



Analysis of errors in English verb forms from academic essays by trainees at one of Rwanda Polytechnic (RP) Colleges

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ABSTRACT

The study of grammatical error-making in academic writing has been an important activity in research, especially for students learning English as a second language. This research paper sought to identify and interpret grammatical errors in verb forms from students' academic writing tasks. Different grammatical theories were explored, including that of Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Grammar (TGG) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), among others. The study employed a descriptive research design with a mixed-method research design where the data collected were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The specific objective was to reveal the common grammatical errors made by students in their writings. From 20 teachers and 260 students, by using the Yamane formula, 15 teachers and 133 students were reached to participate in the study sample. Data analysis methods employed were document analysis, deductive thematic analysis, and descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that year-one engineering students at RP Gishari College make grammatical errors in all five English verb forms in their writings. Particularly, it was found that many students make errors in the third person singular form of the present simple (58.78%), whereas the errors in the past participle form were the least (6.10%). This scientific proof of error-making can be used by language educators to help trainees to improve their writing skills. Finally, the study recommended teachers and future researchers develop different teaching techniques that can help students to minimise error-making while writing academically.

Keywords: Error Making, Grammatical Theories, Second Language, Verb Forms

I. INTRODUCTION

Fluency in English speaking and writing poses a pervasive challenge for university students when English is taught as a foreign language, affecting their communication skills and academic performance. Universities struggle to traverse the language landscape (Tembasi, 2022). This was an article's title that discusses the difficulties facing Rwanda higher education institutions with regard to students' academic English proficiency. In this example, it is claimed that numerous students enrol at universities with weak command of the English language. Indeed, poor proficiency in this language among students impacts their overall success at the job market and daily communication activities. Colleges and universities grade students' written work as part of the assessment process, which requires students to have a sufficient and competent command of English, especially in writing. As it is argued by Suhaili and Mohama (2021), technical and vocational education and training (TVET) students' English language competence makes them market themselves during the job search process.



Globally, numerous researchers have discussed problems with students' writing skills in English. In his study carried out on first-year university students in a South African university, Magaba (2023) found that students' struggles in academic work are mainly reflected in their poor writing skills in English. On the other hand, university students at one Islamic university in Indonesia exhibited writing difficulties related to incorrect use of English verb tenses (Febriani, 2022). Verb forms or tenses are very crucial in academic writing, especially in academic research writing. For example, in academic writing in engineering fields, the use of simple past and present perfect forms makes students discuss other authors' work and action which started in the past and continued up to the present respectively (Okuyama, 2020). However, Alinsunod (2014) confirmed that some engineering students may have writing difficulties in relation to incorrect use of verb tenses and the assessment of their own writing has been proposed as one of the solutions.

Studies conducted in different countries have revealed that students do not produce good written documents because students face significant obstacles in writing English. For example, engineering students in Palestine exhibit syntactic errors when writing essays (Alsher, 2021). It is equally claimed that students make these grammatical errors most often as a result of poor learning. The main cause highlighted in this study is that students have not experienced high potential practical writing experiences to date. This is why, Dhanapal and Agab (2023) reported that, in their study carried out on Saudi Arabia university students, grammatical errors are frequently committed in students' written pieces of documents. On the other hand, a study conducted in Ghana revealed that, students commit English writing errors related to subject-verb agreement among many others (Amuzu & Asinyor, 2016). As it is explained, gap opens up on subject-verb agreement in their mother tongue while communicating their ideas to peers in English. In a similar study in Saudi Arabia, subject-verb agreement errors dominated university students' expressions with singular subject errors and made them fail to correctly use the verb forms, such as the third person singular verb form (Alahmadi, 2019).

The results from one research in Spain, on subject-verb agreement errors in the third person singular verb form conducted by Pérez (2021), show that, the most common error type committed by students is misformation, followed by misordering and addition. For instance, there is a subject-verb agreement issue in this study where the precision of the phrase was impacted by the use of an improper verb form in the third person singular present simple. For the purpose of producing accurate English written documents, all verbs in the language, with the exception of the verb to be, have five alternative forms. Past tense, past participle, present participle, third-person singular, and base or regular form are among them. The sentence's subject and context will determine when to utilize each form. Writing in English requires the ability to arrange and organise one's ideas in a way that often includes the correction of mechanical and grammatical errors, especially those related to verb forms.

Students' writing difficulties in English are a common problem that is reported by all research studies conducted in various regions across the world (Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015). For example, in the study conducted by Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2012), it was found that singular/plural form and subject-verb agreement are common errors made by students in English writing. Nevertheless, a study carried out in a technical university in South Africa discovered that students' issues with academic writing are a result of their linguistic and general literacy backgrounds, their attitudes toward academic writing, and their preference for middle-class literacy practices (Pineteh, 2013). These findings inform the reader that, students' different learning experiences can develop their differences in academic writing. However, it is imperative to know the real causes of students' poor writing skills in English because and as a result, university students may come from different schools where learning experiences are different.

In the Rwandan context, few studies have tackled the students' writing skills. For example, in the study conducted on first-year students at the former National University of Rwanda regarding academic writing skills, one of the comments on students' texts is about incorrect use of tenses and that there is an influence of Kinyarwanda on English (Twagilimana, 2017). On the other hand, Mironko (2013) argues that students in Rwandan higher learning institutions struggle in using English because it is a second and additional language to their mother tongue, Kinyarwanda. Although these studies tried to indicate that Rwandan students have problems in academic writing using English, they did not go further into the matter to describe which language areas pose a challenge to students in their written assignments, Continuous Assessment Tests and examinations. Thus, grammatical errors in verb forms may originate from the persistence of students' poor writing skills because virtually no sustainable solutions have been undertaken to curb the issue; hence, further studies which would address the problem are needed in Rwanda. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify common grammatical errors in verb forms from engineering students' academic writing tasks.

1.1 Research Objective

- i. To identify common grammatical errors in verb forms from students' academic writing tasks
- ii. To interpret the identified grammatical errors in informative way



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Grammatical Theories

The study of linguistics employs a wide range of theories to help explain the basic working and structure of language, especially in grammar. That being considered, research on grammatical errors in English, in order to be successful, requires certain underlying theories. Theories such as Transformational-Generative Grammar (TGG) by Noam Chomsky, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) by Halliday, and Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) by Bresnan and his group do generate the essential idea of grammar. Additional important theories about linguistic construction include Valency Grammar, Role and Reference Grammar, and Relational Grammar.

First of all, TGG revolutionized the domain of linguistics, suggesting application of transformational rules to way a sentence is basically built in order to generate its structure (Mitari et al., 2024). Syntactical and grammatical analysis has been deeply impacted by TGG with its different revisions. As far as English grammar errors are concerned, TGG displays tremendous acumens in the basic elements of sentences. These errors generally occur when people poorly apply transformational rules, occasioning sentences which exhibit surface structures that don't agree with their underlying structures. As an example, the conversion from passive to active sentences can be so challenging that the resultant sentences are grammatically unacceptable.

Second, LFG stands alone by distinguishing syntax from semantics. It thoroughly differentiates between the functions of words and groups of words, connecting them with both grammatical functions and semantic roles (Falk, 2001). LFG stresses the useful harmonization of structural and meaningful components, when examining English grammatical errors. Errors usually emerge from the discrepancy between these two sides, and the resulting sentences are grammatically inconsistent. One example of such errors is a sentence containing a transitive verb while a direct object is missing.

Third, Michael Halliday's SFG highlights the utilitarian feature of language, categorizing it into the domains of ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (Aarts, 2006). Addressing grammar mistakes in English, SFG suggests using a verb that exactly renders the envisioned function. It stipulates that errors are made when unsuitable verbs are used, causing difficulties in interactive communication or gaps in organizing one's speech. These limitations may result into the production of grammatical constructions that are unable to competently express the intended messages.

There are many other theories that support the central point of the present research. Valency Grammar, which is one of them, explores the complex relations linking verbs to their arguments, both subjects and objects being covered (Mitari et al., 2024). As far as English is concerned, verb-related errors typically originate from deviations from the necessary requirements that verbs possess regarding their valency. Such deviations result in cases in which complements of verbs are either left out albeit needed, or included when unnecessary. Furthermore, the theory by Robert Van Valin known as Role and Reference Grammar examines the relationships which occur within the field of grammar and how they contribute to sentence building (Aarts, 2006). It is the inaccurate formation of these relationships which causes language construction errors. These kinds of errors appear as disparities between the thematic roles that are given to arguments and what the verb's valency requires.

Additionally, Perlmutter and Postal proposed Relational Grammar which researches into the growing interaction between the sentence structure which belongs to syntax and its meaning which is the domain of semantics (Aarts, 2006). Errors emerge when this interaction and its associated structures are not precisely interpreted. Subsequently, the envisioned message is not exactly transmitted.

Basically, as this research shows, various theories in grammar offer helpful tools that are used to investigate why errors in verb forms are made. They provide an elaborate basis for identifying and explaining those errors, taking into consideration such aspects like syntax, semantics, valency, and communicative function. By exploiting this theoretical foundation, language scholars can quite surely understand why errors in verb forms occur and try to use the language better than before.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Verb Forms in Academic Writing

A verb form is a way to mold or change a verb to make it more appropriate for the context of an action that is happening right now. The five verb forms in English include root verbs, third-person singular, present forms of verbs, present participles, simple past, and past participles. But for some students—especially those who are learning English as a second language—following the rules of grammar when writing is not always an ideal habit.



2.2.2 Grammatical Errors in the Root Verb or Infinitive Form

Grammatical errors about infinitival forms are reported in many studies found in the literature. For example, in the study conducted to uncover common errors of using gerundial and infinitival forms for EFL learners at one university in Saudi Arabia, it was found that some students could use gerund as an infinitive form (Jama, 2022). According to this author, one of the factors that can lead to students' problems in grammatical errors in writing was stated as the lack of enough real time to practice on writing skills. However, in this same study, it was claimed that students were good at using the infinitive form.

The root form of the verb refers to its original form without any alteration or inflection. From the verb's root form, all subsequent forms are constructed. Note that this is not the case for all verbs. Verbs that are conjugated to indicate different forms of the verb only change when they are in their root form. It's not always the case that there are only a few possible ways to conjugate irregular verbs. To indicate the simple present tense, root verbs are widely utilized. The following examples show you how to employ the root verb in sentences.

Root verb examples: I enjoy watching movies with my pals (Root verb – love). Every day, I complete my schoolwork before six o'clock. (Root verb – finish). You have a great playing style. (Play is the root verb.) You are stunning. (Basic verb: be) The verbs "love," "finish," "play," and "are" are examples of root verbs because they are utilized in their original forms in the aforementioned cases.

2.2.3 Third Person Singular Present Form

One of the challenging grammar rules for learners of English as a second or foreign language is the usage of the third person singular in speaking and writing. This verb form in English grammar is frequently used when talking about people or things. They frequently don't add anything to the conversation. The third person singular inflection in English is one of the first grammatical rules that teachers teach to L2 English learners at the primary level, hence it is regarded as an introduction topic for second/foreign language learners. Although some teachers may assume that the acquisition of the third person singular is easy for students, different studies report some difficulties that students may face when English is their second or foreign language.

Ma (2022) discusses different difficulties in the acquisition of the third person singular form pertaining to the grammatical rules that Chinese students usually violate. In this discussion, the neglect of irregular verb inflection and the instability of suffix- s in oral expressions are pointed out. Moreover, according to this author, the negative transfer of mother tongue influences the verb inflection and the order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes. All of these may lead to students' grammatical errors in the third person singular form as some studies have figured it out. The third person singular is helpful in academic writing like when writing up research papers. It suggested that teachers and educators need to formulate appropriate syllabus and pay attention to the negative transfer of the mother tongue.

The authors of a case study investigating the use of the third person singular in Turkish English written register identified two primary challenges faced by students: internalizing a grammatical feature and being able to use it correctly in conversation (Hamamci & Hamamci, 2018). In a separate Spanish study analyzing subject-verb agreement problems in third person singular verb form, 39 students' grammatical faults were found to be in 2 omission, 3 addition, 25 misformation, and 9 misordering of classes (Pérez, 2021). These errors were detected using the surface approach taxonomy. Examples for every type of grammatical faults have been supplied by the study's author. Using it needlessly in the sentence ". which it means," is one instance in a different category. Additionally, "the majority of us agree" also uses the verb "be" in its augmentation. On the other side, mistakes such as misplaced items, incorrect (to)-infinitive structures, and disagreements with grammatical person and number were put in the misformation group. In case of category misordering, mistakes

2.2.4 The Present Participle Form of the Verb

An active action can be expressed using the verb form of the present participle. The suffix "ing" is always used to finish present participles. They can be used as an adjective or as a verb in a phrase. Students may also produce grammatical errors in this verb form. For example, in their study, Ismani and Simamora (2021) found that students have difficulties to use the present participle in replacing relative pronouns. The problem in using the present participle has also been observed in the study conducted on eleventh grade students in Indonesia (Irawan & Syafi'i, 2021). In this study, while students were using present participle in translating simple dialog, it was found that they produced errors such that 56.3% were in misformation category, 23.9% in omission, and 18.3% in addition and 1.4% were in misordering category.

In actuality, the present participle form is created by appending an 'ing' to the base form or root verb. In certain cases, the final consonant in a monosyllabic word that contains a short vowel is doubled and the suffix "ing" is added. For most verbs ending in a silent 'e,' the 'ing' is introduced and the 'e' removed. Some verbs retain the 'e' in their



base form even when they are changed to the present participle form. This verb form, in the continuous/progressive tenses, implies that the action is still in progress. It is also used to change verbs that describe actions into nouns.

Table 1
Examples of Present Participle Form

	Base form	Present participle form
Inflection of irregular verbs with double consonants	Dig	Digging
	Put	Putting
	Get	Getting
	Pet	Petting
Inflection of regular verbs	Cry	Crying
	Try	Trying
	Read	Reading
	Write	Writing

Source: Lee (2018)

2.2.5 The Use of Simple Past Form of a Verb

The verb is shown in its simple past form when it refers to an earlier activity. In order to produce it, the root verb is frequently added to with an "ed" or "d" (for verbs ending in "e"). Verbs that deviate from the norm are called irregular verbs.

Making grammatical errors in simple past form is also another problem which is discussed by many researchers in the literature. In the study conducted at a junior high school in Indonesia by Nopinawati et al. (2020), investigating students' grammatical errors in using simple past tense, it was found that the past form errors were in all four categories including omission (19.17%), addition (26.02%), misformation (27.39%) and misordering (27.39%). Although there was a classification of these grammatical errors in this study, authors did not clearly indicate the typical errors produced by students. This could not suffice the need of readers and researchers for knowing exactly how students were making these errors.

On the other hand, in the error analysis study conducted on informatic engineering students in Indonesia in the academic year 2018/2019, some typical grammatical errors in simple past tense verb forms were detailed and the intervention to reduce them explained (Tembasi, 2022). The preliminary results of this study, which used a pre-test and post-test methodology, indicated that one error that was caused was when ordinary verbs were suffixed with -ed or -d. Secondly, errors were produced in using irregular verb forms of simple past tense. The third problem occurred on the use of "did" in negative sentences. Lastly, students showed that their grammatical knowledge about the use of the verb "to be" was low.

Table 2
Examples of Simple Past Forms

	Base form	Simple past form
Inflection of regular verbs	Cheat	Cheated
	Dodge	Dodged
	Jump	Jumped
Inflection of verbs that take the same form as the base form	Read	Read
	Cut	Cut
	Put	Put
	Let	Let
Inflection of irregular verbs	Run	Ran
	Sit	Sat
	Sing	Sang
	Throw	Threw
	Fly	Flew

Source: Fitria (2021)

2.2.6 Past Participle Form of the Verb

In academic writing, the use of past participles for both regular verbs and irregular verbs is also a challenging grammatical practice for students. There are studies which have discussed the writing difficulties faced by students. It is stated that students may be unable to differentiate if some verbs are regular or not and thus consider a regular verb as an irregular or an irregular verb as a regular which can result in forming a wrong past participle within a sentence



(Fengjie et al., 2016). Major contributing factors to these issues, according to Fengjie et al. (2016), are disparities in cultural origins, interference from mother tongues, and insufficient and disorganized knowledge of English. According to Yunita et al. (2017), students struggle with employing the past participle form of verbs, which leads to grammatical issues when building the passive voice. In this study, among students' grammatical problems in constructing the passive voice, 46% (highest) were the problems in the use of past participle verbs.

Similarly, Ismani and Simamora (2021) also found that students mostly commit grammatical errors in using past participles when used as adjectives and adverbs (63.73%) compared to perfect participle (33.52%) and present participle (22.52%). In fact, for non-native English speakers (and occasionally even for native speakers), past participles might be a bit confusing because they are the most crucial component of a passive construction aside from the verb "be." The past participle form may or may not be the same as the past tense form, and it may or may not be regularly created, which is why.

2.3 Grammatical Errors Analysis in Academic Writings

A method called error analysis is employed to locate errors in a language learner's work, assess if the faults are systematic, and attempt to determine the underlying causes of the problems. While accuracy is just one aspect of learner language, when native speakers of the target language (TL) hear learner language, they are prone to perceive errors made by learners as being very obvious. While second language learners frequently make mistakes that never occur to native speakers, native speakers occasionally make inadvertent "performance" errors (such as verbal blunders).

Error analysis is an essential component of learning second and foreign languages as well as practical linguistics. Error analysis reveals the origins of grammatical errors and categorises them in their forms (Zhu, 2019). There is also a methodical approach to analyzing students' errors. Actually, making mistakes is a necessary part of the learning process when it comes to language acquisition. Besides providing a systematic way of identifying, summarizing, and expounding upon pupils' shortcomings, they could also provide an understanding of the intricate procedures involved in language acquisition. Error analysis is a useful tool for improving understanding of the acquisition of a second language and foreign languages.

Especially in written communication in English, the error analysis has proved its relevance. This is what is reported in many studies. The application of grammatical error analysis can help language teachers improve their language teaching strategies and methodologies and thus help their learners (Sarkar & Dave, 2022). In fact, there are a lot of benefits of conducting error analysis for both teachers during teaching and learning, and researchers in different contexts, in order to examine different theories or create other theories which can upgrade the English acquisition of a foreign language.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Approach

This study has used a mixed research approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative research approaches due to the nature of the stated objectives and the nature of the research questions. A mixed-method approach enables the researcher to look at the research problem both deeply and broadly. In this instance, quantitative data helped to widen the problem while qualitative data contributed to make it more complex.

3.2 Study Design

Social research requires a design or structure before data collection or analysis begins. The function of the research design is to ensure that the knowledge gained allows the original question to be answered as clearly as possible. Therefore, the current study employed descriptive research design with mixed method research design where the data collected were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

3.3 Target Population

The target population for the current study included year-one engineering students in the electrical and electronic department and civil engineering department for the academic year of 2022/2023 and their teachers in technical and general courses. The total number of these students and teachers is two hundred and sixty (260). These included 92 students in the option of electrical technology, 52 in the option of electronics and telecommunication technology as well as 96 students in construction technology and 20 teachers. Moreover, these teachers are those who teach social sciences and languages.



3.4 Sample and Sampling Procedures

To get the sample size, the Taro Yamane formula was used at a confidence level of 95%. It is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where

n stands for the sample size

N stands for the population size and

e stands for the estimated sampling error.

Taro Yamane's formula is advantageous for accurately determining sample sizes in finite populations, optimizing resource allocation and reducing costs. However, its limited applicability makes it less suitable for very large populations or when the population size is unknown, where Cochran's formula is more appropriate.

In the current study:

$$n = \frac{260}{1+260(0.05)^2} = 157.58.$$

In this case, the sampling error at 95% confidence level is $e = 0.05$. Thus, considering that the target population size was 240, the calculation gave $n = 157.58$ and the sample size was approximated to $n = 158$. This means that the study has recruited 138 students.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

The current study used two categories of instruments to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The first instrument was an essay writing test administered to the students in order to probe and classify the engineering students' common grammatical errors in verb forms. Before the test, students were asked three questions about their identification including age range, gender and study field. The essay writing test was designed with three topics, one of which students could choose:

"My first day at the university"

"My life at the university"

"Using mobile phone in my daily activities as a university student"

The essay was between 250 and 300 words and it was in the paper-pencil format. The researcher believed that students could use at least one of the six verb forms in their writing.

3.6 Data Processing and Analysis Techniques

Students' written papers were collected and carefully stored in a safe place for further processing whereas teachers' responses, with their direct analysis, were stored using Google forms. To respond to the first and second research questions, the document analysis techniques were used. In this document analysis, careful categorization of tense, agreement, and use difficulties was done in order to systematically check students' writings for verb form errors. Using a uniform coding scheme, the researcher made a rubric based on the standard five verb forms and grammatical errors classification was used to identify grammatical errors in verb forms made in written essays by engineering students. This rubric was developed by consulting the literature about grammatical errors and their classification.

Conversely, the teachers' responses were subjected to analysis employing descriptive statistics, encompassing the calculation of percentages of response on Likert scale ratings. In addition, a deductive thematic analysis approach was employed to examine the qualitative responses from teachers, with themes developed based on the variables elucidated in the literature review.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The research process adhered to ethical principles and established procedures, beginning with the acquisition of necessary authorizations and permissions (Mitari et al., 2024). Throughout the research journey, ethical standards were rigorously maintained, aligning with the principles outlined in the Belmont report (Nagai et al., 2022): beneficence, which maximizes benefits, justice, which minimizes harms while safeguarding participants' welfare and guaranteeing a fair distribution of benefits and costs, and respect for persons, which acknowledges autonomy and informed consent. The research process ensured ethical recruitment of participants, avoided coercion, and maintained confidentiality of responses, reflecting a commitment to ethical conduct and conscientious research methodologies (Ginting et. al, 2022).



IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Engineering Students' Grammatical Errors in Verb Forms

The aim of this study was to know which grammatical errors in verb forms are mostly encountered in engineering students' academic writing tasks. The study involved 131 first-year engineering students who took a one-page essay writing test on three optional topics: "My first day at university", "Life at university" and "Use of telephone in daily activities as a university student". Through the document analysis techniques, the researcher identified and revealed the common students' grammatical errors in verb forms. Results from students' essays are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Frequency of Grammatical Errors in Verb Forms from Students' Essays

Verb form error category	Error frequency	Percentage
Root verb (infinitive)	11	8.40%
The third person of singular (presents the form of a verb)	77	58.78%
Present participle (when -ing form is used as a verb)	20	15.27%
Simple past (irregular and irregular verbs)	15	11.45%
Past participle	8	6.10%
Total	131	100%

From the above table titled frequency of grammatical errors in verb forms from students. The table classifies the identified errors into various verb forms and gives both frequency and percentage distribution. The most prevalent type of errors that consist of a significant extent of 58.78% of the total errors, is that of the third person singular verb form. This indicates that students at RP Gishari College often struggle with Subject-Verb-Agreement (SVA) in the present tense where they do not add "s" on verbs while the personal pronoun or subject is *she, he, it*, or their substitutes.

Another type of errors found is on the use of the root verb (infinitive) which accounts 8.40% of the total errors. It is about failing to write the correct verb form in context or misusing verbs in their base form. The error that is at the percentage of 15.27 is related to present participle (when -ing form is used as a verb). These errors involve the incorrect usage of continuous verb forms or confusion between verbs and gerunds. The category of past simple errors with both irregular and regular verbs recurs at 11.45% of the total errors. These errors involve issues like using incorrect verb conjugation in the past tense or difficulties in differentiating regular from irregular past tense verb forms. Finally, past participle form errors amount to the percentage of 6.10 of the total errors. They are related to the incorrect use of past participle forms or failing to apply correctly rules of regular and irregular verbs.

Table 2

Sample Examples of Grammatical Errors in Verb Forms found in Students' Essays

Verb form error category	Examples of grammatical errors in verb forms
Root verb (infinitive)	...someone who are not neared by you the student will success different modules...
The third person of singular (presents the form of a verb)	... telephone also have more important to university student... ... It help to obtain or to get new information... ...truly, telephone assist me in in my daily program...
Present participle (when -ing form is used as a verb)	... it is help me to know all information of my college... ... it can support me for to know a news for outside of school... ...I studies a new curriculum....
Simple past (irregular and irregular verbs)	... when I was get in university of course... ... in everything you done....
Past participle	...I think different to the things I have see... ... I do research about modules I have took that day... ... all something that has not understand well... ... the question which is complexity was be simplified...

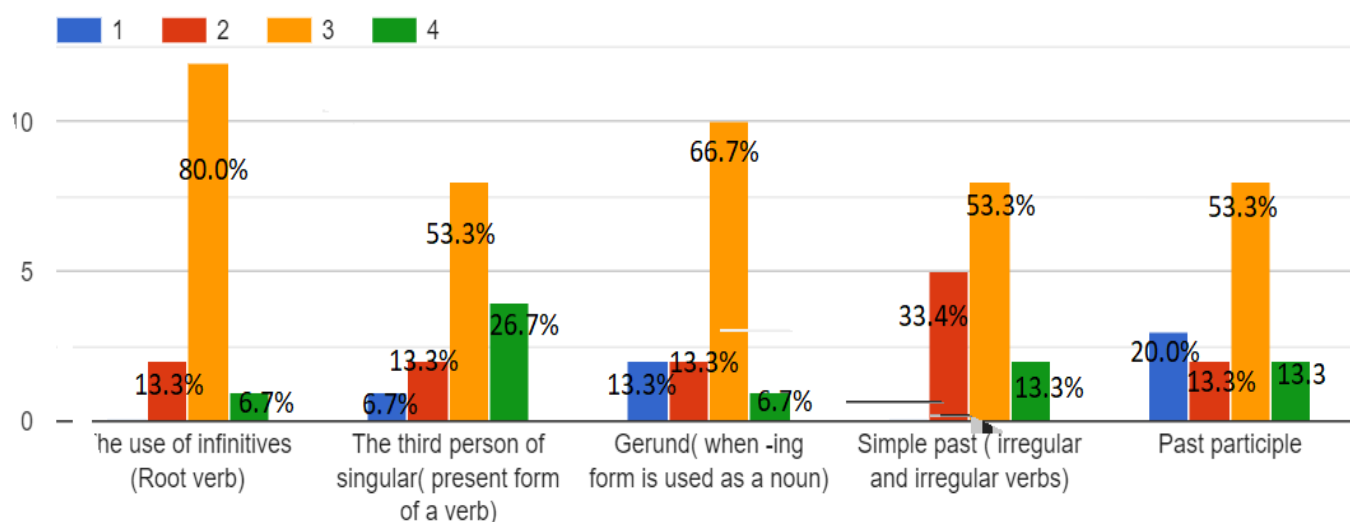


Figure 1

Teachers' Views on Grammatical Errors Committed by Engineering Students

Source: Primary data, 2023

From Figure 1, there are some similarities that can link teachers' responses and students' essay test results. Firstly, looking at the point "always=4" in Figure 1, it is seen that 4 teachers out of 15 (26.7%) confirmed that engineering students commit errors in the third person singular form which is the highest number compared to other verb forms. This matches with the highest percentage observed (58.78%) in this verb form in students' essay test. Secondly, for the students' grammatical errors in the past participle where the results from the test showed that it is the least grammatical error committed, from teachers' responses, 3 teachers (20.0%) (highest) said that students never make this kind of error. However, looking at the Likert point "sometimes=3" it can be observed that 12 out of 15 teachers (80.0%) (highest) confirmed that students sometimes commit the errors in the use of the root verb compared to 8 teachers out of 15 (53.3%) who observed that students sometimes commit errors in the third person singular form and 10 out of 15 (66.7%) who confirmed the same in the present participle form.

4.2 Teachers' qualitative responses on grammatical errors in verb forms

In the field of language education, teachers' insights are crucial for improving students' academic writing skills. This study focuses on teachers' perspectives regarding grammatical errors in verb forms to enhance the academic writing proficiency of engineering students, providing valuable insights from experienced educators. The data were analysed through the deductive thematic analysis basing on the literature review and the corresponding results are presented in the following themes.

4.2.1 Engineering students' grammatical errors

To answer this question "Which grammatical errors in verb forms are mostly encountered in engineering students' academic writing tasks?" one open question was added to the Likert scale questions for the sake of getting more insights in the common grammatical errors made by students. In this case, the researcher asked the participating teachers to provide other students' grammatical errors that they observe in academic writing tasks when they are conducting assessments. Teachers' responses to this question have been collected and grouped under theme one which was formed in line with the literature review on grammatical errors in verb forms.

Almost all fifteen teachers (15) who responded have given, in details, other grammatical errors which were or were not mentioned in the Likert scale questions by the researcher. Only one teacher did not provide additional errors and said: "none". The responses from five teachers have reflected the grammatical errors in relation to the prescribed verb forms. For example, one teacher said: "3rd person" which is related to the third person singular form. Another one said: "Sometimes they confuse simple past and past participle forms of irregular verbs". The same idea was expressed by other two teachers saying: "The use perfect tenses is a problem among learners" and "They use past and future". On the other hand, the grammatical error in subject-verb agreement was raised by another teacher saying: "In writing, my students also commit subject-verb agreement mistakes and tense-related errors".



Teachers' responses regarding the students' grammatical errors in verb forms did not provide deeper information which could reveal their classification. However, these teachers indicated other grammatical errors in academic writing tasks which can be linked to some theoretical classification of grammatical errors. For example, one teacher mentioned students' errors in sentence formation including sentences without verbs, misplacement and repetition of words. In this case, the category of misordering, addition and omission can be thought to be occurring. Although this is important to note, it was not in the scope of the study and thus it is held undiscussed. Other errors talked about included students' errors in punctuation and grammatical errors in the use of the passive and active voice. Another teacher also talked about errors in the use of articles and prepositions, confusing adjectives with adverbs and confusing nouns and verbs in the formation of sentences.

These results show that students' grammatical errors in verb forms are encountered in all five verb forms and there is no exception for which is frequently committed. However, students' confusion between simple past and past participle forms has been greatly emphasised by three respondents. Moreover, in teachers' responses, grammatical errors which are not directly falling in the five verb forms are observed. Nevertheless, these highlighted errors may be influenced by the errors in verb forms. For example, the construction of passive and active voices and the sentence formation may have direct ties with verbal forms and tenses.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Engineering Students' Grammatical Errors in Verb Forms

The main findings showed that year-one engineering students at RP Gishari College commit grammatical errors in all five verb forms. In total, the data from students' essays showed that among 133 essays evaluated, 131 grammatical errors in verb forms were uncovered 77 grammatical errors in the third-person singular form (58.78%) were the most encountered. Grammatical errors in the use of present participle were the second (15.27%) whereas the last errors were in the use of past participle form (6.10%). Linking these results to the teachers' responses, a little similarity was observed with some teachers confirming that students always commit errors in the use of the third-person singular form whereas others confirmed that students never make grammatical errors in the use of the past participle form.

For example, the simple past and present participle verb forms were found among the students' common verb form errors in their written tasks, where the simple past form scored a percentage of 28.9% in the second place, whereas, the errors in the construction of the present continuous tense scored 8.43% in the third place among 8 verb tenses errors recorded (Mayaratri, 2020). On the other hand, the grammatical errors in the use of the third-person singular is reported in many studies as a dominating grammatical problem for students learning English as the second or foreign language (Hamamci & Hamamci, 2018; Ma, 2022; Pérez, 2021). These studies are consistent with the current study in which the grammatical errors in the third-person singular scored the first percentage.

To some extent, the findings on the engineering students' common grammatical errors in verb forms are consistent with the findings in the previous studies about students' grammatical errors in verb forms. The engineering students' grammatical errors in verb forms uncovered in the context of RP Gishari College are well fitting in the current literature in EFL contexts. The types of grammatical errors in verb forms recorded resemble those in studies consulted in the literature. Based on the error analysis theory, this identification of engineering students' grammatical errors is one step to the process of eradicating these errors.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study attempted to answer these research questions through the content analysis of engineering students' essays and descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that year-one engineering students at RP Gishari College make grammatical errors in all five English verb forms in their writings. Particularly, it was found that many students make errors in the third person singular form (58.78%) whereas the errors in the past participle form were the least (6.10%). This shows the effort that students are making to learn English grammar. This scientific proof of error making can be based on by language educators to help trainees to improve their writing skills.

5.2 Recommendation

This study aimed to identify and analyse grammatical errors in English verb forms to improve engineering students' academic writing skills at RP Gishari College. Based on the findings of the current research, the following recommendations are given.



Firstly, teachers of English are recommended to find effective and efficient teaching and learning approaches to writing skills, which can allow them to uncover students' difficulties in the use of verb forms and provide adequate feedback to students.

Secondly, Directors of Academic Services (DAS) are recommended to avail enough teaching and learning resources that teachers and students can use during writing activities. Moreover, establishing regular competitions in writing skills at both college level and intercollege level will help motivate engineering students to improve their academic writing skills.

Lastly, future researchers are recommended to expand the research to wider contexts in Rwanda in order to have the general picture of students' grammatical errors in verb forms. Moreover, researchers can carry out experimental studies on the teaching strategies which can efficiently minimise the engineering students' grammatical errors in verb forms.

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