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Factors accounting for pupils' pattern of errors in English language written expression: Implication for teaching and learning

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Abstract

Effective written language expression is generally conceived as an important tool in communication. Using the work samples of sixty eight primary six pupils drawn from public primary schools in Cape Coast and Twifo Breman in the Central Region of Ghana, the investigators examined the pattern of errors pupils make in English Written Language and factors accounting for the errors. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design and two validated instruments involving questionnaire and a hundred and seventy-five word passage selected from Grade Six English Reader. The results showed that most pupils omitted, substituted and wrongly spelt words in their written expressions. It was also revealed that diverse factors affected pupils' written English expression. There were significant differences in pattern of errors in written English expression between urban and rural schools as well as between male and female pupils. On the basis of the findings, recommendations were made for teachers and parents to engage their pupils more in reading and writing activities.

Keywords: English, written expression, primary, learning difficulties, communication.

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1. Introduction

Primary education serves as the bedrock for the structure of our education and can arguably be rationalized as the intellectual capacity for individual as well as development of the nation. Hence, its recognition worldwide for enhancing literacy, numeracy, communication and generally augments individuals' cognitive development with rippling positive effects on increased labour and productivity.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana has taken a lead in developing education systems that make it possible for children of school age to have access to education. The fCUBE (Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education) initiative is one of several examples of steps taken by successive governments to achieve this feat. This initiative ensures that every child has access to basic education. The policy was in line with the (World Conference on EFA, Jomtien, 1990) which declared that education should be accessible to everyone before 2000. Through education a child can read, write and do maths. Cooper (2000) underscored the need for children to acquire literacy.

As one of the globally used media of exchange, English Language has gained so much recognition. In Ghana, it is the medium of instruction from primary four to tertiary institution. Every student from Junior High School to Senior High School should obtain a pass grade to progress to next level of education. Ajayi (2004) and Ajila (2003) held the view that literacy and numeracy skills should be laid earlier before any other skill is taught.

Written Language expression is one of the skill areas that every learner is expected to acquire during the school years. However, it is generally regarded as the most complex in the sense that 'there are a number of strategies required to express one's ideas in writing (Lerner, 2000). According to Lewis and Doorlag (1995), there are three key things to consider in written language expression. These are:

- Identification of the mechanics of writing such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation and capitalization.
- Language skills such as semantics (meaning of words) and syntax (grammar).
- Thinking skills such as organisation, sequence and logic.

According to Mackay (1978), writing involves ability to shape letters (graphics), knowledge of right combination of letters (spelling) and skill in expressing oneself through the written word (composition). In the course of learning to write, most children tend to commit lots of errors. In determining errors in writing, Corder (1967) points out that the error must not only be systematic, but also consistent (Gyimah, 2008). A pupil's pattern of errors can be identified through error analysis using miscues such as additions or insertions, repetitions, omissions, alterations and/or self-corrections. Miscue analysis gives researchers access into how readers use cues in the text to make inferences and predictions about what is to come, some of which may result in the production of a miscue. Miscues can be categorized on the basis of their graphophonic, syntactic and semantic acceptability. In a study conducted by Darus and Subramanian (2009), it was revealed that most of the errors Malay students made were mainly grammatical and weak vocabulary.

The early experiences of the child provide the basis for language acquisition and development. The infant is immersed in the spoken language of his/her family and begins to associate people, places, objects, events, needs and wants with spoken words. These experiences form the foundations for the development of primary language.

Listening or the comprehension of spoken language is a necessary prerequisite for speaking or oral language. The input and understanding of aural language precedes the output of oral language. Normally, during this stage of development, the child's vocabulary is expanding rapidly and an awareness and ability to manipulate speech sounds (phonological skills) are established.

2. Factors affecting errors in pupils' English language written expression

Several factors including genetic (nature) and environmental (nurture) ones may interact in complex ways to account for why some pupils experience difficulties in their written expression (Young, 2005). The World Health Organisation (WHO) attributes the difficulty in language construction in terms of the person (the self), institutional and social characteristics (Üstün, Chatterji, Bickenbach, Kostanjsek & Schneider, 2003). The environmental factors involve drug use, nutritional problems (before or after birth), diseases (such as German measles) before birth. Rauch, Cieza and Stucki (2008), have acknowledged that certain learning and behavioural disorders may be linked to social and economic status where expectant mothers are involved in excessive alcoholism and smoking. There are others that are school-related such as teachers' poor instructional methods and lack of proficiency in the English Language (Adegbile, 1999; Goodman, 1986). If teachers are unable to speak fluently, write properly and correctly pronounce words or use language appropriately (Digha, 2007; Afon, 2006; Jiboku, 1998; Voller & Benson, 1997; Ayodele, 1988), the likelihood is there for their pupils to have language difficulties. Kolawole, Adepoju and Adelere (2000) have pointed out that teachers' poor grammatical construction and writing skills may contribute significantly to pupils' written language problems.

Home background of students could be another cause of grammatical errors. Hassan (2002) affirmed that students' inability to speak and write standard English Language was due to their background. Many of them have their first contact with the English Language after the maturational age of six. Lim's (1990) study among Mandarin speaking students revealed that exposure to several languages contributed to written language difficulties. A synthesis of errors made in grammar suggests that errors in students' written expression were as a result of the transfer of so many languages. Such errors were common in their tenses, spellings and how singular and plural constructions were connected (Lim, 1990). Brown (1980) maintains that second language learning cannot be free of errors.

Accounting for why learners may exhibit errors in their writing, Farrell (2014) gives the following social reasons:

1. negative attitudes toward the target language
2. continued lack of progress in the L2
3. a wide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture, and,
4. lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning.

It therefore implies that teachers have a big role to play in helping their pupils to overcome written language difficulties. They can help them master the skills of writing if they are good models.

A child's inability to write efficiently may also be the result of learning disability. Learning disability is presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. The condition is heterogeneous and includes difficulties in using both receptive and expressive language. It affects 1 in 30% of pupils of school going age (Lerner, 2000). It is a cognitive and psychological problem, which is found among a good number of children, pupils or students in almost every class in every school everywhere.

Genetically, research (Winkler, 2008) indicates that different genes may influence development of learning disabilities. Available statistics indicate that in the United States 1 out of every 5 people has a learning disability with 3 million children between the ages of 6 and 21 exhibiting some form of a learning disability and receiving special education in school (Twenty-fourth Annual Report to Congress, U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Children whose parents have some history of learning problems (like dyslexia) are likely to experience some academic problems (Lerner, 2000). It has been revealed that some people have difficulty performing specific types of skills including reading, writing, and reasoning.

3. Effects of English language written errors on pupils' academic, social and emotional development

Educationists have realised the importance of language and in particular anxiety linked to writing and the issues of second language (Atay & Kurt, 2006; Cheng, 2002). Evidence suggests that the fear and anxiety associated with writing may particularly affect pupils (Bline, Lowe, Meixner, Nouri & Pearce, 2001). Miller (2011) found that learners who experience problems regarding writing most of the time were victims of low self-esteem and dropout in schools. By implication, low self-esteem could be linked with insecurity and excessive dependence on other people. Evidence suggests that there is a relationship between difficulties in reading and behavioural deficits that are linked with anti-social (Gittleman, Mannuzza, Shenkar & Bonagusa, 1985; Rutter, 1974).

Lall's (1996) studies perceived peer relations, parenting and social competence in children who exhibit academic skill problems. Using a sample size of twenty participants made up of children aged between 7 and 12 with academic skill problems (described as specific developmental disorders of scholastic skills) by International Classification of Disease (ICD)-10 and twenty children without academic skill difficulties, the results indicated that the children were weak in their social interactions. Thus defective English language construction results in students' poor academic performance (Ayodele, 1988). Hence, Iroegbu (2006) put emphasis on the passing of English Language for progression into tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

5. Measures to be put in place to reduce or remove English Language Written Expression Errors

It is generally acknowledged that the ability to write well does not naturally occur. It must be a skill that must be learned in formal instructional settings or other environments (Myles, 2014). Helping pupils to be familiar with the process of writing can contribute a lot to minimising written language errors. Even though the writing process may involve several steps, generally six steps have been identified. These are: pre-writing, writing, revision, editing, final draft, and publishing. Researchers such as Roca de Larios, Murphy and Marín (2002) and Scott (1996) and Susser (1994), have suggested that the process of writing is the best way through which learners can improve their competence in writing. This is because it helps the learner to be aware of the writing process. It also suggests the importance of teachers, or peers as guiding the process for improved competence to reduce the tendency for only looking out for mistakes and correcting them.

Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. In order to help pupils to overcome their difficulties in written expression, Ferris and Roberts (2001) provided five ways [errors—verbs, noun-endings, articles, lexicon, and sentences structure] that could be blazed and recommended that grammatical errors could be reduced based on individual needs and feedback.

Researches have emphasised two ways by which written work can be corrected (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Terry, 1989; Zamel, 1985; Lalande, 1982) and categorised as:

- a. Explicit (i.e. direct) where the instructor indicates the error and provides the correct form, and
- b. Non-explicit (i.e. indirect), here, the instructor marks the error in some fashion (for example, underlining, highlighting, coding, etc.). The onus lies on the student to provide the correct answer.

The non-explicit or indirect procedure has been successfully used by researchers such as Ruiz-Funes (2001); Scott (1996) and Chastain (1990). Adapting Lalande's (1982) Essay Correction Code (ECCO) method, instructors prompted learners about different mistakes they made in such a subtle manner that they were not made aware of the right responses. This method improved teaching and learning through problem solving (Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

It is important for teachers to use appropriate methods of teaching English and use sentences that are simple to improve upon learners writing skills (Digha, 2007; Afon, 2006; Kolawole, 1997).

6. Statement of the problem

A study which used Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) in English Language conducted by the Centre for Research on Improving Quality of Primary Education in Ghana (CRIQPEG) (1996) indicated that 95% of the Grade Six pupils tested on their written expression could not identify some letters of the alphabet and could therefore not achieve mastery of basic skills in English. This may imply that such pupils will experience difficulty spelling words. After several years of this study, it is unclear whether the difficulties are still persistent; hence, the current study.

7. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to identify the level of differences in English language written expression errors between pupils in rural and urban schools in Central Region of Ghana and the possible factors that undergird the errors. Additionally, the study explored the possible effects pupils' written language expression errors have on their academic, social and emotional development as well as the strategies to adopt to improve pupils' written expressions.

8. Research Questions

The study sought to answer four main research questions namely:

1. What are the most frequently occurring errors pupils make in their English language written expression?
2. What are the factors that account for the errors pupils make in their English language written expression?
3. What effects do English language written expression errors have on pupils' academic, social and emotional development?
4. How can the errors pupils make in their English language written expression be mitigated?

9. Hypotheses

- 1a. Ho: There is no significant difference in the pattern of errors pupils in rural and urban schools make in English Language written expression.
- 1b. Ho: There is no significant difference in the pattern of errors male and female pupils in rural and urban schools make in written language expression
- 2a. Ho: There are no differences in factors that account for ELWE based on school location
- 2b. Ho: There are no gender differences in factors that account for pupils' ELWE

10. Methodology

10.1. Research participants

The research participants were 68 Class Six pupils selected from two public primary schools in Cape Coast and Twifo Breman, in the Central Region of Ghana. They were within the ages of 10 and 16 years and had had at least two years exposure to the English Language and could presumably read and write English. Pupils from Cape Coast were described as urban, while those from Twifo Breman were described as rural.

10.2. Instrument

In developing the research instrument, the current researchers were guided by Lim's (1990) instrument which was used in analysing college students written English errors in Kuala Lumpur.

In order to identify the pattern of errors pupils made in their written language expression, the pupils were asked to listen to a 175 word passage selected from their Grade Six English Reader. In selecting the passage, care was taken to ensure that it was one that all the pupils were familiar with and had been treated as class exercise.

In order to investigate the factors accounting for the pupils' written language expression errors, a self-made questionnaire of 70 items was administered. The instrument had a coefficient alpha of 0.96 which lies in the normal range. There were in two sections. The Section A comprised of demographic characteristics of pupils and their parents. The Section B dealt with pupil Identification of English Written Expression Errors; factors accounting for English language written errors; effects of English written expression errors on pupils' academic, social and emotional development; and measures to reduce or remove English Language Written Expression Errors.

10.3. Procedure for Data Collection

The pupils were required to first listen to the reading of the passage and secondly reproduce the passage as the reader read slowly over each line of about ten words. The reading out of the passage to the pupils and the writing out were considered between 20 and 30 minutes.

10.4. Procedure for Data Analysis

In analysing the data, we were guided by an error classification scheme developed by Darus et al. (2007). Darus et al's classification consisted of 18 types of errors including: word order, incomplete structures, negative constructions, mechanics, word choice, and word form. However, we subjectively labelled the errors as substitution, self-correction, insertion or addition, repetition, omissions and wrongly spelt words to suit the purpose of our study.

Since English Language was not the respondents' first language, it was likely errors could be unavoidable (Brown, 1980). Hence, in interpreting the results, we call for caution.

11. Results

The data for answering the research questions and testing the hypotheses stated are presented as results and each of them is discussed in this section. There were 68 respondents from both the rural and the urban schools as indicated in table 1, out of which 35 were males and 33 females representing 51.5% and 48.5%, respectively. There is therefore a fair gender balance.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	35	51.5
Female	33	48.5
Age		
10-12	44	64.7
13-15	22	32.4
16-18	2	2.9
Total	68	100.0

The ages of the respondents ranged between 10 and 18 as shown on table 1. Majority of the pupils were in the age bracket of 10-12(64.7%) which lies in the appropriate age of which a child is supposed to be in class six in Ghana. A good number 22(32.4%) were in the range of 13-15 years and 2(2.9%) represents the range of 16-18. The reason for this was not ascertained.

RQ1. What are the most frequently occurring errors pupils make in their English language written expressions?

In order to determine the frequency of errors pupils in urban and rural schools make, the mean scores of the miscues were ranked. The summary of Table 2 depicts the most frequently occurring errors.

Table 2. Mean Rank for Urban and Rural Miscues

Type of miscue	Urban			Rural		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Omissions	34	17.06	22.10	34	58.94	40.05
Wrongly Spelt Words	34	6.97	9.44	34	32.26	18.52
Substitution	34	4.06	3.56	34	6.18	7.64
Self-Correction	34	3.56	3.74	34	4.35	3.75
Insertion or Addition	34	2.32	1.97	34	3.06	3.32
Repetition	34	0.06	0.34	34	0.15	0.70

The Table reveals that omissions (Urban, 17.05; Rural, 58.94), wrongly spelt words (Urban, 6.97; Rural, 32.26), substitutions (Urban, 4.05; Rural, 6.17) and self-corrections (Urban, 3.55; Rural, 4.35) were the most frequent errors pupils in both urban and rural schools made in their written language expressions. The least was repetitions (Urban, 3.55; Rural, 0.14). The results further indicate that pupils in urban schools were better at self-corrections (3.55) than those in rural school (4.35). There was also an indication that pupils in rural schools committed more omissions, wrongly spelt words and substituted more words than those in urban setting.

Hypothesis 1a:

There is no significant difference in the pattern of errors pupils in rural and urban schools make in written language expression.

To test for the statistical differences between urban and rural schools in the pattern of errors pupils make in their English language expressions, the data were subjected to an independent t-test analysis.

Table 3. Summary of t-test analysis of Pupils' pattern of errors based on location and gender

Independent variables	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Location					
Urban	23.59	4.79	-6.02	66	0.000*
Rural	30.94	5.27			
Gender					
Male	28.46	6.37	1.648	66	0.104†
Female	26.00	5.89			

N=34; * $p < 0.05$ (significant); † $p > 0.05$ (not significant)

Hypothesis 1b:

There is no significant difference in the pattern of errors male and female pupils in rural and urban schools make in English Language written expression.

There was an indication that between urban and rural schools, there was significant difference. Urban, $M = 23.59$; $SD = 4.79$; Rural, $M = 30.94$; $SD = 5.27$ { $t(66) = -6.02$ $p < 0.05$ } meaning that the location of a school could have an impact on the errors pupils make in their English Language written expression.

In terms of gender differences in patterns of error between urban and rural schools, no difference was established as table 3 shows. Male, $M = 28.45$; $SD = 6.37$ higher than (Female, $M = 26.00$, $SD = 5.89$) $t(66) = 1.648$, $p > 0.05$).

RQ 2: What are the factors that account for the errors pupils make in their English language written expression?

The mean scores of the factors that account for pupils' written expression errors in both the rural and the urban schools have been ranked on table 4. The table reveals that 'my parents do not care about my learning' (3.96), 'I absent myself from school' (3.42) and 'I feel lazy to correct my mistakes' (3.33) were the most frequently occurring factors that accounted for the pupils' written language expression errors. These revelations are crucial in the sense that the school and the home environments are important in shaping the pupils' learning.

Table 4. Mean ranking for factors that account for ELWE errors in both rural and urban schools

Factors	N	Min.	Max	Mean	SD
My parents do not care about my learning	68	1.00	5.00	3.96	1.11
I absent myself from school	68	1.00	5.00	3.43	1.41
I feel lazy to correct my writing mistakes	68	1.00	5.00	3.34	1.22
I understand my teacher when he/she speaks English to me	68	1.00	5.00	1.62	1.16
My parents inspect my homework	68	1.00	5.00	1.50	1.02
I like teachers teaching method	68	1.00	4.00	1.50	0.96

Table 5 depicts the ranking of the factors responsible for pupils' written language expression errors in the rural school as compared to the urban school. The mean scores of the factors shown on the table indicate that, I have no patience for writing (4.17), I have difficulty with reading comprehension (3.91), I come to school late (3.85), I make frequent reading errors (3.79), I have poor handwriting (3.79) I have difficulty with letter and word recognition (3.79) and I spell words differently in single passage (3.76) were the most frequently occurring factors causing pupils' written language expression errors in the rural school.

Table 5. Mean ranking for factors that account for ELWE errors in rural and urban school

Rural	Mean	SD	Urban	Mean	SD
I have no patience for writing	4.18	0.76	I have difficulty with language transfer	4.12	1.07
I have difficulty with reading comprehension	3.91	1.16	I am slow at learning new skills	4.12	1.17
I come to school late	3.85	0.86	I confuse basic words when reading	3.88	1.07
I make frequent reading errors	3.79	1.07	I make frequent reading errors	2.71	1.45
I have poor handwriting	3.79	1.30	I have difficulty with language transfer	2.68	1.34
I have difficulty with letter and word recognition	3.79	1.09	I understand my teacher when he/she speaks English to me	2.62	1.33
I understand my teacher when he/she speaks English to me	3.79	1.15	My parents inspect my homework	2.56	1.26

N=34

As shown on Table 5 results of factors causing errors in written language expression in the urban school have been ranked in a descending order. The mean scores depict that, I have difficulty with language transfer (4.12), I am slow at learning new skills (4.12), and I confusing basic words when reading (3.88) were the most prevalent factors. These factors are different from what prevails in the rural school yet attention is required towards improving pupils' cognitive processes in both schools.

Hypothesis 2a: *There are no differences in factors that account for ELWE in rural and urban schools*

In determining the differences in the factors that accounted for ELWE in rural and urban schools, (see summary in table 6), the data were subjected to an independent t- test analysis.

Table 6. Summary of t-test analysis in factors that account for ELWE errors based on location and gender

Independent variables	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Location					
Urban	76.62	19.98	-8.35	66	0.000*
Rural	121.41	24.06			
Gender					
Male	103.49	30.86	1.21	66	0.230†
Female	94.27	31.90			

N=34; *p< 0.05 (significant); †p> 0.05 (not significant); ELWE= English language written expression.

Hypothesis 2b: *There are no gender differences in factors that account for pupils' ELWE*

Significant differences were found in the results. Urban, M= 76.62, SD 19.98; Rural M=121.41 SD = 24.06 {t (66) = -8.35 p< 0.05}. The results mean that pupils in the rural schools made more English written language expression errors than their urban counterpart. To test for the differences between the two groups, a t-test was conducted. Results show significant differences on table 6.

In terms of gender differences in factors causing ELWE between urban and rural schools, no difference was established as table 6 shows. {(Male, M=103.49; SD=30.86) higher than (Female, M=94.27, SD=31.90) $t(66) = 1.21, p > 0.05$ }.

RQ3. What effects do English language written expression errors have on pupils' academic, social and emotional development?

Table 7 shows the effects written language expression errors have on pupils in both urban and rural schools. These have been put into social, emotional and academic effects where the gravity of each has been arranged in a descending order.

As shown on table 7, an exciting trend occurs with the effects of written expression errors on pupils' academic, social and emotional development in the urban school. As indicated on the table, the mean score of the social effect, I do not talk in class (3.05), is the factor that affects pupils in the urban school the most.

However, as depicted on table 7, the rural pupils are affected by more written expression errors in all the domains especially the social domain than their urban counterparts. The mean scores are shown on the table as, it affects my self-image (3.59), it affects my self-confidence (3.52), I do not talk in class (3.14) and I am too quiet in class (3.12). The mean scores of the emotional effect, it makes me feel unimportant (3.26) and academic effects, I do not do well in examination (3.26) and I think I am a failure (3.14) indicate the degree to which rural pupils experience problems compared to the urban pupils.

Table 7. Effects of English language written expression errors on pupils' academic, social and emotional development in urban and rural schools

URBAN			RURAL				
Effects of ELWE	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effects of ELWE	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Social			Social				
I do not talk in class	34	3.06	1.30	It affects my self-image	34	3.59	1.05
I am too quiet in class	34	2.65	1.28	It affects my self confidence	34	3.53	1.11
It affects my self confidence	34	2.35	1.30	I do not talk in class	34	3.15	1.13
It affects my self-image	34	2.24	1.42	I am too quiet in class	34	3.12	1.04
I think my teacher does not like me	34	1.65	1.20	I think my teacher does not like me	34	2.85	1.05
Emotional			Emotional				
It makes me feel unhappy	34	2.26	1.38	It makes me feel unimportant	34	3.26	1.21
I am moody	34	1.94	1.07	I am moody	34	2.65	0.95
I sleep in class	34	1.41	0.82	I sleep in class	34	2.59	0.96
Academic			Academic				
I do not do well in examination	34	2.53	1.38	I do not do well in examination	34	3.62	0.98
I think I am a failure	34	2.00	1.41	I think I am a failure	34	3.15	0.96
I do not want to go to school	34	1.47	0.90	I do not want to go to school	34	2.68	1.12

Q4. What are the main remedies for pupils' English language expression errors

Table 8. Remedies for pupils' English language expression errors in rural and urban school

RURAL	Mean	SD	URBAN	Mean	SD
Parents should encourage their children to read books.	4.88	0.33	Parents should encourage their children to read books.	4.62	0.99
Prizes should be given to pupils who spell well	4.32	0.64	Peers should speak English often	4.59	0.56
I should listen to children's English programme on air	4.26	0.83	I should watch children's English programmes on TV	4.35	0.92
Class teacher should encourage my reading	4.12	1.01	There should be spelling 'bee' every morning in class	4.29	1.17
Peers should speak English often	4.12	1.09	Prizes should be given to pupils who spell well	4.21	1.12
Class teacher should encourage my writing	4.06	0.98	There should be extra classes in English language	4.18	0.90
There should be extra classes in English language	3.97	1.06	Pupil should listen to children's English programme on air	4.09	1.08
There should be spelling 'bee' every morning in class	3.94	0.78	Class teacher should encourage my reading	4.09	0.90
Pupils should watch children's English programmes on TV	3.91	0.90	An extension in the number of English periods on time-table	4.06	1.04
There should be extension in the number of English periods on time-table	3.88	0.95	Parents should speak English often	3.88	1.27
Parents should speak English often	3.74	1.08	Class teacher should encourage writing	3.82	1.03
Class teacher should re-teach the letters of the alphabet	3.53	0.96	Class teacher should re-teach the letters of the alphabet	2.50	1.42

N=34; SD=Standard Deviation

Results of the remedies to mitigate pupils' English language expression errors are shown on table 8 for rural and urban schools respectively. The mean scores of the main remedies indicated, Parents should encourage their children to read books (4.88), Prizes should be given to pupils who spell well (4.32), I should listen to children's English programme on air (4.26), and Class teacher should encourage my reading (4.11). Class teacher should re-teach the letters of the alphabet (3.52) is the least among the remedies.

However, as shown on the table for the urban school, 'Parents should encourage their children to read books (4.61)' was also mentioned by the rural school as the first remedy with the highest mean score for written language expression errors. This suggests that the home environment of the pupils could have positive or negative outcomes for their future development which calls for urgent attention. In the urban school, Peers should speak English often (4.58), I should watch children's English programmes on TV(4.35), There should be spelling 'bee' every morning in class (4.29) indicated a different trend compared to the rural school. Hence, pupils in various locations have different needs that must be met appropriately.

12. Discussion

Results of the data analyses in this study were used to develop a profile of class six pupils in rural and urban settings in the Central Region of Ghana with respect to their English written language expression errors. The gender and age sampled for this study were presented on table 1. The foregoing characteristics give a vivid impression of the pupils' age profile in Ghana. The expected age range to be in class six is 10-12 and if allowance is given due to peculiar delays and admission problems, the upper limit of the range may extend beyond 12.

12.1. Patterns of pupils' English Language written errors

The study revealed that the most frequently occurring errors that pupils in both the rural and the urban schools made were 'omissions' followed by 'wrongly spelt words' but the least occurring error was 'repetition'. However, the mean difference determining the degree of errors in written language expression between rural (23.58) and urban (30.94) was 7.37. Hence, rural pupils tended to make more errors than urban pupils. This gives credence to Darus and Subramaniam (2009) results of a study that the students were weak in English language vocabulary and therefore made mistakes in the application of the rules regarding structure of sentences in English. As an expressive language the importance of effective English Language written expression cannot be underestimated (Lerner, 2000). When words are wrongly spelt, repeated or omitted it makes it difficult to understand what is being conveyed. It is for this reason that teachers especially those at the Basic School level have to be encouraged to give clear and precise instructions in English Language written expression for successful communication.

It is succinctly pointed out by Lerner (2000) that competent writing requires many related abilities including facility in spoken language, legible handwriting as well as cognitive strategies. Learning to spell can be made more difficult if teachers fail to teach pupils well (Stakes & Hornby, 2000). Peters and Cripps (1983) cited in Stakes and Hornby (2000) suggest that in teaching pupils they need to be told to 'look carefully at words and to think about the letter pattern' (p. 89). Additionally, they need to visualise words and write words from memory. The 'look-cover-say-write-check' (p. 89) approach is helpful in overcoming wrong spelling. Teachers have to ensure that pupils have full understanding of what is being taught and give ample time to enable them to compose their ideas. Pupils have to take their time in writing. Pupils should be further encouraged to be careful and pay attention to what they write in order to avoid omitting words.

Reading is not simply decoding letters and words but also comprehending what is decoded. Hence teachers should teach pupils to understand what they read. Children need to spend time finding and fixing their mistakes, which could improve upon their general level and quality of writing. Pupils should make conscious effort to write as accurately as possible. They need study plan to set aside time to work on their errors, read more books and function independently.

The rural-urban difference in pupils' written performance may not be surprising as most qualified teachers graduating from the Colleges of Education hesitate to accept postings to rural areas. The reasons are not far-fetched for in most rural communities in Ghana, electricity and other basic facilities are non-existent. It is for these reasons that successive governments' initiative to extend electricity to rural areas and the introduction of the capitation and school feeding programmes to deprived communities in the country must be encouraged. Also worth commending is the incentives given to teachers who accept postings to the rural areas in the country. Nonetheless, a good supply of reading materials and library facilities, teacher commitment and pupils' readiness to learn could mitigate the problems.

12.2. Male/female English Language written expression performance

The general trend of the differences in the pattern of errors in written language expression made between male and female pupils in the sub population revealed that female pupils made fewer errors than their male counterparts therefore the former may be better in language acquisition than the latter. This corroborates Wood's (2001) argument that there are gender differences in communication. Burman, Bitan and Booth (2008) agree that girls are better at abstraction than boys which could imply that when teaching children educators should consider gender differences in their levels of understanding the target text. While this could be the case, we only widen the gap if little attention is paid to the boys in their English Language written expression. As a solution, efforts should be made to inculcate reading interest in boys while not neglecting the girls.

12.3. Factors affecting pupils' English Language written expression

The general factors reported by respondents that are responsible for English language written language expression errors were documented as 'my parents do not care about my learning', 'I absent myself from school', and 'I feel lazy to correct my mistakes.' Whilst the afore-mentioned fit into the social *and personal* domains, it adds credence to factors outlined by Young (2005) that nature, nurture and socialisation play complementary roles that influence learners written English language competence.

In dealing with the personal factors, it must be recognised that pupils' lateness to and absenteeism from school may be the result of varying factors including probably parents' inability to supervise their children's school work, lack of reinforcement and/or models to emulate, and lack of motivation. Admittedly, parents have a role to play in their children's schooling. As key stakeholders, they are to ensure that they get the children ready early enough for school as well as remove any barrier likely to be detrimental to their children's academic performance. Probably for this reason, the provisions the Section 7 of the United Kingdom Special Educational Needs Code of Practice made towards improving children's educational achievement related to working in partnership with parents. It is not a good practice for teachers and parents to work independently of each other. Isichei (2007) explains that collaboration occurs when people work together toward a common goal. If collaboration can be effective, the role each partner plays should be clearly defined, while their respective contributions are recognised. Teachers and parents have to develop reading habits in pupils. The pupils should be educated on the importance of effective written expression since it promotes effective communication. In addition to these, teachers are encouraged to assess school-related factors likely to impede pupils' learning. They should find out the availability and adequacy of instructional materials and equipment to ease teaching and learning.

12.4. Effects of written language expression errors on pupils

The effects of written language expression errors on pupils were categorised in this study as social, emotional and academic. It was revealed in the study that the main effects in both the rural and urban settings were poor self-image, poor self-confidence and poor performance in examination. The findings corroborate Lall's (1996) results of a study in which teachers identified that children were weak in their social skills. The results are in line with Miller's (2011) revelation of the problems experienced by students who exhibit errors in their written expression including lack of social competence, low self-worth and high rate of truancy. It will therefore imply that low self-esteem could be linked to insecurity and excessive dependence on other people. Therefore, the general confidence of the pupils ought to be emphasised in both the school and the home environments at an early age. This could be effectively achieved if parents in particular, at the early stages of life develop interest in education by acquiring relevant reading materials for their wards and encouraging them to read frequently.

Parents should critically observe their children's behaviour for information on any social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, seek for medical assistance where the condition is medically related and assess the environment to remove any obstacles likely to impede children's learning e.g. parent-child relationship etc. Lateness to and absenteeism from school should as much as possible be discouraged since they create knowledge gaps which may be difficult to fill. Further, they should be interested in what happens to their children in school and offer any help that may be required. These could go a long way to enhance their children's self-image for a healthy adult life.

13. Conclusions

The importance of improving written English language skills is underscored by researchers. The difficulties pupils experience in English Language written expression could be mitigated if teachers consistently encourage pupils to listen to children's English programmes. Hence, the processes involved in reading-to-write (Ruiz-Funes, 2001) characterised by the teachers' subtle guide and help from peers at any time should be taken seriously. Through reading, pupils could identify Roberts' (2001) five error correction patterns that made students more successful at correcting errors. Therefore curriculum designers and stakeholders should allot enough time for reading lessons for pupils in both lower and upper primaries.

14. Recommendations

It is important to remember that most kids with English Language written expression difficulties are just as smart as everyone else. They just need to be taught in ways that are tailored to their unique learning styles. Having better and deeper understanding of the problems of a child's English Language written expression difficulties needs teachers' and parents' commitment. It also requires the involvement of school psychologists and other professionals who will diagnose and plan interventions for children with varying forms of psycho-social disorders. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are important communication skills that are important in all subject areas in the curriculum. Hence, literacy should have a central position in the curriculum.

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