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ANALYSIS OF CONCORD ERRORS IN STUDENTS' WRITTEN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY IN UMAR SULEIMAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION GASHUA, YOBE STATE.

[1*]BUKAR BARUWA MOHAMMED
Department of Primary Education
Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua Yobe state Nigeria

*Corresponding Author Information :-
E-Mail: bukarbaruwamohammed
Phone: +2347037693361

ABSTRACT

Many studies have been carried out on examining different problems worrying learners in academic settings. Concerning mastering language skills, researchers suggest that learners of English as second Language face great challenges and that negatively affect their academic performance. Also, it's generally believed that lack of having good knowledge of grammar leads to production of ineffective communication through either writing or speaking and that surely decreases learners' language competence and performance. It's against this background that this study analyzes the effect of concord errors in students' written argumentative essays in Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua, Yobe State in order to find easy ways that students will adapt to avoid making ungrammatical expressions. Experimental research design was used in analyzing the extent to which students in the study area made use of concord in their written argumentative essays. A total of 360 students were sampled out using Taroyamani's sampling rule. Though, the participants were divided into two equal groups. That is, 180 participated as experimental group and equally 180 participated as control group respectively. Achievement test item format with and without treatment was used as instrument for data collection. Valid and reliable writing tasks were used to test the experimental group. While the control group, was analyzed without given treatment in order to make a comparison between the two groups. The experiment was carried out in duplicate and data collected were analyzed using T-test statistical package. The research adapted inter-language transfer as its theoretical framework propounded by Olagoke in 1983. Findings showed that many of the students whose written argumentative essays were analyzed have difficulties with subject Vs verb concord errors, tense concord, pronoun antecedent, subject object concord, complementation, prepositions and comparison. After careful analyzes of the students' written argumentative essays, possible solutions recommended based on the findings from the study such as exposing lot of writing task to learners to ameliorate the prevalence of such concord error.

***Keywords**: Analysis, concord, errors, and argumentative essay*

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Introduction

English language plays very significant roles in academic setting especially in countries where it is used as foreign and/or second language. In schools, it surely plays a vital role because many text books, instructional materials, syllabus and teachers' guides are written in English language. This indicated the high value that Nigerian system of education placed on teaching English language. According to Polot and Beck (2004), Students are obligated to communicate using English language whenever in schools. But when looking at the current situation of many students in Nigerian context, it will be observe that many of them cannot communicate fluently either in written or in spoken English. This attitude does not help students in becoming competent users of English language particularly in second language learning situation (L2). According to Parot (2000), the downward trend of the students' performance especially in English language has been a source of worry to many teachers, parents, government and other stakeholders. Parot (2000) further suggest that if this trend is not curtailed one may wonder the kind of future citizens this country (Nigeria) may produce since it will be unimaginable source to entrust the ration in the hands of headers who cannot communicate effectively with official language of the country.

English language occupied a status of second, official, commercial and basic language for academic purposes. As far as academic is concern, English is synonymous to literacy and failure in mastering any of the four basic language skills, will definitely lead to failure in correct use of English language. Therefore, English language has occupied status of compulsory requirement for success at all levels of education. Learning English is indeed like learning any other languages taught in a formal situation. It requires learners to learn basic skills like: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Language could be spoken or written and it follows systematic principles which have been accepted by linguist and must be use by its users.

Improving learners' communicative competence and performance at all levels of education is one of the most vital goals for teaching English language in Nigerian schools. Proficiency in English usage achieved through mastering language skills which writing is one of them. Sound writing attained via good of use of grammar, application of linguistic knowledge, correct use of

punctuation marks and by way of developing lots of vocabulary. Osasona and Onjewe (2005) claim that, although writing is the last in the hierarchy of language skills, hitherto it is the most vital one, because it serve as a medium through which students expose their intellectual abilities such as expressing ideas, feelings, emotions or knowledge learnt or acquired on practical ground. Also, writing helps to display students' levels of grammatical knowledge, vocabulary and correct use of punctuation marks too mention but few.

Grammar is a vital aspect of language which must be given attention (Moiinvaziri, 2008). One main aspect of grammar which constitutes a lot of problems to many students is concord. It is believed that a good grasp of the concord is a Panacea for good language competence and performance. Though, the present researcher's experience and observation of students' write up through different interactions with the students in this research area, revealed concord errors as one major problem worrying the students. It is realized that concord errors reflect badly on students' personalities as they frequently misuse it on the course of expressing ideas or feelings and that lead to incorrect formation of sentences, clauses and phrases.

Concord as feature of grammar surely confuses many students who lack its proper mastery. In English grammar, concord refers to agreement or it simply referred to the grammatical rule that ensures elements of a sentence agree with each other in terms of number, gender, case, or person. The concord (agreement) could be: subject-verb, noun- pronoun, and/or adjective-noun concord. Grammatical concord virtually helps in ensuring clarity and coherence in sentences by maintaining consistency in the relationships between words. Maclean (1998) claims that writers and speakers carelessness is the major factor affecting speakers' speech or writers' write up.

As a result of the foregoing, needs arise to correct the incorrect use of concord among learners of English as second language. Various scholars like Ofuokwu (1982), Anasiudu (1983), Banjo (1969), Olaofae (1986) too mention but few studied grammatical errors in written and spoken English among users of English in Nigeria and they all agreed that errors vary in complexity and sources. Likewise other researchers mainly in the field of linguistics have for some time duel extensively on providing possible solution to the problems militating against the smooth learning of English language especially by second language learners in the areas of syntax, phonology, morphology, semantic and pragmatic (language in context) and have continued to receive

attention. In this effort, myriad problems relating to the wrong use of tenses, unacceptable operation in lexical constructions, poor pronunciation etc. were found among non-native speakers of English language.

Even though there are various problems confronting learners of English as second language all over the world, the present study focuses on analyzing the effect of concord errors in students' written argumentative essay in Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashu'a Yobe State Nigeria. The motive behind this research is to guide students to learn how to use concord correctly. The present researcher observed that examining students' write up in order to check correct use of language aspects particularly grammar, will immensely help the students to learn how to correct their mistakes and increases their level of expressing ideas and feelings clearer in both written and spoken language. Even though various grammatical aspects were treated in many studies in the past like the use of tenses, verbs and prepositions, concord has still remain a major issue to many learners of English as second language in Nigerian tertiary institutions and Universities. Wrong use of concord surely lead to incorrect expression of ideas and that actually causes lots of distortion and wrong interpretations.

Writing is guided by rules and conventions that are necessary to ensure complete compliance to rules set down by linguist. Harrison (1987) sees writing as a way through which we communicate and convey information by making marks on paper with pen. That is to say writing is a visual representation of human thoughts, feeling, and imaginations. Furthermore, Mcquade and Atwan (1980) state that thinking is a kind of internalized preparatory activity and writing is a useful means of communication that formed bedrock for human civilization and it is a concept that separates the literate from the non-illiterate. That is to say writing must be done in such a way that will fulfill a requirement of formal standard.

Statement of Problem

There have been great amount of researches conducted on students' problems allied to writing skills especially in the countries where English is used as foreign and/or second language. However, such works might have treated different types of learners' writing skill problems. Also, researchers suggest that many students majoring in different courses in Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) are facing great challenges with writing skills. This is happening at a time

Nigeria still requires considerably skilful and qualified teachers who will be teaching at the basic educational levels (primary and secondary schools) to address its needs as stated in the objectives of the National Commission for Colleges of Education in 2014.This critical situation therefore, needs special consideration. As such, it seems essential to address the learners' different problems in order to equip them with effective strategies that will help them to develop better use of English language. Also, many teachers and examiners have pondered over the rate of mass failure and poor performance of students especially in English language courses. Adeyanju (1984), states that many students in tertiary institutions have not mastered the structure of English language (grammar in particular). It's against this background that the present research intends to analyze the effect of concord errors in students' written argumentative essay in Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua. The study focused on analyzing the effect of concord errors in students' written argumentative essay simply because the researcher observed that many students produce clauses and sentences that have concord issues such as lack of agreement between subject and verb, pronouns and their antecedents etc.

Even though many studies on concord have been based largely at different tertiary institutions, not much work has been done on concord in the present study area. This implies that there is need to look into this aspect of grammar because observations and experiences showed that students are having limited knowledge of this aspect of grammar. The analyses of the students' concord errors in this research is done in order to find easy ways that the students will adopt to improve their grammatical expressions as it's a basic design feature of language to see that a language user constantly uses language devices such as elements of grammar effectively in producing meaningful expressions, thoughts, feelings and/or ideas either in written or in spoken language.

Research Questions:

1. Do concord errors have any negative effect on students' academic writing capabilities?

2. To what extent concord errors affect students' correct expression of ideas, thoughts and/or feelings in writing argumentative essays?

3. How could such situations be tackling to improve the students' standard of correct use of concords in writing argumentative essays?

Objectives of the study

The aim and objective of the study is to identify and analyze the effect of concord errors in students' written argumentative essays in Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua and to suggest effective solution that will address the problem.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. According to Ali (2006) descriptive survey research design is a descriptive study that uses sample of an investigation to document, describe and explain what is in existence or not in existence on present status of phenomena being investigated. Similarly, Akuezuilo and Agu (2003) claim that a survey research design is the one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. The design is therefore suitable for this study since it involves an attitude of students majoring at different levels of study.

Population of the study

The population of the study includes the entire students majoring in English language in different programs offered in Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua Yobe State Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size of the study involved 360 students who were randomly selected in Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua Yobe State Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to ensure all the students have equal chance of being selected. The 360 total participant

students encompassed 250 males and 110 females. Hence, the participants were divided into control and experimental groups. Thus, 180 students participated as control group, and equally 180 students were treated as experimental group.

Research Instrument

Writing tasks on interested topics were used as instrument for data collection in this study. The researcher drafted an argumentative essay writing topics that required good use of concord and administered to the students. A checklist with five (5) point's likert scales (5, 4, 3, 1 and 0) were used to grade good use of concords in the students' written argumentative essays treated.

Validation of Research Instrument

To validate the instrument, copies of the research topic, purpose of the study, research questions, and research hypothesis together with the draft instrument were given to three experts. One from department of Psychology in School of Education, and the other two from School of Science Education all in Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua Yobe State Nigeria. The experts were requested to examine and scrutinize the items in terms of content relevance, suitability, item clarity and coverage of the dimensions of the study. After the experts' examination of the items, their suggestions and comments guided the construction of the final draft of this research.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher employed self-delivery techniques in data collection and a direct examination format was used by way of presenting writing tasks and allocating equal writing time to the participants. The scripts were collected immediately and the students' use of concord in the essays written were evaluated and analyzed by the researcher.

Data Collection procedure

To gather data for the study, the participants were given argumentative essay writing tasks on different but interested topics in order to check and analyze their use of concords. Though, the

experimental group was served with writing task at two different stages. That is, before and after given them training about concord. Eventually, the scores of the experimental group from both pre-training and post- training were compared and examined. While for control group, there was no treatment. This is because; a good test item is composed through considering its validity, reliability and practicability. Therefore, in order to ascertain the content of the writing task given to the students, the three criteria of a good test were considered.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation which culminated into T-test final analysis. A five point's likert scale was used with 5 point, 4 point, 3 point, 2 point, 1 point and 0 point respectively. The mean and standard deviation were calculated using the fomulae as described below:

$X = \sum FX / N$ Where:

X= mean

F= frequency

X= nominal value of option

$\sum$= summation sign

N= number of the respondent

4+3+2+1/4 =10/4 = 2.50

The decision rule is 2.50. This means that any mean score equal to or greater than (≥) 2.50 is considered as positive response and any mean score less than (<) 2.50 is considered as negative response.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The table below presents the result of the null hypothesis after given pre and post-test to the experimental group which was analyzed using t-test. The result is also interpreted underneath of the table for better understanding.

Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	P-Value	α- level	Df	Decision
Xbar1=42.57	SD1=5.00	V1=25.04	-3.49	0.05	358	Not significant
Xbar2=57.00	SD2=1.67	V2=2.8				

From the table, it could be seen that the p- value (-3.49) is less than the level (0.05). Hence, the hypothesis is rejected, and then the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, the analyses exposed that the students are having great issues concerning correct use of concords. As such, they need to be given more training on how to use concord effectively in order to help them improve their level of grammatical expression and standard of essay writing capabilities especially in terms of writing argumentative essays. The students' incorrect use of grammatical concords realized from result of the study where 180 students were tested before and after given training on how to write good essays. The study exposed that even though the experimental group were observed to have many lapses regarding correct use of concord, they performed better than the control group who were not been given treatment (training).

DISCUSSION

In order to obtain reliable findings, training on writing essays was given to the experimental group. Thereafter, they were asked to write argumentative essays on different but interested topics. Findings from this study revealed that, majority of the students particularly the experimental group uses concord incorrectly and that negatively affect their academic writings skills. Equally, it's observed that the students' incorrect use of concord for example agreement between subject Vs verb, pronoun Vs pronoun antecedent, extremely underrate their performance. The negative implication of incorrect use of concord is that, it's a gradual progression that definitely affects students' good command of grammar and standard of essay writing skills. This was observed from the fact that before giving treatment to the experimental group, their performance was less than after they were given treatment. It was also found in this study that the students are having problems with knowing how to use concord effectively and

they admit that as great issue on their academic writings, since incorrect use of concord slows down the expression of target meaning clearly.

In addition, findings showed that the most prevalent concord errors observed worthy of 67% concerned with lack of having knowledge about subject-verb agreement. Even though Tenses and spelling errors are not direct focuses of the topic of this study, but observed and found that the students do have great issues with them. The least errors were errors in case corresponded with 50%. Based on this research finding, majority of the errors happened due to lack of knowledge of subject-verb agreement. It was also found that 75% out of the total number of participants are having problem with pronoun concord. Quirk et al (1974) claim that pronouns can be either singular or plural and when used as subject of sentence, it must agree with the verb and if the subject of a sentence does not match with verb, an error will definitely occur. Errors in concord arise as a result of numerical mismatch between a subject and its verb or a pronoun and its antecedent. This implies that an error of concord occurs when a singular subject is forced to agree with a plural verb or when a singular pronoun is forced to agree with a plural antecedent.

Also finding in this research revealed that wrong application of concord has been the common feature in students' both spoken and written English and that affect their overall communicative ability. The general contention is that students' failure to correctly use concord is due to insufficient knowledge of its functions because most of the students do not have good understanding of concord, not even to identify its forms or sources. Dada (2000) claims that, the basic nation or underlying principles behind good sentence construction placed under forming grammatical and meaningful sentences. This principle is only attained through good use of concord. Furthermore, Aremo (1987) is of the view that concord is the term that uses to refer to the relationship between two grammatical items. This means that a singular subject should be accompanied by a singular verb likewise a plural subject should have a plural verb respectively.

CONCLUSION

As, this research aimed at analyzing the effect of concord errors in students' written argumentative essay, its findings showed that the students do not have good knowledge of this aspect of grammar. The study claims that writing is one amongst the four basic language skills and it does not carried out haphazardly as there are guiding principles that fluent writers required

to make use to successfully arrive at excellent writing of any essay type. Therefore, it is very much pertinent to note that effective writing does not only require gathering of enough vocabularies but also having knowledge of grammar.

Berry (1975), Faucett and Halliday (1985), claimed that fluent language users can make choice among different aspects of grammar on the course of utterance production. For instance they can make use system of numbers (singular or plural), tenses (past, present or future), model (declarative, imperative, actuality, exclamatory, interrogative and subjunctive), person (first, second or third person) gender (Masculine, Feminine or neuter) etc. Eka (1994) explains further that according to this model all language have units of structure, classes and systems. Sentences and clause are instance of the category of unit. Verbs and Nouns are instance of classes. Subject and complement are instance of structure. Unit, structure and class form a system of categories of the grammar. Clause, sentence and subject are said to be descriptive categories is particular instance for description.

This study therefore concluded by suggesting that students should learn more about concord as it will help them immensely in improving their writing skills and correct use of English language in general. The suggestion given here is best on the findings of this research which revealed that the students' incorrect use of concord has great negative implications on their writing capabilities one of which can be seen in term of non-compliance to the rules of standard grammar of English language.

RECOMMENDATION

This research recommend other researches to conduct similar researches to the present one by using other methods of conducting research in order to look into the students' situation and to bring more positive solutions to the negative effects of concord errors that negatively affect students' correct use of English language. It is also recommended that concord as a grammatical category should be entrenched to avoid production of ungrammatical expressions and this can be done by way of encouraging students to read newspapers, magazines, novels and watching or listening to educative programs. Further, it is also recommended that students should be encouraged to write essays frequently though teachers' guidance to master sentence structure for constructing good sentences in their essays.

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