Critical Insights in the Practice of Literacy Development: Perspectives from Oral Expressions and Writing Skills from Final Year Students in a Department Of English in Cameroon

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Abstract

Purpose: This article reports on a study that highlights the link between reading, oral communication, and writing skills dearth to the overall communicative incompetence exhibited by university students of a Department of English. The study seeks to document a frequency of errors as justification that these are triggers of communicative incompetence emanating principally from pedagogical lapses and students' ignorance and neglect of their practice in reading, speaking and writing in English. The study is contextualized within the larger framework of course evaluation, teaching approaches and student involvement in their own literacy development, and is placed within the realm of the new literacy framework.

Methodology: 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, organization, and strategic communication errors. 325 of these scripts were obtained from final year students in an undergraduate class for research methodology from a continuous assessment test. The test was 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. Oral communication proficiency of 300 third year students were also assessed for grammatical and strategic communication errors as they did a standard course requirement in oral presentation.

Findings: Numerous errors were identified at the levels of the written and oral performances in grammar, spelling, organization and writing in conformity with expected norms and registers, which did not favour effective communicative achievement. The study concludes from the error base that students are negligent and fail to practice within their course work and by looking at external literature in order to improve communicative skills.

Unique contributions to theory, policy and practice: The significance at the institutional level calls for practical approaches to align courses offered towards a conscious development of reading, speaking and writing skills, while at the same challenges students to rise up above the practice of negligence with their reading, speaking and writing practice.

Key words: Course Evaluation, Knowledge Construction, Reading/Writing/speaking Connections, new literacy.

I.   Introduction

The English linguistic proficiency of departments of English graduates in Cameroon is, most often, assessed as being "low in English language competence" (Ayafor, 2015 p.1). These are the language people, and as such should exhibit a natural high-level of proficiency in the use of English in every communicative sphere. Hence when their productions, in oral communication, reading and writing are assessed as wanting, people are left bemused and perplexed to the point of questioning the aptitudes imparted on the students by their

study programs. This paper examines the English literacy content in teaching, and learning approaches, in a department of English as it seeks to account for the alarming drops in levels of competence in the students' spoken English, reading and writing skills. It explores requisite extensions to popular teaching approaches in practice that border around the mastery of isolated grammatical patterns and advocates for communicative teaching practices that considers genres culture, and normative responses. The paper argues that these should be taught in a deliberate and conscious way. These form the basis of the new literacy approach, favored in this paper, an approach that should be embraced by departments of English.

1.1 Background

For decades now, educationists, researchers and the Cameroonian Anglophone linguistic authorities have been lamenting a great fall in standards in the English language used by Cameroonian English speakers, especially from pupils, students and recent university graduates. Cameroonian Anglophones' difficulty in communicating in English to functional fluency and proficient levels have been 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. Whatever the reasons maybe, which argue for the protection and standardization of the use of local varieties, familiarity with the standard usage is still beneficial and essential.

When 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, the speaking of 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 a 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. Oral communication training for instance scarcely exists as part of the teaching of the oral communication skills in Anglophone schools and even where it does, the Anglophone students rarely take it seriously as they go along with the false notion that as Anglophones they know English. Other elements that necessitate studies in error analysis could be advanced within the scope of language interference, such as in code-mixing as Anglophones may be losing competence in the language due to influences from pidgin, local languages and French.

This paper however brings in another dimension of thought. In a viral transmission of a Whatsapp post, the following words found themselves into 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, reading and writing in the university where I taught for several years, and more specifically in my department, the Department of English. 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 at allotting 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 from 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 briefly review related content from other sources, they will find themselves in the 'knowing dimension' and not the 'memorizing dimension'. Of course, very few ever heed to this guide.

The overall observations are that students find it difficult holding up a conversation in articulate English with eloquence, 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, and much more. Students never seem to have time to research, to learn and to 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 writing skills are sufficient (a presumption also lamented in Ayafor, 2015). As such one can easily understand the absence of heightened emphasis in the teaching of writing, speech development and reading.

Yet a mastery of reading, speaking and writing skills, coupled with the enthusiastic engagement in academia requires nurturing and developing. Reading for instance involves the development of its highly interrelated major component skills: decoding, exploring and mastering vocabulary, developing fluency, and the overall reading comprehension skills. These skills are difficult to possess if one does not engage consciously in reading. Effective reading instruction is therefore required to explicitly and systematically target each of these component skills for proper development and integration unto the students.

Similarly with writing, students need to be taught to write. They need to be taught practically, a process that transcends the lecture mode, how to present answers to questions on their answers sheets, how to write in the various text types, as well as formal and informal text types. Students need to be trained and to be encouraged to carry out basic research with course components designed to consciously engage them in the process. Leaving students' development of reading and 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 reading, speaking and writing within the specific context of a guided learning environment. Students need the 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 The ideological framework of new literacies

Historically speaking, during much of the twentieth century, education was characterised by the bid towards attaining literacy, which was broadly defined as the basic ability to read and write. Literacy in its most popular sense was seen as a set of technical skills involving reading, writing and calculating, and as a result, mass literacy campaigns emerged in order to assist with the eradication of illiteracy. We have for instance the 1965 World Congress of Ministers of Education on the eradication of illiteracy which held in Tehran and emphasised for the first time "the interrelationship between literacy and development, and highlighted the concept of functional literacy" (UNESCO, 2006: 153). Functional literacy marked a turning point in the history of education, as it allied education and especially literacy with social and economic development and expanded the understanding of literacy slightly beyond the imparting of basic technical skills.

The term 'literacy' has however evolved considerably from this original sense of denoting reading, writing and calculating. This evolution is particularly noticeable with advances in information technologies and an increase in globalisation, which have significantly changed how individuals go about their day-to-day personal and working lives. Such changes have an impact on the nature of literacy and how it is perceived in diverse contexts. Today, being literate is more than just being able to read and write the printed word (Lyons, 2000; Fuhler & Walther, 2007; Temple et al., 2008; Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fielitz, 2011). Deciding at a societal level what literacy is automatically creates an ideological framework for how literacy is to be imparted. Wright (2002) adopts what could be regarded, broadly, as a critical approach to the meaning and practice of literacy and sees the modern student as one who is comfortable with a form of literacy that empowers them according to their needs and not pre-set standards of literacy; pre-set notions of literacy and often imposed, redundant and irrelevant forms of literacy. This provides the premise for asking what is really going on in our classrooms as we perceive and receive reports everyday of students' dropping levels in speaking skills, reading and writing.

The premise of this paper therefore 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 perceive disengagement encouraged by the lecture-mode approach, which is ill suited to bring our students to knowledgeable levels required by the new literacies ideology, must be revisited.

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, reading and writing skills development for the English graduate as these can have powerful economic and social-implications.

1.3 Research Questions

Using the descriptive error approach this paper generated the following questions to guide the assessment of the reading, speaking and writing errors of the Department of English students.

1. What categories of errors are made by the students, and why?
2. What can be done to improve student's proficient use of English?

1.4 Scope of this study
This study is limited to mapping a link between teaching practices and student lack of follow-up practice as responsible for the errors and deviations from standards. It does not seek to account for errors as deviations due to local variations of English and the socio-linguistic landscape of Cameroon. These have been amply covered by other researchers. 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 oral expressions and writing skills deficiencies.

II. Literature review

What makes English in a university department of English different from the English used as medium of instruction and the English taught at pre-university levels? Sardic (2011) concurs that B.A. English students' needs far exceeds A-level coverage (and by my extension, secondary and primary levels) 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.

Further grounding comes from the concept of communicative competence. Communicative competence has always been the goal of every language classroom and is proposed here as an option to add value in the type of instruction offered by departments of English. 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, a better option is offered at attaining communicative goals. This is especially so if enough attention is given to language use and not just usage, likewise to fluency alongside accuracy and to realistic language and contexts. 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 instructional approaches to departments of English students directed towards the acquisition of valuable knowledge and skills means thinking about the nature of literacy and thinking critically about it before instituting academic programmes. 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 departments of English to add value to their practice of literacy should be about communicative practice, which implies the social production of meaning along the terms of reference discussed above. This is the premise for inquisition into the course content, teaching and learning.

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.

III. 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.
3.1 Writing skills assessment checklist
For the writing skills assessment, the corpus was a formal letter, past examination papers and complaint letters. In all 650 written material was analysed, made up of 300 randomly selected past examination scripts, 325 sit-in and monitored test 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. The checklist below was used.

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
ORGANISATION
Here the intent was to assess if writing was in conformity to writing practices and requirements of the specific register?
GRAMMATICALITY
Assessment criteria was 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 for 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.

3.2 Oral expression (speaking and reading) assessment checklist

The observation strategy involved the assessment of the oral communication proficiency of the students as they read and spoke in English. One of the primary tasks of modern English language teaching methodology is in teaching students to speak and read English fluently, proficiently, and strategically. Students' strategic competence in speaking and reading can be interpreted as their ability to maximize the effective usage of all available language means to realize one's personal aim and the overall purpose of communication process with consideration of all its pragmatic factors. From a viewpoint of achieving interlocutors' purposes, strategic competence comprises a range of strategies and tactics that include, but are not limited to informative, evaluative, emotional-expressive, persuasive, conventional, metacognitive, compensatory and didactic ones. Quality teaching of communicative strategies to university students demands valid assessment tools. Hence, the importance of accurate evaluation of strategic competence in speaking is paramount alongside grammar, and this is backed by the modern day need of competitive communicators. The embedded hypothesis here is that students who are more fluent are expected to make fewer errors and restarts, demonstrate a more varied use of vocabulary, and are also expected to be less hesitant than the students who are less fluent.

Using the language proficiency observation grid (Brown, 2001), students were observed in classroom situations during oral presentations and reading exercises for grammatical errors along the lines of the categories afore mentioned as well as for strategic competence. The checklist below was used to record error frequencies categorized under two broad criteria: strategic competence and grammar.

Table 2: Oral expression (speaking and reading) skills assessment Checklist

Criterion	Observation target

Strategic competence	Ability to interpret oral speech utterances correctly
	Ability to understand interlocutor's reaction
	Ability to provide quick communicative reaction.
	Decision-making ability
	Ability to predict
	Ability to program meaning
	Ability to make deep critical analysis and synthesis
	Ability to evaluate and control one's actions and communicative situation in general
	compliance with conventional norms of greeting and parting
	ability to quickly repair communicative bias or difficulties which are caused by specificity of a particular speech form
	addressing the audience
	ability to clearly express one's own position/idea/etc.
	ability to provide logical and persuasive arguments
	adequateness of language tone and style of communication
	addressing the audience
Grammar	Agreement errors
	Tenses and participles
	Number errors (singular/plural)
	Prepositional errors
	Article errors

Source: Adapted from: A Focus on Language Test Development: Expanding the Language Proficiency Construct Across a Variety of Tests (Brown 2001)

3.3 Data collection procedures

For the writing skills test, 650 written documents by the students were examined. These documents were all analysed using the content analysis approach. The errors were identified and the recurrence counted to establish frequency, which will be presented in a table. In this study, the researcher considered a 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.

With regard to the procedure for obtaining the oral data, level three students (final year undergraduates) were the participants in a natural class environment and natural class exercise or oral presentations. They were not informed they were being observed and recorded. This was to guarantee natural oral expressions uninfluenced by particular stress, consciousness and tensions. However they were all aware that as part of the continuous assessment, this exercise was being evaluated at 20% of their overall test marks for the course. The course was the oral presentation segments of the undergraduate research seminars, in which the researcher acted as principal facilitator. Groups had been constituted for the purpose of group work research and they were to work on unique topics and present the information they gathered in front of the class to other classmates. The lecturer and the other students were permitted to challenge them, ask questions for clarification. Each group presented for 15 -20 minutes.

For the data collection at the level of strategic competence 15 indicators were observed while for grammar 05 indicators were observed. The recordings were listened to three times and the errors jotted down under the five categories under grammar. Only those which were unimpeded by too much interference were used and the frequency of each of the errors categorized under each criterion. For the strategic competence measure, the researcher recorded the perceptions of the interaction between the students and the presenters in real time as they presented by jotting down points in the strategy they used or neglected to achieve effective communication. Points were jotted such as: 'arguments not clear; presenter not persuasive; unconvincing; presenter unsure/not well prepared, presenter/listener rude, presenter was tensed/stressed/not relaxed; question posed not well understood/ not well answered.

IV.   Results

A. **Data from case study student respondent writing samples**

Backed by Ellis (1995) competence indicators, prototypical writing content were assessed for grammar (which includes vocabulary and spelling); organizations and communication achievement. These approaches

were intended to illuminate great lapses in existence between academic practices and communication expectations. In the case of great divergences one can hypothesize that these are indications to the decried lapses that affect the performances of Department of English graduates with regard to attaining proficiency and ease of navigation through various communicative genres.

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 which 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 highlights the errors which were recorded. These are retyped verbatim from the students' scripts and reflect in a unifying content approach method the varying categories presented in chapter three in the checklist.

Table 3: Grammatical errors sample from exams answer booklets

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

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 words that contains
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 pronunciation 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 pronunciation of the word…/ Diphthongs is the change that occurs due to the pronunciation 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
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'**.**

Prepositional errors.

with the above certificate which was earlier mention

It is futile for man to boast his wealth…

They sat besides each other.. silently for a long time

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 words that contains

(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. 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 4: Communicative achievement, grammatical and organizational sample of errors

Area of error	observation
At the level of the honorific:	Dr. Sir, (for Dear Sir as honorific
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..
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…
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.
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

In accordance with Day and Koorland (2001), the most common weakness in students' oral and 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 were 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.

4.1 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 were 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 minutes 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.

4.2 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 agreements 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 error in that order.

Table 5: Break down of 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 Tin (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 is consistent with the findings of Chele (2015) and Tin (2000), when they indicated that subject-verb agreement poses serious problems to L2 learners of English, especially the 3rd person.

For the punctuation and mechanics errors identified, they were loosely classified under the following categories.

Table 6: Punctuation and mechanics errors types and frequency

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

Source: data generated from student's written documents

The table 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.

B. Data from case study student respondent oral presentation

The following section begins with a presentation of the data of oral errors pertaining to grammar that were recorded during the oral presentation sessions.

    a)   **Article errors** (*Missing articles/ Wrong article use Redundant article use:*)

- An action research process or applied research consist of series of action…
- The chart below illustrate a research process
- The action research process begins with serious reflection directed towards…
- The following are the main steps in social or business process
- By theoretical we mean those researchers whose objective is theoretical formulate the new theories, principles or law.
- From above analysis, there is no gain saying that…
- After choosing the title and creating hypothesis
- What is research proposal
- The most respondents selected …..
- It depends on respondents point of view..
- Research method contains a series of closely

    b)   **Subject/verb agreement**

- The chart below illustrate this
- The second step involves identifying the theoretical perspectives the researcher hold…
- Research method contains a series of closely related activities which has to be carried out
- .. to do this the researcher must receives the literature related…
- This is the most important part of the research as the research collect information…
- It provide method use in previous research on topic
- It help you to work out how to answer the question
- She have realized the error, sir, let me chip in and help her…

    c)   **Some generic errors which hampered communicative achievement.**

- Such activities overlap continuously rather than following a strictly prescribed sequence
- A number of relatively users-friendly…
- By theoretical we mean those researchers whose objective is theoretical formulate the new theories, principles or law…
- Research is a tool to improve students learning and classroom problem with the teacher in encountering with problem
- The definition and the analysing of a research problem…
- The research data collected is forwarded to the test of hypothesis

- Literature is a work of creative imagination while review of literature is bringing in the current meaning…
- Traditional meaning is bringing into existence an idea which have not been in existence
- The table below displays the frequencies observed from groups during the presentation.
- The reporting of action research most often occurs in informal settings that are for less intimidating..
- By factual objective we mean fine out new facts
- A father who distorts the piece of the family

The other errors identified and presented below pertain to strategic competence errors.

Table 7: Data from strategic errors identified during oral presentations

Criterion	Observation
Strategic competence	• inability to interpret oral speech utterances correctly
	• inability to understand interlocutor's reaction
	• inability to provide quick communicative reaction.
	• inability to predict
	• inability to make deep critical analysis and synthesis
	• inability to evaluate and control one's actions and communicative situation in general
	• non-compliance with conventional norms of greeting and parting
	• inability to quickly repair communicative bias or difficulties which are caused by specificity of a particular speech form
	• tensed and closed in addressing the audience
	• inability to clearly express one's own position/idea/etc.
	• in ability to provide logical and persuasive arguments
	• inadequateness of language tone and style of communication
	• failure to address audience as they rather face but the teacher

Source: Data generated from student's oral presentation sessions

An analysis of the errors revealed that the most frequent category of error made by the students were the tense and agreement errors with 501 counts picked out from the students' speeches. Numerous cases with regard to the rules of sentence formation and number agreement were also recorded, especially in cases where they had to use 'someone', and 'all of them'. In most utterances meaning was lost as we can read from the document sentences and chunks above.

In terms of strategic competence, students failed to begin presentations with greetings, outline the topic and plan, inform where questions could be asked or failed to explaining the turn taking strategies they adopt. No group used the expected exit or conclusion of thanking the rest of the class/ audience for their attention and inviting questions. They seemed to hasty to return to their seats. There was also a lot of aggression when challenged by mates with questions, especially when an individual was not convinced with the presenter's perspective and offered counter arguments or evidence. This was especially due to the fact that as a gradable exercise, the students were worried that the countering of their arguments will cost them a reduction of marks as penalty.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

The English linguistic proficiency of the English Department graduate, which the population expects as a natural prowess of the English graduate, 'the language 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 a 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 speech and 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 reading, speaking and 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 in highlighting the link between the teaching and learning it promotes and the functions it should serve to the students and for 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 engage critically with the design of their social futures and the achievement of success.

Recommendations

Equipping students with functional English skills

From the arguments generated by the literature review and the findings, advocacy thus emanates for the development of a form of literacy that will equip the students in Departments of English with discursive practices and skills. The data revealed that students were unable to accomplish several standard practical writing and speaking 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. The same was done for oral productions by way of an oral presentation exercise where too many errors in grammar and communicative approach were also recorded.

Advocacy is thus for a specific English language teaching approach which will empower them with standard forms of the English language with contextual significance. Such an approach will enable the students to work with content, and language itself, and enable them to engage critically with prevailing discourses in a planned and elaborate manner, reshape and pluralize English by using written and spoken discourse in constructive ways.

The need to redesign pedagogical philosophies

From the more specific premise above, the observations veer off to consider the broader platform of philosophical tenets which inform on curricular practices and teaching approaches. The departure point here is the understanding of the important role that the Department of English can play in the modern society, mindful of the appellation of English in its name hence the 'English people'. This is with regard to the status of English as a lingua franca and the new literacy requisition. The neglect of understanding this background is indeed obfuscating the Department of English's ascension into the realm of important contributors to individual and societal edification in econometric terms. Sticking to traditional forms which study grammar and literature as isolated forms of meaning making is unhelpful. Stressing the importance of communicative language teaching is one of such outlets that this work brings out to deconstruct existing curriculum and philosophical tenets.

Redesigning the curriculum and courses mean structuring the different subjects, and engaging actively in training the students with a conscious monitoring strategy in place for their reading, speaking and writing skills..

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