

ANALYSIS OF GRAPHO-GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN WRITTEN COMPOSITIONS OF SELECTED UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LAFIA

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ABSTRACT

This study involved a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the nature, distribution, and causes of the grapho-grammatical error class in the written compositions of undergraduate students of the Federal University of Lafia. The research design of this study was descriptive research, which is based on Error Analysis Theory (Corder, 1984) and Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972); the number of students sampled was 120, of which 40 students were drawn from Mass Communication (100 level), 40 from Mass Communication (200 level), and 40 from English and Literary Studies (200 level). Results of the empirical studies showed that the main burden of syntactic errors across all cohorts of students was concord errors (12.6%–13.0%), and tense errors (10.9%–14.6%) were also prevailing, whereas other errors in the category of graphological errors can be said to be prevalent, such as the comma splice and misplaced inverted commas. A large positive correlation between specialised language exposure and error reduction was indicated by cross-cohort quantitative comparisons, which showed that English majors submitted a lower average error burden (2.6 errors per script) than 100-level Mass Communication non-majors (6.3 errors per script) and 200-level Mass Communication non-majors (5.8 errors per script). Based on the qualitative analysis, the error persistence showed two types of model errors: negative first-language (L1) interlingual transfer and intralingual overgeneralisation alongside register interference from informal digital communication. This study concludes that L1 fossilisation of the interlanguage system in writing is not challenged by the usual, passive learning style of lecturing and suggests the employment of diagnostic error profiling, grammar instruction in context, and iterations of drafting to help transition from L1 writing habits to academic norms.

Keywords: Grapho-grammatical errors, written composition, interlanguage theory, concord

Introduction

Written language is used for knowledge recording, sharing, and evaluation in academic and professional life and plays a central role. Grapho-grammatical devices such as punctuation, capitalisation, syntax, and word choice are essential features of linguistic competence in writing that often pose challenges for multilingual learners like Nigerians (Ugwuanyi & Aboh, 2025; Adekola, 2007; Lai & Wang, 2025). English is the official language and the main language of instruction in Nigeria (Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025; Adegbija, 2001) but is usually learnt as a second or third language. This linguistic context creates interference between languages and facilitates the development of a particular variety of English in Nigeria (Adegbija, 2001; Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025; Oyebola & Gut, 2020) with consequent grapho-grammatical errors in written texts.

Despite the importance of writing for academic and career success, many students consistently exhibit errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure. Subject-verb agreement, tense consistency, and the appropriate use of punctuation are major problems faced by undergraduates in Nigeria (Muhammad & Nair, 2017). These grapho-grammatical errors hinder the quality of academic writing and make it less effective and understandable (Bacha, 2000). Moreover, the informal characteristics of digital communication are associated with students' loss of formal writing skills, leading to inaccurate capitalisation and non-standard abbreviations (Deji-Afuye & Zhou, 2025). These errors persist and suggest that current writing pedagogical practices are ineffective, tending to focus on rote memorisation of rules over writing in context with critical understanding (Myhill, 2020).

Although the ability to communicate effectively in writing is crucial to student academic achievement, the underlying causes of persistent grapho-grammatical errors among undergraduate students at the Federal University of Lafia remain underexplored. In this context, there is a clear need to investigate the pedagogical and linguistic aspects of these errors, their root causes, and their impact on academic performance.

This study addresses this gap by critically analysing undergraduates' written productions at the Federal University of Lafia.

Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to critically examine and evaluate the grapho-grammatical error patterns in written compositions of selected undergraduate students at the Federal University of Lafia.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify and categorise the typical types and frequency of grapho-grammatical errors in the students' written compositions.
2. To analyse the underlying linguistic and pedagogical causes responsible for these errors.
3. To assess the impact and correlations between grapho-grammatical errors and academic achievement.
4. To suggest pedagogically sound solutions and strategies to remediate these errors and enhance overall writing competence.

Research Questions

1. What are the typical kinds and distribution of grapho-grammatical errors found in the written compositions of the selected undergraduates?
2. What are the linguistic and pedagogical causes contributing to these grapho-grammatical errors?
3. What correlations exist between these grapho-grammatical errors and students' overall academic achievement?
4. How can these errors be effectively minimised, and how can writing competence be enhanced through pedagogical intervention?

The study evidence in the Nigerian context offers empirical support to the development of resources to be used by educators and also helps to connect writing skills to professional standards for use by policymakers. The scale is confined to the classification of grapho-grammatical errors (punctuation, capitalisation, tense, concord, and sentence construction) and their implications for communication undergraduates at the Federal University of Lafia.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Errors and Mistakes

This study uses a conceptual approach to distinguish between errors and mistakes to establish a baseline for analysis. Errors are considered systematic and consistent deviations from target language norms resulting from the incomplete internalisation of rules in the learner's interlanguage (IL) or L2 system (Corder, 1984; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010). Mistakes, on the other hand, are non-systematic performance-based slips that are self-correctable, occurring due to factors such as fatigue, inattention, or distraction (Corder, 1984; Lennon, 1991). Errors can further be categorised into interlingual errors (resulting from L1 transfer) and intralingual errors (arising from overgeneralisation of L2 rules) (Richards, 1984). Understanding this distinction is essential for pedagogy: errors of competence require explicit instructional intervention, whereas performance mistakes may only require self-editing or gentle monitoring (Robert & Meenakshi, 2022).

Graphological and Grammatical Competence

Graphological and grammatical skills are essential for achieving proficiency in writing. Graphology encompasses the visual and structural properties of text, including punctuation, capitalisation, and layout (Crystal, 2008), which are vital for creating coherent written documents (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Nwachukwu-Agbada (1993), Bacha (2000), and Alexander (2016) identified several common graphological errors made by students, such as the omission of full stops, comma splices leading to run-on sentences, and distorted meaning caused by the misuse of inverted commas and apostrophes. Grammatical competence serves as the backbone of effective language use (Uibu & Liiver, 2015). Issues surrounding subject-verb agreement (concord) and tense consistency remain significant hurdles for L2 learners, often stemming from L1 interference and resulting in semantic ambiguity (Adebijia, 2001; Adekola, 2007).

Written Composition and Academic Discourse

Written composition in the academic context is not simply the registration of oral thought; it is a complex cognitive, social, and linguistic task that requires synthetically acquiring information on rhetorical structures, registers, and grapho-grammatical rules. In tertiary contexts, written composition is the primary means for higher-order cognitive processing, critical argument construction and knowledge integration of the subject (Bacha, 2000; Myhill, 2020). Demanding academic writing, as with all the other types of discourse in the L2, requires one to master discourse-level organisation, alongside demanding sentence-level accuracy. If L2 writing is studied in a multilingual/multilingual classroom, it is especially difficult for L2 learners since they have to concurrently manage ideation, develop a structural plan, and encode the target language (Gass et al., 2020). When learners hit 'roadblocks' in processing in L2 composition, nonstandard languages are produced as systematic interlanguage deviations, in which they are trying to negotiate the complex syntactic demands in formal discourse that define the composition boundaries (Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1984).

Conceptualising Concord in L2 Syntactic Structures

Concord, or grammatical agreement, is the harmonious fit between the elements of a sentence on a systematic, morphosyntactic basis, most particularly noun to verb and pronoun to noun. The function of the syntactic and semantic structure of the word 'concord' is to make it the essential linkage tool to establish syntactical and/or semantic relations between clause boundaries within a syntactic construction (Uibu & Liiver, 2015). The correctness of subject-

verb agreement in academic writing is vital because the errors dealing with the subject-verb agreement directly affect the structure and formality of the register in academic writing (Adegbija, 2001; Alexander, 2016). Concord shows up as a persistent difficulty in the second language (L2) learning process by L2 learners, especially in a multilingual situation like that of Nigeria, where crosslingual incongruence between the learners' first language (L1) and target language (L2) presents itself (Bacha, 2000; Muhammad & Nair, 2017). Many Nigerian indigenous languages do not have any third-person singular agreement morpheme; thus, this aspect of Nigeria's languages creates a problem of negative interlingual transfer. Moreover, intralingual complexities such as proximity agreement, collective nouns, and complex subject noun phrases with intervening prepositional phrases create cognitive overload for the learners, forcing them to resort to simpler or fossilised rules of interlanguage agreement (Richards, 1984; Selinker, 1972).

Tense Consistency and Temporal Coherence

In academic writing, tensile consistency and aspectual coherence (Adekola, 2007) are structural conditions that have to be met in order to create temporal orientation and narrative logic. The tense not only plays a grammatical role in expressing the times of action but also has a discourse function of marking the rhetorical function, the process and method, the statistical results and the generalisation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The incorrect or uncoordinated use of tense prevents the continuity of events in scholarly writing, makes it less clear and mangles the flow of ideas between them (Bacha, 2000). Equipped with high stimulation with the intricate interaction of morphosyntactic rules with abstract discourse functions, second language (L2) learners constantly demonstrate weakness in tense control (Gass et al. 2020). L2 learners often bypass simple tenses or are not consistent with them in longer text segments during the L2 acquisition process. Theoretically, these tense errors are indicative of the developmental stages in learning a second language, during which a learner's complex temporal framing rules have not yet internalised the rules of the target language or where L1 as well as temporal systems clash with the development of the target system and thus leading to formal compositions that continue to be syntactically unstable (Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1984).

The L2 acquisition of English is complicated in the multilingual, where the native language structures, which may conflict with L2 norms, present a challenge (Bacha 2000). What it shows from the empirical evidence is that the grammar and mechanics errors are consistent and exist at different levels of education (Hamzah, 2012; Charles & Rebecca, 2017). Studies by Vasu et al. (2022) have indicated that the number of communication courses that are available to correct the high syntactic error rate is too limited; Tlonaen (2020) notes that even students at the end of L2 programmes still make errors in register adaptation and L1 transfer. They are recurrent problems, which require instructional methods that go beyond mere memorisation to regular writing tasks and frequent and remedial feedback to improve student writing skills (Sihombing et al., 2016; Charles & Rebecca, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical models used in this research are Error Analysis Theory (EA) and Interlanguage Theory (IL). Corder (1984) introduced the notion of error analysis as a systematic and meaningful part of the learning process which provided information for the diagnosis of the developing competence of the learner. Errors in EA can be classified in terms of the interlingual type, caused by interference from the first language (L1), and the intralingual type, which is caused by incompleteness in L2 (Richards, 1984). Choi & Ziegler (2015) and other Nigerian scholars agree that EA is useful in multilingual contexts for analysing grapho-grammatical errors as a vital sign of the problems encountered in internalising the rules of English grammar. In addition, Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972) complements EA by defining the learner's transitioning, evolving language system (interlanguage) that is a hybrid

of L1 and L2. This framework is necessary when considering the phenomenon of "language transfer", in which L1 rules are carried over to L2, resulting in "negative transfer" in English syntax and morphology (Gass et al., 2020; Shuaibu & Sale, 2025) and "fossilisation", where non-standard forms of L2 become fixed and stable after long-term learning (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010; Haufiku et al., 2023). These theories led to systematic research to identify the error patterns found in the second language acquisition spectrum within the multilingual context.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to conduct an analysis of grapho-grammatical error patterns. The study population were first- and second-year undergraduate students of the Federal University of Lafia. The subjects were students of the Mass Communication Department (100 and 200 levels) and the English and Literary Studies Department (200 level), with 40 students sampled in each department. In order to produce authentic academic writing, students were required to compose a 500-word essay on a topic that was relevant to their studies. The sampling strategy used was stratified random sampling for the representation of demographic and disciplinary subgroups and then purposive sampling. This sampling method used (purposive sampling) was selected in order to bring error-dense scripts to the fore, not to be statistically representative of student proficiency generally. The tools used to collect data were an essay question and an error categorisation sheet to record errors in spelling, punctuation, concord, tense and structure. Both quantitative (using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages)) and qualitative (exploring trends and causes) analyses were used, the latter to inform the pedagogical recommendations.

The study was conducted in an ethical manner where informed consent was obtained for all student data, and there was a strict anonymity and confidentiality policy adhered to throughout the research process to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the student participants.

Result Presentation

This section presents the findings of the study categorised directly according to the four main research questions posed in the introductory section. The presentation presents a combination of quantitative (relative frequency distribution of error types across cohorts) and qualitative (examples from students' scripts) examples so as to give a comprehensive reflection of the grapho-grammatical error pattern of undergraduates at the Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria.

Research Question 1: What are the typical kinds and distribution of grapho-grammatical errors found in the written compositions of the selected undergraduates?

To answer Research Question 1, error frequencies and relative percentages across the three sampled cohorts – Mass Communication 100 Level, Mass Communication 200 Level, and English and Literary Studies 200 Level – were computed and classified. Table 1: A total of 252 errors were picked up by 40 scripts in Mass Communication 100 Level. The most common Concord errors were at 12.7% (32) with violations of the comma and at 11.5% (29) for tenses, and the most common errors were for inverted commas at 11.1% (28). The error frequencies of mechanical problems (capitalisation (6.0%) and apostrophes (7.1%)) were relatively low.

Table 1: Distribution of Grapho-Grammatical Errors in Mass Communication 100 Level

S/N	Error Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Full stop.	22	8.7%
2	Comma	30	11.9%
3	Inverted Comma	28	11.1%
4	Apostrophe	18	7.1%
5	Concord	32	12.7%
6	Tenses	29	11.5%
7	Pluralisation	18	7.1%
8	Paragraphing	21	8.3%
9	Capitalisation	15	6.0%
10	Indentation	19	7.6%
11	Spelling	20	8.0%
	Total	252	100%

For Mass Communication 200 Level students (Table 2), a total of 230 errors were identified across 40 scripts. Although the total number of errors decreased, Concord errors were still the most predominant error type and accounted for 13.0% (30 errors) of the total number of errors. The second most occurring error types were tenses, with 10.9%, or 25 occurrences, and commas with 10.4% or 24 occurrences)

Table 2: Distribution of Grapho-Grammatical Errors in Mass Communication 200 Level

S/N	Error Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Full stop.	20	8.7%
2	Comma	25	10.9%
3	Inverted Comma	24	10.4%
4	Apostrophe	15	6.5%
5	Concord	30	13.0%
6	Tense	25	10.9%
7	Pluralisation	15	6.5%
8	Paragraphing	20	8.7%
9	Capitalisation	17	7.4%
10	Indentation	18	7.8%
11	Spelling	21	9.1%
	Total	230	100%

The English and Literary Studies 200 Level students (Table 3) now had 40 errors in a total of 103 (0.38) scripts, which constituted a markedly lower error load than did the Mass Communication students. Among the errors in this cohort, the group labelled 'Tense' has the highest number of errors at 14.6% (15), closely followed by the errors within the group labelled 'Spelling', which amounts to 13.6% (14), and then Concord errors at 12.6% (13) and Pluralisation errors at 12.5% (5). Capitalisation was the least frequent error with 1.9% (2 errors).

Table 3: Distribution of Grapho-Grammatical Errors in English and Literary Studies 200 Level

S/N	Error Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Full Stop	9	8.7%
2	Comma	12	11.7%
3	Inverted Comma	8	7.8%
4	Apostrophe	10	9.7%
5	Concord	13	12.6%
6	Tense	15	14.6%
7	Pluralisation	5	12.5%
8	Paragraphing	6	5.8%
9	Capitalisation	2	1.9%
10	Indentation	9	8.7%
11	Spelling	14	13.6%
	Total	103	100%

Research Question 2: What are the linguistic and pedagogical causes contributing to these grapho-grammatical errors?

To answer Research Question 2, the qualitative and descriptive analysis of grapho-grammatical errors that were found in students' composition was conducted so that the specific causes of errors, both linguistic and pedagogical, can be determined. Errors were classified based on three general error factors: L1 (first language) interlingual interference, intralingual overgeneralisation of English syntactic rules and graphological errors caused by informal digital communication practices.

1. Concord Errors (Subject-Verb Disagreement)

The most common type of syntactic error among the mass communication students' groups was subject-verb agreement errors at the 100 level (12.7%) and 200 level (13.0%), and they were still the top class among English major students (12.6%). The errors can mainly be attributed to the lack of a clear third-person inflectional morpheme for major Nigerian languages (including Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and intralingual ambiguity due to prepositional phrases separating the noun phrase head and the verb.

Sub-category A: Disagreement with Intervening Prepositional Phrases / Relative Clauses

Excerpt: "The list of recommended textbooks for the journalism courses has been posted on the departmental board."

Correction: "The list of recommended textbooks for the journalism courses has been posted on the departmental board."

Sub-category B: Plural Subject with Singular Verb (and vice versa)

Excerpt: "Many undergraduate students in the department struggle to write coherent academic essays."

Correction: "Many undergraduate students in the department struggle to write coherent academic essays."

2. Tense Errors (Inconsistency & Arbitrary Shifts)

Tense errors represented 11.5% (MC 100L), 10.9% (MC 200L), and 14.6% (ENG 200L) of all observed deviations. The errors can be divided into two main types, involving L1 tense-aspect system incongruences in the narrative and argumentative paragraphs and the incorrect use of aspectual markers, which seems to be related to the lack of control over complexities of specific temporal sequence in writing in academic discourse.

Sub-category A: Unjustified Tense Shift within Sentence/Paragraph Boundary

Excerpt: "Yesterday, the lecturer explained the communication theory, and then we will write a short quiz on it."

Correction: "The lecturer had explained the communication theory yesterday and then wrote a short quiz on it."

Sub-category B: Omission of Past Tense Regular (-ed) Inflectional Endings

Excerpt: "The researcher collected the questionnaire data last week from all participants."

Correction: "The researcher collected the questionnaire data last week from all participants."

3. Punctuation Errors (Comma Misuse & Splices)

The number of graphological errors, such as comma splices, comma omissions, and misplaced inverted commas were significant across all three groups (10.9 percent to 11.9 percent for the comas alone). These errors are due to a gap in teacher training on clause boundaries and sentence combination.

Sub-category A: Comma Splice (Joining Independent Clauses with Only a Comma)

Excerpt: "The students were tired after the long lecture; they decided to go home early."

Correction: "The students were tired after the long lecture; they decided to go home early." (or: "...lecture, so they decided...")

Sub-category B: Omission of Commas in Compound or Complex Sentences

Excerpt: "Although the library was quiet, many students found it difficult to concentrate."

Correction: "Although the library was quiet, many students found it difficult to concentrate."

The empirical findings suggest that errors of concord and tense repeat in the 100-level and 200-level Mass Communication and also in the formal, informal and 100-level samples of Mass Communication students, while the formal errors (grammatical comma splice) and informal error type of abbreviation occur across all three Mass Communication student groups.

4. Digital Communication Abbreviations & Graphological Deviations

A separate subset of the grapho-grammatical mistakes detected in students' texts consists of the use of the informal digital communication register (textese, IM argot and nonstandard capitalization) in academic writing. Occurrence of these errors because of frequent use of social media communication on the internet, which results in register confusion and poor editing while composing.

Subcategory A: Text Messaging Abbreviations and Phonetic Spelling Conversions

Excerpt: "The media b4 reporting the news cuud not verify if it was 4 real."

Correction: "The media before reporting the news could not verify if it was for real."

Sub-category B: Lowercase First-Person Pronoun and Sentence-Initial Decapitalisation

Excerpt: "when i interviewed the respondents, u could see their hesitation."

Correction: "When I interviewed the respondents, one could see their hesitation."

Research Question 3: What correlations exist between these grapho-grammatical errors and students' overall academic achievement?

To address Research Question 3, a quantitative comparison was made between the three cohorts to investigate the quantitative association between the academic specialisation of learners, error counts, the average number of errors each script yielded and the overall academic writing performance level.

Table 4: Correlation Between Academic Exposure/Specialisation and Student Error Output

Cohort / Department	Level of Academic Exposure	Sample Size (n)	Total Errors	Average Errors per Script	Relative Error Burden Category
Mass Communication 100 Level	General / Introductory	40	252	6.3	High Error Burden
Mass Communication 200 Level	General / Intermediate	40	230	5.8	Moderate-High Error Burden
English & Literary Studies 200 Level	Specialised / Advanced	40	103	2.6	Low Error Burden

The quantitative results presented in Table 4 show that English and Literary Studies majors demonstrate a 58.7% lower total error burden (2.6 errors per script) compared to Mass Communication 100 level students (6.3 errors per script) and 55.2% lower than Mass Communication 200 level students (5.8 errors per script). This suggests that there is a strong positive correlation between accuracy of writing and specialised language training.

Research Question 4: How can these errors be effectively minimised, and how can writing competence be enhanced through pedagogical intervention?

The present study relied on a descriptive, comparative, and cross-cohort analysis of the sampled groups to determine the effect of pedagogical exposure and instructional focus on error reduction and writing development. Table 5 presents the comparative synthesis of error burdens and instructional conditions across the cohorts.

Table 5: Comparative Error Burden and Pedagogical Exposure Across Student Cohorts

Cohort / Department	Type of Instructional Exposure	Sample Size (n)	Total Errors Identified	Primary Error Category (Concord)	Average Error Burden Per Script
Mass Communication 100 Level	Standard / General Lecture-Based	40	252	32 (12.7%)	6.3
Mass Communication 200 Level	Standard / General Lecture-Based	40	230	30 (13.0%)	5.8
English & Literary Studies 200 Level	Intensive / Specialised Language Training	40	103	13 (12.6%)	2.6

The total error burden for students receiving intensive, specialised language training (English and Literary Studies 200 Level) dropped by 58.7% compared to the 100-level non-major cohort and by 55.2% compared to the 200-level non-major cohort, as shown in Table 5. The marginal decrease observed in average error burden per script between Mass Communication 100 Level (6.3 errors) and 200 Level (5.8 errors) indicates limited progression under standard lecture-based instruction. Conversely, intensive language instruction yielded a significantly lower average of 2.6 errors per script. Notably, concord error rates remained consistently high across all cohorts (~12.6%–13.0%), highlighting that general language exposure alone is insufficient and that targeted interventions addressing subject-verb agreement specifically are required.

Discussion of Findings

The empirical data shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3 confirm that the two most frequently occurring grapho-grammatical errors, accounting for a combined average of 23% to 27% of all recorded errors, are concord and tense errors across all undergraduate groups. These are recurrent structural errors that persist rather than self-correct, representing systematic competence errors within Corder's (1984) Error Analysis framework. The high prevalence of concord errors among non-majors (12.7% in 100L and 13.0% in 200L) provides empirical support for Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972), specifically the phenomenon of fossilisation, wherein non-standard L2 forms stabilize within the learner's IL continuum despite progressing to higher levels of instruction. These findings align with earlier studies by Alexander (2016) and Charles and Rebecca (2017), which observed that L2 writers frequently experience subject-verb agreement and tense stability issues when negotiating complex academic registers. Such syntactic failures impair sentence-level cohesion and compromise overall communicative efficacy.

Concerning Research Question 2, that is, the underlying linguistic and pedagogical causes for these errors, qualitative text analysis shows a dual-driver model of errors that takes into account first-language (L1) interlingual error transfer and intralingual overgeneralisation, as well as informal digital communication habits. An error analysis perspective of Corder (1984) and Richards (1984) suggests that the absence of the third-person inflectional agreement morpheme to represent the "s" in the English sentence and the compulsory past tense inflection in major Nigerian indigenous languages – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo – may be the sources of the negative interlingual transfer. This results in the native morphosyntactic structures being carried over onto the English syntactic structures by the L2 learner. In addition, the complexity in an L2 language, like subject-verb agreement that might be interrupted by intervening prepositional phrases or complex noun phrases, makes learners' cognitive effort to deal with the difficulties during L2 composition, favouring the use of simplified or fossilised interlingual rules (Gass et al., 2020). Concurrently, the prominent occurrence of comma splices (10.9%–11.9%), run-on sentences, textise abbreviations (e.g., "b4", "cuud"), and lowercase first-person pronouns demonstrates a clear register transfer from daily digital messaging platforms into formal academic writing. The results of this study consistently support Adegbiya (2001), Deji-Afuye and Zhou (2025), and Lai and Wang (2025), who reported that L1 structural divergence and the extent to which the informal digital communication channels reign in the tertiary

institutions are very debilitating to the correctness of L2 grammatical structures and the precision of the graphological forms.

When it comes to Research Question 3 – correlation between grapho-grammatical errors and overall academic achievement – the quantitative results of Table 4 show that there is a strong inverse correlation between error density and academic specialisation/exposure. The average number of errors of English and Literary Studies major students was decreased by 58.7%, from 6.3 errors per script recorded for Mass Communication 100 level students to 2.6 errors per script recorded by English and Literary Studies major students, while for Mass Communication 200 level students, it was reduced by 55.2%, from 5.8 errors per script recorded for Mass Communication 200 level students to 2.6 errors per script recorded for the English and Literary Studies major students. Inside the IL (Interlanguage) framework developed by Selinker (1972), this performance gap shows that the intensive, discipline-specific language teaching facilitated a learner's progress along the SLA (Second Language Learning) continuum and helped him/her to restructure his/her interlanguage system and thus to transcend fossilised rules. On the other hand, non-English majors with high error rates have rhetorical structure problems, non-linear arguments, and reduced readability, and all of these negatively impact their course assessments and performance. This result lends credence to many scholars whose findings claimed that the presence of grapho-grammatical errors in learners' writing affects higher-order language skills in revealing their thoughts, expression difficulty in academic learning, and overall effect in their. Finally, there is active academic performance in the works of Bacha (2000), Hamzah (2012), and Muhammad and Nair (2017).

Finally in response to Research Question 4, which focused on pedagogical intervention strategies for error minimisation and writing competence-building, the empirical contrast between the cohorts suggests that the traditional, passive, grammar-first instruction method failed to uncover the old interlanguage structure. However, as seen in Table 4, the average error burden in the category of mass communication between 100- and 200-level courses showed only a slight decrease from 6.3 to 5.8 errors per report, and the error rates remained unchanged for between 12.7% and 13.0% for the concord error categories. Based on L1 mistakes analysis theory (Corder, 1984), these results support the idea that L2 error analysis must shift from the traditional approach of teaching grammar to the systematic teaching approach, diagnostic teaching approach and process-orientated teaching approach in order to attain a good outcome in the writing process resulting from the writing remediation. Introducing diagnostic error profiling in an early tertiary writing course provides teachers the opportunity to give contextualised feedback and continue writing for a period with specific focus on those concord-rule violations or tense shifts that have been identified as common errors. The results are aligned with the positions of Myhill (2020), Tlonaen (2020), and Vasu et al. (2022), who favour clarifications through research-based grammar in context, adoption of a self-reflection-revision mechanism, and diagnostic formative feedback as stepping stones to close the informal writing gap and formal writing standards.

Summary

The present study examined the written compositions of undergraduate students at the Federal University of Lafia to address prevalent grapho-grammatical challenges in an L2 academic writing context. Guided by Error Analysis Theory (Corder, 1984) and Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972), four central research questions were addressed. Regarding Research Question 1, empirical findings showed that concord and tense errors constituted the highest proportion of syntactic errors across all cohorts (23%–27% combined), alongside prominent graphological issues such as comma splices. For Research Question 2, qualitative analysis identified a dual-driver error model consisting of negative L1 interlingual transfer and intralingual overgeneralisation coupled with digital messaging register interference. Regarding Research Question 3, cross-cohort comparisons revealed that English majors exhibited a 58.7%

lower error burden (2.6 errors per script) than Mass Communication 100-level non-majors (6.3 errors per script). Finally, for Research Question 4, comparative evaluation indicated that standard course progression yields minimal error reduction without targeted pedagogical interventions, underscoring the need for explicit diagnostic instruction.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that grapho-grammatical deficiencies present significant obstacles to academic writing competence among undergraduate students at the Federal University of Lafia. The persistent high rate of subject-verb agreement errors (averaging ~13% across cohorts) points to fossilised features within students' interlanguage systems. Rather than viewing these as mere mechanical slips, educators should address them as ingrained competence errors requiring direct remediation. To overcome fossilisation, tertiary instruction must transition from passive grammar lectures to structured, contextualized, and diagnostic writing instruction integrated across the curriculum.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the grapho-grammatical problem obtained, the following pedagogical strategies are recommended for the Federal University of Lafia:

1. Instructors should systematically profile each student's errors at the beginning of first-year writing courses and examine common error clusters (e.g., incorrect concord, tense shifts, and comma splices).
2. Teachers should move away from a focus on rote memorising of grammar rules and provide students with explicit and contextualised grammar instruction that will make explicit the rules and principles for linguistic accuracy that contribute to textual coherence.
3. Lecturers should set up revision cycles and use diagnostic formative feedback, with the students having to actively revise the non-standard interlanguage structures before submission.
4. Curriculum developers and curriculum designers must develop specific academic writing curriculum modules that teach awareness of register differences, which will help students separate out entertainment language (IL) from academic language (AL).

Contribution to Knowledge

This research makes the following key contributions to the body of knowledge:

1. It offers empirical information on the occurrence of grapho-grammatical errors, particularly among the undergraduate students of the Federal University of Lafia.
2. It clearly specifies the level of errors by category by subject and by level (based on four categories) and makes clear how much more common are the basic grammar type errors than are mechanical errors (spelling and capitalisation).
3. It provides some hands-on guidance for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers looking to enhance the quality of academic writing in the early years of tertiary education.

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