brief meetings with students in each class to explain the study's purpose and the level of involvement required. Any concerns or questions raised by the students were addressed, and their consent to participate was obtained. To maintain confidentiality, all students were kept anonymous, and no identifying information was used during data collection. Additionally, all essays were sealed in envelopes to ensure privacy.

An essay was administered to all study participants. Students were tasked with composing a 200-word essay detailing how they spent their Easter holidays. This word count was according to the BECE requirements to accommodate the study's objectives. Students wrote their essays in a relaxed classroom environment under the supervision of the trained research assistants and English teachers. 30 minutes was allotted for the composition, following which they were collected. The researcher subsequently conducted a thorough analysis of the essays to identify and quantify errors. Participants' written essays served as the primary data for this study. Essays were selected based on their direct relevance to the research question, ensuring that the collected data aligned with the study's objectives.

Data Analysis Method

Data analysis for this study was conducted using both quantitative methods, aligning with the research objectives outlined in previous sections. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and modes, were utilized to analyse the student essays. The Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 26 was employed for this purpose, as recommended by Martin and Acuna (2002) due to its capability to handle large datasets efficiently and its array of statistical procedures designed for the social sciences. Each student's essay was examined and coded according to the pre-established coding manual. Errors identified in the essays were categorized into three types: Mechanical Errors, Grammatical Errors, and Lexical Errors. The frequency of each error was determined by counting the occurrences of each specific error.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (Students)

Demographic Variable		
Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	95	45.2
Female	115	54.8
Total	210	100.0
Age	Frequency	Percent
9-11	29	13.8
12-15	117	55.7
16 and above	64	30.5
Total	210	100.0
Circuit	Frequency	Percent
Central Circuit	66	31.4
West Circuit	60	28.6
East Circuit	84	40.0
Total	210	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2024

From the Table 1 above, out of the 210 students, 95 (45.2%) were male, and 115 (54.8%) were female. This distribution indicates a slightly higher representation of female students in the sample. In terms of age, the age distribution of the participants was diverse.

Of the total, 29 students (13.8%) were aged 9-12 years, 117 students (55.7%) were aged 12-15 years, and 64 students (30.5%) were aged 16 years and above. The majority of the students fell within the 12–15-year age range. Besides, the data shows that the students were distributed across three circuits. The East circuit had the highest number of students, with 84 (40.0%), followed by Central circuit with 66 students (31.4%), and West circuit with 60 students (28.6%). This distribution reflects a broad representation across different educational circuits within the Effutu Municipality. The demographic characteristics of the teachers is also presented in the Table 2 below:

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants (Teachers)

Teacher	Sex	Highest Academic Qualification	Years of Teaching experience
Teacher 1	Male	MPhil (Basic Education)	7 years
Teacher 2	Female	B.Ed (Basic Education)	3 years
Teacher 3	Male	B.Ed (Basic Education)	7 years
Teacher 4	Female	B.Ed (Basic Education)	4 years
Teacher 5	Male	B.Ed (Basic Education)	8 years
Teacher 6	Female	MPhil (Basic Education)	2 years

Source: Field Data, 2024

Research Question 1: What types of errors do JHS 2 students in Effutu Municipality make in their English Language compositions?

To answer research question one, marked essays of students were analysed to identify the specific errors. The study found the common errors present in students' composition averagely based on the three general categories of errors observed in the study. Results indicated that JHS 2 students averagely committed 9 lexical errors, 8 mechanical errors and 3 grammatical errors per essay. The standard deviations for lexical and mechanical errors suggest a wide range of ability levels among students in these areas. The results are presented in the table 3 below:

Table 3. Common errors JHS 2 students make per composition based on general category

Error	Freq	%	M ± SD	Mode	Min	Max
Grammatical Errors	665	21.5	9 ± 8	4	0	54
Mechanical Errors	1773	67.1	8 ± 6	5	0	42
Lexical Errors	207	7.8	3 ± 3	1	0	20

Source: Field Data, 2024

The study further explored the frequency of occurrence of specific errors in English Composition among the the JHS 2 students and is presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Frequency of occurrence of specific errors in English composition among JHS 2 students

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Capitalisation	557	21.1	
Punctuation	547	20.7	
Spelling	669	25.3	
Mechanical Errors	1773		67.1
Tenses	358	13.5	
SVA	190	7.2	
Article	116	4.4	
Lexical Errors	664		25.1
Vocabulary	131	5.0	
Word Choice	59	2.2	
Word Order	17	0.6	
Grammatical Errors	207		7.8
Total	2644		

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SVA	190	7.2
Article	116	4.4
Vocabulary	131	5.0
Word Choice	59	2.2
Word Order	17	0.6
Total	2644	100

Source: Field Data, 2024

The analysis of errors in English compositions among JHS 2 students in Effutu Municipality reveals that Mechanical Errors are the most prevalent, accounting for 67.1% of all errors. Spelling errors are the most frequent, making up 25.3% (669 occurrences), followed closely by capitalization errors at 21.1% (557 occurrences), and punctuation errors at 20.7% (547 occurrences). This indicates that issues with basic writing mechanics among JHS 2 students are widespread in the Effutu Municipality and need significant attention in instruction.

Grammatical Errors constituted 25.1% of the total errors, with tense errors being the most common within this category, occurring 358 times (13.6%). Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) errors and article usage errors follow at 7.2% (190 occurrences) and 4.4% (116 occurrences), respectively. Lexical Errors were the least frequent, representing just 7.8% of the total errors, with vocabulary errors being the most prominent at 5.0% (131 occurrences). This suggests that while students struggle primarily with mechanical aspects of writing, grammatical and lexical issues are also present but to a lesser extent.

Spelling errors were another significant issue, particularly among female students. The analysis revealed that these errors were the second most common, aligning with the assertion that spelling errors are often linked to writing skills rather than broader cognitive abilities (Kreiner et al., 2010). Wang et al. (2021) also noted the prevalence of spelling errors in student essays, attributing them to the complexities of the English spelling system, particularly with vowel and consonant usage. However, unlike Figueredo and Varnhagen's (2004) study, which distinguished between phonological, orthographic, and morphological spelling errors, the current study did not delve into these classifications.

Capitalization errors were the third most frequent type of error identified in the study. This finding supports research findings that many ESL learners struggle with proper capitalization, which can hinder their writing development and overall language proficiency (Pathan, 2021). Punctuation errors were also prevalent among the students, ranking as the fourth most common mistake. This finding is in line with observations by Tabiri (2019) which highlighted punctuation as a significant challenge for ESL students, leading to frequent errors in their compositions. Other studies have identified common issues with commas, quotation marks, apostrophes, and other punctuation marks, which were similarly problematic for the students in this study. Additionally, research on error analysis in student essays further corroborates the prominence of punctuation errors (Amoakohene, 2017).

Furthermore, the study found the common errors present in students' composition based on the severity of errors observed in the study. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 5: Common errors present in students' composition based on severity

Number of Errors	Interpretation (Degree)	Frequency	Percent
5-10	Mild	48	22.9
11-15	Moderate	102	48.6
16 and more	Severe	60	28.6
	Total	210	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2024

The number of errors per essay was further categorised into mild, moderate and severe errors based on the number of occurrences. Table 5 presents the common errors categorized by their severity. The data shows that most errors fell into the "moderate" category, with 102 occurrences, accounting for 48.6% of the total. This suggests that nearly half of the students made errors that were not extreme but still significant enough to impact their writing. The next highest category, "severe" errors, had 60 occurrences,

representing 28.6% of the total, indicating that a notable portion of students exhibited more serious writing issues. Finally, "mild" errors, with 48 occurrences (22.9%), were the least frequent, suggesting that a smaller group of students made relatively minor mistakes.

The data from these tables revealed that mechanical errors were the most prevalent, making up over two-thirds of all errors, followed by grammatical errors, and lastly, lexical errors. Despite their lower frequency, lexical errors exhibited a high variance, indicating that while they may be less common, they were more problematic for some students. Mechanical errors (spelling, capitalization, punctuation) dominated the error types, pointing to fundamental issues in students' basic writing skills. This suggested a need for reinforcing these foundational skills in the classroom.

Grammatical errors were also common, particularly with verb tenses and subject-verb agreement, which are crucial for constructing coherent and grammatically correct sentences. The data indicated that while students may have had a basic understanding of grammar, there was inconsistency in applying these rules correctly. Lexical errors were the least frequent but showed significant variation, with some students struggling considerably more than others. This suggested that while many students could select appropriate words and use them correctly, a significant number of the JHS students had substantial difficulties with vocabulary and word choice.

The findings from the current study align closely with previous research, indicating that mechanical errors remain a prevalent issue in students' compositions across different educational levels. For example, studies by Amoakohene (2017), Owu-Ewie & Williams, (2017) and the present study identified mechanical inaccuracies, primarily involving punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, as the most frequent type of errors. While Amoakohene observed more punctuation errors (42.1% of all errors), the current study highlighted spelling as the most prevalent, constituting 25.3% of all errors, followed by capitalization (21.1%) and punctuation (20.7%).

Moreover, the findings also resonate with Karim, Fathema, and Hakim's (2015) identification of frequent errors in verb agreement, punctuation, and articles. In the present study, grammatical errors accounted for a significant portion of all errors, with issues in tenses and subject-verb agreement being particularly common. Specifically, grammatical errors made up 25.1% of all errors, echoing Karim et al. (2015)'s findings regarding verb misuse. In addition, the current study supports Ancheta and Simagala's (2017) observation of common errors in subject-verb agreement, tenses, and sentence structure, suggesting that these grammatical issues are persistent challenges in English composition across various educational settings. However, the current study contrasts with Hussain & Hossain (2022) who reported that prepositions and articles were the most problematic areas for Bangladeshi students. The variation in findings may be attributed to geographical location or differences in educational contexts and the specific challenges faced by students at different levels or in different regions. For instance, this study focuses on students at the basic level while studies by Hussain & Hossain (2022) and Amoakohene (2017) focused on undergraduate students.

Research Question 2: How do demographic variables describe the occurrence of errors in English Language compositions among JHS 2 students in the Effutu Municipality?

This research question sought to describe the occurrence of errors in the composition of students based on the various demographic variables in the study. The results are presented in the tables below.

Table 6: Occurrence of types of errors in English Language compositions based on gender

	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Capitalisation	239	43%	318	57%	557
Punctuation	230	42%	317	58%	547
Spelling	286	43%	383	57%	669
Tenses	135	38%	223	62%	358
SVA	88	46%	102	54%	190
Article	35	30%	81	70%	116
Vocabulary	43	33%	88	67%	131
Word Choice	19	32%	40	68%	59
Word Order	12	71%	5	29%	17
Total	1087		1557		2644

Source: Field Data, 2024

Table 6 presents the occurrence of different types of errors in English Language compositions, categorized by gender. The data reveals that female students exhibited more errors in all categories compared to their male counterparts. For instance, in terms of capitalization, female students made 318 errors (57%), while males made 239 (43%), with a total of 557 errors recorded. A similar trend is seen in punctuation errors, where females had 317 errors (58%) compared to 230 (42%) from males, totalling 547. The highest error count was found in spelling, where females made 383 errors (57%) and males made 286 (43%), leading to a total of 669 errors.

Errors related to tenses also showed a considerable difference, with females accounting for 223 errors (62%) compared to 135 (38%) from males, resulting in a total of 358 errors. Errors in subject-verb agreement (SVA) were slightly more balanced but still showed females contributing more, with 102 errors (54%) compared to 88 (46%) from males, for a total of 190 errors.

Article usage errors showed a pronounced difference, with females making 81 errors (70%) and males making 35 (30%), totalling 116 errors. Vocabulary and word choice errors also followed this pattern, with females having more occurrences: 88 vocabulary errors (67%) compared to 43 (33%) from males, and 40-word choice errors (68%) compared to 19 (32%) from males. The only category where males had a higher error rate was word order, where they made 12 errors (71%) compared to 5 errors (29%) from females, although the overall frequency of word order errors was quite low, with only 17 total errors recorded.

Overall, the total number of errors made by female students was 1,557 (59%) compared to 1,087 (41%) by male students, with the total number of errors across all categories being 2,644. This indicates that female students tended to make more errors across various categories in their English language compositions, suggesting potential areas for focused intervention or further investigation into gender-related writing challenges.

The study also analysed the occurrence of severity of errors in English Language compositions based on gender. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Occurrence of severity of errors in English Language compositions based on gender

	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Total (%)
Male	25	48	22	95 (45%)
Female	23	54	38	115 (55%)
Total	48	102	60	210 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2024

The total number of errors recorded in the study is 210, with 95 (45%) errors attributed to male students and 115 (55%) errors attributed to female students. The data suggests a gender difference in the occurrence and severity of errors in English Language compositions. While male and female students make a comparable number of mild errors, female students are more prone to making both moderate and severe errors, especially the latter. These results indicate that female students might need more focused intervention or support in certain areas of English Language writing to reduce the occurrence of these severe errors. The study further described the occurrence of errors based on the age of the students.

Data from the study revealed that gender played a significant role in the occurrence and severity of errors. While both genders exhibited a similar number of mild and moderate errors, females appeared to commit slightly more errors overall, particularly severe ones. This could have indicated potential differences in understanding or application of English language rules between genders, with females possibly facing more challenges at the severe end of the error spectrum. The data further indicated that females in JHS 2 within the Effutu Municipality generally had a higher occurrence of errors across all categories of English Language composition. This could have pointed to potential differences in literacy education, confidence, or exposure between male and female students.

Table 8: Occurrence of errors based on age of students

Age	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Total
9-11	3	13	13	29
12-15	35	55	27	117
16 and above	10	34	20	64
Total	48	102	60	210

Source: Field Data, 2024

Table 8 presents the occurrence of errors in students' writing compositions based on age groups, categorized by severity as mild, moderate, or severe. The data reveals that students aged 12-15 made the most errors across all categories, with a total of 117 errors. Specifically, this age group accounted for 35 mild errors, 55 moderate errors, and 27 severe errors, indicating a higher frequency of

writing challenges among middle-aged students. Students aged 16 and above recorded 10 mild errors, 34 moderate errors, and 20 severe errors, totalling 64 errors. While older students made fewer mild errors compared to younger students, the number of moderate and severe errors suggests persistent difficulties in writing. The youngest group, aged 9-11, had the fewest total errors with 29, consisting of 3 mild, 13 moderate, and 13 severe errors. Although this group had a lower overall frequency of errors, the balance between moderate and severe errors indicates that when errors did occur, they were relatively significant.

In this study, the observation that students between 12-15 years committed more errors than those below 12 and above 16 years can be explained through Interlanguage Theory (Corder, 1974) and developmental factors. Learners in the 12-15 age group are often in a critical phase of cognitive and linguistic development, where they may be transitioning from reliance on their native language (L1) to more complex interlanguage systems. This transition phase can make them more prone to overgeneralizing rules or relying on L1 structures, leading to more frequent and varied errors (Catabay, 2023).

On the other hand, younger learners (below 12) tend to be more flexible and adaptive in acquiring new language patterns, making them less reliant on L1 transfer, and thus, they may produce fewer errors. Older learners (above 16) might have developed more stable interlanguage systems and greater metalinguistic awareness, allowing them to recognize and correct errors more efficiently. This could also be due to the assertion made by Kashen (1982) that these younger groups are more prone to errors due to their ongoing cognitive and linguistic development.

This age-related trend suggests that the 12-15 age group is at a stage where their interlanguage is still developing but may be more unstable due to increased cognitive demands, resulting in more frequent errors. The results further highlight that errors increase in frequency with age, particularly in the moderate and severe categories, except for the group aged 9-11, which had a more balanced distribution across the severity levels. This suggests that as students' progress through their education, more targeted interventions may be needed to address the increasing complexity and frequency of writing errors, particularly for students aged 12 and above.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analysis revealed that students frequently committed mechanical errors (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation), which accounted for the majority of mistakes. The findings also showed that female students made more severe errors than male students, especially in tense, spelling, and punctuation. Age also played a role, with students aged 12–15 committing more moderate to severe errors compared to both younger (9–11 years) and older (16 years and above) students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that errors in students' English compositions are widespread and influenced by a combination of linguistic, developmental, and socio-cultural factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since mechanical errors (spelling, capitalization, punctuation) were the most frequent, followed by grammatical and lexical errors, it is recommended that Heads of schools and English teachers in Effutu Municipality should organize targeted workshops and remedial sessions addressing these error categories. Also, practical spelling and writing drills, spelling competitions, and guided grammar exercises could help students improve accuracy. Also, the study recommends that English teachers should also integrate explicit lessons on mechanics into regular composition teaching, ensuring students internalize basic writing conventions.

Given that female students and those aged 12–15 made more severe errors, the study recommended that teachers provide differentiated support tailored to the needs of these groups. Peer mentoring systems, where stronger students support weaker ones, could also be introduced. Besides, the Effutu Municipal Education Directorate should consider assigning teachers to specialize in particular aspects of English (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, writing skills) or Teachers who graduated with at least a degree in English Language Education to provide more focused instruction across age groups in the public schools in Winneba.\

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