Exploring Some Reasons for the Dearth in Writing Skills in English by English Major Students in the University of Yaounde 1

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Abstract

This article reports on a study that sought to highlight a link between writing skills dearth to the teaching approach, as well as ignorance and neglect by the students. The study's focus is on university students in a Department of English. The study is contextualized within the larger framework of course evaluation, teaching approaches and student involvement and is placed within the realm of the new literacy framework. Data was generated from document reviews and observation. The study is qualitative and used 650 written documents from the Department of English of Yaounde 1 University to assess writing skills proficiency through an error analysis approach for grammatical errors, organizational errors (such as in paragraph organization and formal letter structuring), and strategic communication errors. 325 of these scripts were obtained from final-year students in an undergraduate class from a continuous assessment test. The test was a standard requirement, lasting for one hour and was invigilated. 25 were complaint letters obtained randomly from complaints submitted at the Chair's secretariat and 300 were past examination papers also randomly selected. Numerous errors were identified at the levels of the written exercises that related to grammatical infelicities, spelling errors, paragraph structure and organization as well as writing in conformity with expected norms and registers. All the findings pointed to poor teaching approaches vis-à-vis the attainment of proficiency in writing skills, as well as gross neglect by the students' application of rules, and lack of practice. The study has significance to both the teachers and students as the key stakeholders as it calls for practical approaches to align courses offered towards writing skills proficiency, as well as a student consciousness in developing writing skills.

Keywords

Writing Skills, New Literacy

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The fall in standards in the English language used by Cameroonian English speakers is a growing concern. Ayafor and Green (2018) in their book, "The grammar problem in Higher Education in Cameroon" show how standards are falling, and try to find reasons and provide solutions. Literature on Cameroonian Anglophones' difficulty in communicating in English to functional fluency and proficiency levels can be attributed to several factors. Mforteh (2006) sees it as the outcome of the identity boundaries that emanate from the multiplicity of linguistic and cultural complexity of Cameroon. Similarly, Kouega (2007) affirms that the Anglophone literates only occasionally speak Standard English and even when they do, their speech forms are full of non-standard word stock, probably influenced by the complex linguistic setting in which English operates in Cameroon. Ngefac (2011) blames this on the unrealistic approach of teaching English in schools with the teachers and students both speaking Cameroon English and yet the expectation is for teachers to teach Standard British English. Meanwhile, Atechi (2015) reflects more in line with the influence of French. When again one considers the fact that Anglophone Cameroonians acquire pidgin or a local language first and are expected to learn Standard English formally in schools as a second or foreign language, then naturally, speaking English with native proficiency must be uniquely difficult. That notwithstanding other factors are equally important for consideration based on the argument aforementioned that Anglophones are expected to learn English in school, such as the fact that the teaching and learning of English to Cameroonian Anglophones is taken for granted based on the false presumption that Anglophones must be good at communicating proficiently in English. As such, the lack of functional fluency in using English by Anglophone Cameroonians could be attributed to the amount of time devoted to learning English, teaching and learning styles, and students' traits, such as motivation, learning styles, time, and energy.

This paper brings in another dimension of thought. In a viral transmission of a WhatsApp post, the following words found themselves in my phone: "*I don't have time to Google the correct spelling. I write what I can pronounce. You are the one who will suffer the kwensikwenses*". A seemingly light-hearted joke, but an amazing truism based on my observations of students' attitude towards speaking and writing in the university where I studied and practiced as a lecturer assistant for several years. In that little post, the elements with lamentable deficiencies are identified: pronunciation, spelling, writing and researching skills (learning skills and the no-time factor). With regard to this last point, when it concerns students' ability and willingness to allot time for research after lectures, or to the reading of class material in preparation for a class, they seem to have a lot of difficulty. The same applies to reading circular material unrelated to course work, or referring to the dictionary or other content for knowledge and the edification of the intellect. I have experienced moments of complete

blankness in my students when after instructing them to review the day's taught content and prepare a new topic for a future class, they come in on the day of the class unable to answer any quiz questions. Yet it is almost standard practice in my pedagogical approach to tell my students that if after each day of lecture, they review the taught content, and undertake appropriate searches on terms not understood, or, if they briefly review related content from other sources, they will find themselves in the "knowing dimension" and not the "memorizing dimension".

The overall observations are that students find it difficult to hold up a conversation in articulate English with eloquence, as they exhibit lots of difficulty during oral presentations, and their writing is marred by deviations from; expected standards, text-types norms, punctuation and mechanics infelicities. Students never seem to have time to research, learn and improve.

The teaching approach and content are also subject to some scrutiny. Students at the tertiary level are, in general, expected to exhibit intensive reading and writing aptitudes as well as to naturally engage with enthusiasm in reading extensively and in explorative research. Lecturers expect students to come in with a high thirst for knowledge, self-discipline and rigor and through these presumptions fail to nurture them towards these ends effectively. Lecturers rarely question the reading culture these students bring with them from the secondary education system and presume their speaking and writing skills are sufficient. As such one can easily understand the absence of heightened emphasis in the teaching of writing, and speech development and reading.

Yet a mastery of speaking and writing skills, coupled with enthusiastic engagement in academia requires nurturing and development. With writing, students need to be taught to write. They need to be taught practically, via a process that transcends the lecture mode. They need to be taught how to present answers to questions on their answers sheets, how to write in the various text types, and much more. Students need to be trained and encouraged to carry out basic research with course components designed to consciously engage them in the process. Leaving students' development of writing skills to chance and assumptions certainly has detrimental outcomes to their academic development and even more detrimental effects beyond the confines of academia.

As with the development of other literacy skills, students are best able to develop successful strategies in speaking and writing within the specific context of a guided learning environment. Students need knowledge of the structure of the English language and of different modes and types of discourses, which need to be developed through explicit teaching, implicit learning and extensive practice. This knowledge is relevant in advancing both the spoken and written language proficiency of the students.

1.2. Research Questions

Using the descriptive error approach this paper generated the following questions to guide the assessment of the writing errors of the Department of English

students.

1) What categories of errors are made by the students?

2) Do students engage in a conscious and purposeful practice in writing in standard English after classes?

1.3. Scope of This Study

This study is limited to mapping a link between teaching practices and students' lack of personal development practices as some factors responsible for the errors and deviations from written English standards. It does not seek to account for errors as deviations due to local variations of English and the socio-linguistic landscape of Cameroon. The work situates itself within action research as it seeks to put out practical pedagogic and learning solutions to an alarming problem of students' errors in writing skills deficiencies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Ideological Framework of New Literacy

The premise of this paper is that literacy and literacy teaching and learning are now broadened to include negotiating a multiplicity of discourses as it posits that educational structures, programs, practices, or materials, are presented clearly as choices about how to achieve linguistic proficiency. Our students must speak, read and write well in English and the perceived disengagement encouraged by the lecture-mode approach must be revisited. The lecture-mode approach is ill-suited to bring our students to knowledgeable levels required by the new literacy ideology.

This new literacy ideology, within English language studies, can be likened to a call for the reconceptualization of the pedagogy in departments of English language, a call for specific orientations when it comes to the domains of speaking, and writing skills development for the English graduate as these can have powerful economic and social-implications.

2.2. The Empirical Literature Review

Sárdi (2011) concurs that B.A. English students' needs far exceed A-level coverage and must include aspects that aid in construction and representation of social, cultural, ethnic and national identities. The major concern today should relate to the ways in which English in the school curriculum can ensure that students have competence in the kinds of literacy appropriate to an age of globalisation and technology, and have access to the networks of communication within a global world economy.

Brown (2001) stresses that authentic language and real-world tasks enable students to see the relevance of classroom activity to their long-term communicative goals. By introducing natural texts rather than artificial ones where students will more readily dive into the activity will be better at attaining communicative goals especially if enough attention is given to language use and not just

usage; to fluency and not just accuracy; to realistic language and contexts and to how students will apply the learning in real life situations. Such a consciousness will generate an empowering literacy which will lead to the development of the ability to decode and produce meaning for different purposes and in different ways, resulting in the production of multimodal and multisensory texts. This kind of literacy means recognizing that the meaning and content of literacy are determined by the context of that society. This implies therefore that teaching departments of English students to acquire knowledge and skills means thinking about the nature of literacy and thinking critically about it before instituting programmes to make them literate. This perspective thus evokes the consideration that the production of meaning is a social process, or as Halliday (1985) puts it, "…the fundamental components of meaning in language are "functional…" in the pursuit of shared goals. The principal premise therefore for the Department of English to add value to its practice of literacy should be about communicative practice, which implies the social production of meaning.

Communication always occurs in a context that constrains the use of grammatical structures, tone and even gesture or body language. Understanding a language means understanding that its structure is derived from its function and that when one studies language one has to approach its discursive aspects in terms of the social reality of which it is an integral part.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodology

Qualitative content analysis that suits the interpretive paradigm or deductive approach is employed for the study. The analysis of the data and discussion of the findings are thematically done based on the research questions posed earlier in the study.

3.2. Data Collection Procedures

Level three students were the participants in a natural class environment and natural class writing exercise. They were not informed their scripts would be studied. This was to guarantee naturalness in writing, uninfluenced by particular stress, consciousness and tensions.

For the writing skills assessment, the corpus was a formal letter, past examination papers and complaint letters. In all 650 pieces of written materials were analysed, made up of 300 randomly selected past examination scripts, 325 sit-ins and monitored tests on writing a job application letter and 25 complaint letters randomly picked from a pile of complaints submitted to the Head of the Department of English by the students. These documents were all analysed using the content analysis approach. The errors were identified and the recurrence was counted to establish frequency, which will be presented in Table 1. In this study, the researcher considered deviant writing as an error when it occurred more than once. This is mindful of the fact that the student at all the phases of the

writing had enough time to read over his/her work and correct all errors before submission. So the students' inability to correct a deviant form during the proofreading phase meant they did not know the correct form. The checklist below was devised and used to collect the data.

Table 1. Writing skills assessment Checklist.

COMMUNICATIVE ACHIEVEMENT

- Strategies to achieve effective communication like navigating from the Beginning-Middle-End.
- Holding reader's attention by communicating straight forward ideas, free of spelling errors, and misuse of punctuation

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ORGANISATION

Here the intent was to assess if writing was in conformity with writing practices and requirements of the specific register?

GRAMMATICALITY

Assessment criteria were on
- Agreement errors
- Tenses and participles
- Number errors (singular/plural)
- Prepositional errors
Article errors

Source: Culled from the CEFR—writing assessment (2001: 58) and from literature review sources.

The students were not informed they were going to be used for a study during the sit-in test for writing a job application letter, thus providing natural responses. The writing output is deemed to be a true reflection of what they will naturally do anytime if given the task. The scripts and test papers were photocopied and the photocopies trimmed to remove every possible trace of identifying the students.

4. Results

4.1. Results

Data from student respondent writing samples

With regard to writing skills, and with specific dwelling on spelling, in the first instance it was observed that most of the students' answer scripts did not show highlighted spelling errors nor were the students given the alternative spelling by the grader of the script.

With regard to grammatical errors, the collection of scripts, complaint letters and job application letters were examined for vocabulary, spelling and deviant forms. In all the documents used, major spelling errors, wrong vocabulary and deviant structures were picked out from the scripts and recorded. This also encompassed elements of ignorance of rule restrictions: such as words and phrases

exhibiting constructions and forms that were not applicable as rules in those contexts. Similarly, incomplete application of rules, which refer to structural failures or omissions of constituents like auxiliary verbs or prepositions, and other grammatical or linguistic elements, such as verb forms and tenses were observed and also recorded. The following Table 2 highlights the errors that were recorded. These are retyped verbatim from the students' scripts and reflect in a unifying content approach method the varying categories presented above in the checklist.

Table 2. Grammatical errors sample from exam answer booklets.

1.	Subject-verb agreement: In the sentences below, the subject-verb agreement principle and the noun-pronoun agreements are violated. ● There is that tendencies…/The speaker is living the world that is full of caius to go to nature where he can find some love and peace ● Man is not what he want to be, ● Thomas Hardy is one of the prominent 20thC poet. ● Thomas Hardy's poetry show man's state of life in regard ● RP stress differs from GenAm stress in that in RP, words that ends in –ate ● Diphthongs is the change that occurs ● Stress is a phenomenon in English which describe… ● The first stanza of the poem provide us… ● The work highlight the fact that… ● These theories… Highlights… ● He attended school at Dorchester were he publish many books but its was refused to be publish
2.	**Tense errors (present, past, progressive, perfect, future)** The following are extracts of such errors from the data: ● New historicism can be define as a bringing back together those lost glorious ● He express this idea in two philosophies. ● with the above certificate <u>which was earlier mention</u> ● Hardy said "man is exactly who he is" 20th century modernism was full of Disillusionment and frustration people question their origin and existence and see themselves as strangers in their country thus bring the idea of nihilism that is, question the existence of sacramental (God), the was the intellectual Current (the study of human thought through freudanism by Sygmund Freud. ● Thomas Hardy is a poet of the 20th century British poetry. He attended school at Dorchester were he publish many books but its was refused to be publish people in the society considered him as a pessimistic writer, that is some one who does not see any goodthing about life. ● Research can be define as… (observed twice in two back-to back sentences ● New historicism can be define as a bringing back together those lost glorious of the African colonist such as culture traditional values beliefs and bringing out new ideas that will create history in the society. ● After the collection of the data, the researcher analysis the data to check if the data collected is correct or not ● Man is not what he want to be, man is being control by the… ● Stress is the highest prominence sound of a word when produce known as word stress. ● Stress is a phenomenon in English which describe… ● (x) Will be greatful if my request is being accepted ● And as far as stress is concern… ● Stress is a phenomenon where a word or syllable in a word received the highest prominence ● I have hold several post… ● I have work as a sectory in… ● I have work as a stage in 2015 and 2016

Continued

Number (singular-plural) errors: The following are some examples identified from the data:

3.
- Research is a systematized method to acquire new knowledge…the manner we obtain datas
- Man is not what he want to be, man is being control by the…
- Thomas Hardy is one of the prominent 20thC poet.
- I come before your table with my few <u>words that contains</u>
- RP stress differs from GenAm stress in that in RP, words that ends in –ate…while in GenAm the dysyllabic words that ends in…
- Diphthongs is the change that occurs due to the pronounciation of…
- The following document are attached
- Atarch to this are the certificate
- … I come before your table with my few words that contains
- I have worked in the radio house for 4 year

Spelling/Deviant structure errors

- Yeat's father thought him orthodox and mother with Forlk stories
- Thomas Hardy's poetry show man's state of life in regard to the environment of which man leave.
- The 20th Century British peotry was Peotry writen as a result of the break away from the traditional way of writing.
- The speaker is living the world that is full of caius to go to nature where he can find some love and peace
- New historicism is the pararel reading of the literary
- A research is a concious search for new knowledge
- The poem in stanzar two tells… (10 counts of this spelling of stanza was observed on a single script and in many others).
- The speaker is living the world that is full of caius
- …a scientific method of collecting petinent information (wrong spelling of pertinent observed recurrently in 20 scripts)
- Acedemic writing…/accademic writing…/writting (observed across 32 scripts recurrent several times on the same script)
- Man is a play thing in the hands of the gods that the manipulate as they which
- In RP stress falls either in the initial, media or final position depending on the pronounciation of the word…/Diphthongs is the change that occurs due to the pronounciation of… (this student actually cancelled an earlier rendition only to rewrite the same spelling of pronunciation as pronounciation, thus demonstrating a complete ignorance of the correct form).
- Writting
- Aline (align)
- Ministory (Written twice on same script and recurrent across 6 letters)
- Answer shit (written twice on same script)
- Attarched/atarch/attarsh

4.
- english
- Greatful/gratful/greatfull
- I remaind
- To sick for a job
- expirience
- hunor
- I see myself feet for it
- responce
- graduade
- I have work as a stage in 2015 and 2016
- It is with much pleasure writing to gain the post of editor
- I attain my certificate in the year
- It is with great honour to come befor the most high to sick for the post of a principal
- I will be greatful if you will apply me as an English literature teacher…
- It is with great honour to table you this application for the job of sectory…
- I am writing to apply as a stage in your Ministry I am a
- I have been teaching for 15 years now with good experience…to role and govern a school
- …presently am looking forward in having a P.H.D
- …I will be able to boast my degree as a language student
- I studied English which will merit me to be able to do the job…
- thanks for your kind understandx'.

Continued

5.	**Prepositional errors.** ● with the above certificate <u>which was earlier mention</u> ● It is futile for man to boast his wealth… ● They sat besides each other…silently for a long time
6.	**Communicative achievement** ● The 20th Century British peotry was Peotry writen as a result of the break away from the traditional way of writing. ● Academic writing is a product of many considerations, Many things have to been taken into consideration…/to begin with the introduction, the research after writing…/the research writes on a topic… ● New historicism is the pararel reading of the literary ● A research is a concious search for new knowledge ● The poem in stanzar two tells… (10 counts of this spelling of stanza was observed on a single script and in many others). ● …a scientific method of collecting petinent information (wrong spelling of pertinent observed in several scripts) ● Acedemic writing…/accademic writing…/writting (observed across several scripts) ● Research is a systematized method to acquire new knowledge…the manner we obtain datas ● When we talking about analysis of data we are taking about how the data collected by the researcher are analysed. After the collection of the data, the researcher analysis the data to check if the data collected is correct or not and if the data collected is not well analysed, the researcher will have to carry out another analysis of the data. ● Man is a play thing in the hands of the gods that the manipulate as they which ● Wilfred Edward Seltor Owen (1893-1918), is a 20th century English poet his poetry is divided into two early poetry and later poetry ● Stress is the highest prominence sound of a word when produce known as word stress ● Stress is a phenomenon in English which describe… ● And as far as stress is concern…starting a sentence with "And" ● Stress is a phenomenon where a word or syllable in a word received the highest prominence ● I am an ongoing student in the university… ● I will be greatful if you will apply me as an English literature teacher… ● I want to have an interview with you in order to know more. ● I will be able to boast my degree as a language student ● I studied English which will merit me to be able to do the job… ● It is with great honour to table you this application for the job of sectory… ● I am writing to apply as a stage in your Ministry I am a… ● I have been teaching for 15 years now with good experience…to role and govern a school ● I come before your table with my few <u>words that contains</u> ● (x) Will be greatful if my request is being accepted ● (x) Am an advanced level holder

Source: Samples of errors from 300 examination scripts from the Department of English.

From the job application letter (325) and complaint letters (25) an assessment was also done to observe for conformity with the form of this register (a formal letter) alongside grammaticality, vocabulary and spelling, paragraph organization and communicative achievement (see Table 3). The expectations were defined alongside criteria collected from numerous sources such as: "the sample guidelines of the layout and design of a job application letter from, the Boston Consulting Group and Morgan Stanley" (two major global recruiters of repute), "Elements of Writing" by Kinneavy and Warriner, "the English grammar digest"; and "Communicate what you mean in English". These all (350) written productions by students had several of the check-listed errors. Below are excerpts pertaining to errors within the grammatical category.

Table 3. Communicative achievement, grammatical and organizational sample of errors.

Num	Area of error	observation
1.	**At the level of the honorific:**	Dr. Sir, (for Dear Sir as honorific
2.	**For the subject field:**	● An application for a job as sectory/sectary ● An application for a stage ● An application for the post of… ● A cover letter for a position as…
3.	**For the introductory paragraph the following openings were observed.**	● It is with great honour for me to come for a job opportunity. ● It's with great honour that I write this letter to you applying for a job… Sir, I will like to be accepted as an assistant Manager etc. ● I am honoured to write to you this letter of application of a job in your company. Sir, I am a holder of the G.C.E… I am apt to work in your company and I will work very hard. ● It is with great honour and pleasure that im writing ● It's with pleasure writing to you this letter of application. Am an advanced level holder… Am writing to apply… ● It is with due respect, Honour and loyalty that I present to you this application of mind for the post of… ● It's my pleasure I write to you concerning for a part time job vacancy in your office. ● It is with due respect that I come before your table… ● It's with great honour to come befor the most high to sick for the post of…
4.	**For the main body and final paragraph**	● Paragraphs were not defined with clear topic sentences and unique main points within. ● No summing up, expression of a wish, leaving a door-strategy to be contacted ● "I hope u grant me the job" was used as a summing-up ● Thanks for your understandx was also used in one script.
5.	**Ending**	● Yours faithfull ● Yours sincerly ● The absence of agreement between the ending and the salutations at the beginning was also observed ● Many scripts showed students were not sure where to sign off.

Source: Data generated from the letters.

The most common weakness in students' writing is the inability to generate sentences that are readable, understandable, and grammatically correct in a conventional and formal sense. In this section of the data collection, although the researcher opted to present the data in a holistic way, the sorting of the errors was nevertheless done using the sub-categories earlier outlined such as; agreement errors, article errors, tense errors, preposition errors. In addition to these were errors of organization and achieving effective communication.

4.2. Categorizations of Grammatical and Spelling Errors

In all, 5765 grammatical errors (Agreement errors, Article errors, Tense errors, Preposition errors and Number errors) and spelling errors were identified from the 650 writing samples which imply an average of 9 errors per script. It is worth mentioning that these figures bear a lot more weight when one considers that

the letters were relatively short, ranging between 80 to 300 words, which therefore means that the frequency of errors was indeed higher and exceeded 9 errors in the longer essays.

- **Paragraph Organisation**

Students' introductory paragraphs were observed to cover over 4/5th of the content of two pages; formal job application letters were written in one paragraph, same as with complaint letters where one paragraph carried the salutation, introduction, outline of the problem and expected outcome. The standard expectation of an introductory/beginning, body/middle and conclusion/end is visibly ignored. The topic sentence in its standard position at the beginning of the paragraph is also visibly ignored and was observed to be inexistent in many of the scripts.

It can also be observed from the letters that when it came to the conclusion and signing off, none of the 350 letters complied with any of the standard expectations. Students seemed to be unaware of when to use "yours sincerely" and "yours faithfully" as well as where to sign a signature. They were again observed to be unsure of the spelling with renditions such as: "yours faithful"; "yours sincerly"; "yours humble applicant"; and in some cases no signing-off was observed while others just signed-off using the initials of their names. Some formal letters simply ended with "thanks"/"I hope u grant me the job". One very remarkable one read: "thanks for your kind understandx".

- **Communicative achievement**

With regard to communicative achievement all scripts, the job application letters and complaint letters contained one or more evidence of complete neglect of the basic IBC (Introduction, Body and Conclusion) format, a verb/tense disagreement, number or spelling issue, mechanics and syntax issues (poor punctuation, run-on sentences, problems with modification etc.) which greatly defeats the objectives of compliance to the norms and requirements of the writing. This greatly impacts negatively on the comprehension of the texts.

Another observation is that several letters from the sit-in test scripts were incomplete after the 45-minute exercise. One can hypothesize from this that the students were completely overwhelmed by the exercise and had nothing to write about. This is a good indicator of a weakness in writing.

4.3. Frequency of Errors

As indicated in the methodology section, the grammatical errors were categorized under the following: agreement errors, article errors, tense error, prepositional errors, and number errors. The analysis of the grammatical errors indicated that 822 were agreement errors, 364 were article errors, 1323 were tense errors, 322 were preposition errors, and 368 were number errors. This shows that tense errors were the most frequently committed, followed by agreement errors, number errors, article errors, and preposition errors in that order (see Table 4).

Table 4. Break down grammatical errors by types and their frequencies.

Type of grammatical error	Frequency count
Agreement errors	822
Article errors	364
Tense errors	1323
Preposition errors	322
Number errors	368

Source: Data generated from student's written documents.

The analysis above agrees with earlier studies by Sonmez and Griffiths (2015) and Tim (2000) that tense errors are the most frequently committed grammatical error among English language speakers. Additionally, the findings of this study with regard to agreement being problematic are consistent with the findings of Chele (2015) and Tim (2000), when they indicated that subject-verb agreement poses serious problems to L2 learners of English, especially the 3rd person.

The punctuation and mechanics errors identified were loosely classified under the following categories.

Table 5. Punctuation and mechanics errors types and frequency.

Num	Type of error	frequency
1.	Capitalization (as beginning of sentence or proper noun)	755
2.	No introductory paragraph, body or conclusion	892
3.	Punctuation and sentence structure: run on and fragment sentences Unnecessary or missing comma, and other punctuation (such as semi-colon and full stop)	928
4.	Wrong word choice	313

Source: Data generated from student's written documents.

Table 5 above shows that punctuation issues were indeed more frequent, and clearly affected the logical organization, clarity of expression, and effective use of language. Compliance with the IBC (Introduction, Body and Conclusion) format was the next with a higher frequency as every script had one situation of a structure that was not inconformity with the expectation. At the level of capitalization, it was observed that most students ignored this when new sentences were generated in the middle of the paragraphs while again proper nouns as specific names of places and things were not capitalized.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The English linguistic proficiency of the English Department graduate, which the population expects as a natural prowess of the English graduate, "the lan-

guage people" is assessed as wanting. The analysis of the data incorporates and emphasizes elements such as critical literacy, active self-regulated learning, deep understanding, and building on students' prior knowledge as the necessary conditions needed for learning to take place and stipulates that instruction must focus on three integral and intersecting elements:

1) Focus on Meaning (which delineates a focus on critical literacy moving beyond a surface-level reading of a text);

2) Focus on Language which implies understanding the linguistic codes and critical language awareness as essential for the department of English students, thus calling for a conscious and guided training in reading, writing and speaking.

3) Focus on Use (where instruction creates opportunities for students to produce knowledge, create multimodal texts, and respond to diverse social realities).

Reading academic or circular literature for instance is an essential attitude to be inculcated for writing skills development because as one reads, the mind is opened, new vocabularies are captured, syntactic patterns and usage patterns are mastered, and profound vocabulary enrichment develops. Most especially, when one reads with a dictionary close-by to refer to, immense conscious learning is taking place. All these within internal and external learning environments necessitate a training in discipline and time-management. These procedures are testament conduits towards effective writing skills development.

These points have a particular bearing on the structure and pedagogical philosophy of the BA English degree programme as it makes a case for inscribing literacy theories and pedagogy to facilitate, coherence and consistency. This will again aid in highlighting the link between the teaching and learning it promotes and the functions it should serve to the students and society. The use of English communication literacies approaches to pedagogy will open the students up to the awareness of the importance of developing proficiencies which will inevitably have the fall-back effect of getting engaged critically with the design of their social futures and the achievement of success.

5.2. Recommendations

Departments of English should develop a form of literacy that will equip the students with discursive practices and skills. The data revealed that students were unable to accomplish several standard practical writing normative tasks. These lapses were also confirmed through the document review and observation phases of the research where written corpus (formal letter, complaint letter and answer sheets of exams) produced thousands of errors, of both a grammatical nature and communicative achievement.

An English language teaching approach needs to be developed which will empower students with standard forms of the English language cognizant of contextual uses. Such an approach will enable the students to work with content, and language itself, and enable them to engage critically with prevailing dis-

courses in a planned and elaborate manner.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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