



# **Analysis of Errors In The Response Of NCE III Students In Examination Questions of GSE 321 2019/2020 Session Of SSCOE Sokoto**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Error is one of the weaknesses of human beings. Man is created by God and has endowed him with ability to excel in some phenomena and degrade in others. The consequence of degradation is weakness and poor performance. In academics, Language is very important because through it one is able to present facts, ideas, thoughts, procedures and expressions in one's field of specialization correctly without ambiguity or with little or no error. This makes the learner or reader or examiner as the case may be to understand these facts, ideas, thoughts, procedures and expressions and make just judgement that is devoid of many errors. On the other hand, when language is poor on the part of the students or learners, they become victims of degradation as they cannot communicate or express their thoughts, ideas and other demands without errors. This means that their ideas and thought will be vaguely communicated and as a result poor performances emanate. This study was carried out to investigate the causes and effect of poor English expression of NCE III students of Shehu Shagari College of Education, 2019/2020 session in GSE 321. Various aspects of English Language were examined and the errors identified. The study had a population size of 3,182 students across five (5) Schools in Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto (SSCOE, SOKOTO) during the 2019/2020 session. Out of this number, 100 were sampled, 20 each from each school. The sampling technique adopted the stratification technique method. In this method, for every five (5) scripts, the fifth is picked. The 100 sampled scripts were critically scrutinized and various forms of errors were identified. These errors are classified into those related to usage of vocabulary, wrong word formation, errors in the use of verb forms, punctuations among others. The analysis of the errors is provided as why some of the candidates performed poorly. The findings included that the ratio of errors per word ranges from 3:1 to 11:1. The paper recommends that more funding should be given to education, screening of candidates at point of admission to ascertain their language communication skill levels, organization of qualifying English for the weak students in English communication skills, increase in the hours of teaching English Language, synergy between institutions of tertiary levels with that of basic levels among others.

**Keywords:** Language,

## **INTRODUCTION**

English language is the medium of instruction at the higher level of education in Nigeria. This means that thoughts, ideas, procedures and other means of communication are done English language. Therefore mastery of the language at least at basic level is very paramount in achieving successes in our studies.

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**Being An Institutional Based Research Sponsored By TETFund Ref. Nor: TETF/DR & D/CE/COE/SOKOTO/2021/IBR/VOL. 1- BATCH 7, 2015-2021 Merged Interventions Serial No. 8**

Observations by scholars revealed that most of our students make errors in English language thereby becoming unable to communicate or properly respond to examination questions correctly. This phenomenon is very common among most NCE students in Shehu Shagari College Of Education, Sokoto. The problems are much more evident in their response to General Studies Education (GSE) examination questions. From the analysis of the errors in the students' scripts, it can be stated that whether by accident or design, the students lack the ability to develop the necessary skills needed to express themselves adequately in English Language. They do not understand most of the concepts of the English Language, its rules and regulations and how the concepts work or operate. As a consequence, many of them used varieties of Spoken English like Pidgin, Creole, slangs etc that are not recognised or unacceptable in formal written form. From what was observed, most students, with the exception of a few, do not have much clear understanding of the basic differences in functions and forms between writing and speech.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Proper understanding of language is instrumental to acquisition and understanding of knowledge. At present, it is sad to observe that the command and understanding of the English Language among most NCE III students in SSCOE Sokoto is grossly inadequate to meet their needs of expression in English. The essence of any language is to assist students to convey clearly not only acquired knowledge but thoughts, procedures, feelings, ideas and experiences as well. But this is seriously lacking in many of our NCE III students and specifically in their written responses to GSE 321 examination questions of 2019/2020 session. The students' writing and expressions are full of many errors which make their performances very dull and colourless making lecturers and examiners to spend several hours trying to understand what they mean or wrote in the process of marking.

It was against this background that this research was conceived. It raised research questions like why NCE III students cannot communicate in English Language fluently in GSE 321 – COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH V; why do NCE III students spell common English words wrongly?; why do they misuse verbs, tenses, adjectives and pronouns? Why do they use vernacular especially Hausa in their responses to GSE 321 examination questions? What is the demand of the NCCE Minimum Standards of GSE 321 from NCE III students? What were the causes of these problems among NCE III students? What is the nature and analysis of these errors? Are there any way(s) that these students can be assisted to remedy some of these problems? Thus, the research set out to find answers to these questions and similar ones.

### **Aims and Objectives of the study**

It is pertinent to point out that the broad aim and objective of this research was to investigate the causes and effects of poor English Language expressions in response to examination questions of NCE students in SSCOE, Sokoto but the specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the causes of poor expressions (written) in English among NCE III students in GSE 321 Course of 2019/2020 session.
2. Identify the types of simple errors NCE III students committed in GSE 321 of the 2019/2020 session
3. Provide an analysis and ratio of some of these identified errors
4. Identify the demands of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) GSE 321 Curriculum from students and the level of these Students
5. Proffer solutions to some of the identified problems

### **Review of Related Literature**

The concepts, error and mistake are very important and as such have to be defined. Generally, human beings make errors and mistakes. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003) defines mistake as something that has been done the wrong way or an opinion or statement that is incorrect; something you do that is not sensible or has bad result; something you do without intending to.

Saleh (2008) sees error as a mistake, especially a mistake in speaking or writing or a mistake that causes serious problems. Saleh (2008) further explains that in daily ordinary use, error and mistake are used interchangeably but in Applied Linguistics a distinction is made between error and mistake. Error occurs as a result of lack of or partial knowledge of the rules at certain stage of the second language (L2) learner's inter language. Where as a mistake is a slip of the tongue or as a result of a psychological problem of tension, stress, fatigue etc.

Errors in the Use of Punctuations are aspects that affect expression and thoughts and can affect the meaning or ideas intended to communicate. According to Kirpatrick (2009), punctuation is the use of certain established marks (punctuation marks) or symbols within a piece of written text. Punctuation prevents a piece of text from being just a string of words by breaking up the string of words into meaningful units and by making the text more fluent. Odiaka (2007) sees punctuation as the correct use of capital letters, full stop (.), comma (,) question mark (?), hyphen (-) and the exclamatory mark (!). Punctuation makes what we read or write clearer, sensible, understandable and explicit, as they refer to symbols which are used to separate and join units of language or sentences into a cohesive text. Little (2006) states that punctuation helps to organise longer sentences that have several clauses.

Poor expression is an error in language which can negatively affect the meaning of ideas and thoughts as well as performance in examinations. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2013) defines expression as something you say, write or do that shows what you think or feel. Therefore, impliedly from this definition, one can say that expression refers to the automatic control of the structures and patterns of the language which one is learning, (Moody, 1970). Expression can also mean using suitable words that accurately describe or explain with confidence, how an action or process is done, will be done or has been done.

In Applied Linguistics and in the teaching and learning situations, adult students who are poor like our students, the syllabi should come after running a test, exam or research work like ours in order to find out their actual problem and language levels before designing the syllabi not the other way round.

Language learning especially the second language is very difficult and needs a lot of time. This is a problem when we consider the background of the students whom most of them come from rural areas where sound provision of learning materials and infrastructures are either absent totally or inadequate. Therefore giving ample time for the learners of the second language to acquire its basics rules is very necessary. In this regards, Grant (1973) asserts that

“Slow and sure should be the motto when teaching English: One lesson well understood is better than four lessons only vaguely understood. It does not matter if it takes four weeks to teach one lesson, if in the end the child can read it well and can tell the teacher clearly in good English what it is about. A good teacher does not push the child to fit in with the syllabus, but changes the syllabus to suit the child.”

Proper usage of verbs is very important in every language. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003) defines verb as a word or group of words that describe an action, expectance or state; such as ‘come’, ‘see’ and ‘put’ on.

Verbs are words, like have, seem, go, teaches, shuttling, sewing, wasn't. Most English verbs occur in forms like three, four and five. Examples of verbs that occur in four forms are clean, look, answer, talk, play, burn, call, agree etc. some occur in five forms examples of which include bear,, beat, become, write,, shine, see, sing, know, leave, lead, etc. A few verbs occur in three forms and some examples of this include put, hit, set, spread, shed, rid, burst, cost, hurt, let, shut, split, thrust.

Certain verbs have no distinctive ending corresponding to the /d/ (written- ed) played in ‘he played’ or the /en/ of written in ‘he has written’, and their corresponding forms are marked instead by changes in the vowel sound of the base thus: I swim; I swam; I have swam; I sing; I

sang; I have sung etc. it is convenient for various purposes to use symbols to represent verb forms for various systems are used by different authorities (Boadi 1973).

Knowledge of vocabulary, its usage and word formation helps to develop and enhance the comprehension of a language. Vocabulary refers to all the “words” that someone knows or uses while word formation refers to connecting the letters of alphabet to form correct English words.

At the basic stage of learning a language, one has to know as many words as possible including the way they are formed from the root word and written correctly. English Language has some inherent difficulties, that is many English words do not sound in a regular phonetic way (in many cases the way the word is pronounced is different from the way it is spelt). And to write them just after only hearing them without enough oral practice and enough written exercises only confuse the students. Examples of such words are champagne, opaque, people etc. Take the word “champagne” for example the spelling is world a part from the pronunciation. Somebody once made a joke out of it when he said: “And what the hell is the ‘g’ doing there? as it is not pronounced!”. Since the backbone of any kind of writing is to express one’s thoughts in writing and at the same time use a larger number of words to make the sentences one writes; more varied and grammatically correct. It is quite clear to us, that most of the NCE students in question at the basic have not been taught at the basic and secondary schools levels what they needed to have been taught in order to have even a smothering command of the language.

Words are the building blocks for communication in any language, without them, no proper communication can take place. William (1973) asserts that” When a child first starts to learn English, he must obviously be taught new words just as methodically and carefully as new structures”. You cannot have a building composed only of cement (structures), just as you cannot have one made only of bricks. (Vocabulary or content words). So, in the first part of Primary school, for the first three or four classes, vocabulary needs to be taught just as carefully, specifically and methodically, as structures.

**METHODOLOGY**

The research team decided to use the responses of NCE III 2019/2020 session to “Section F” of GSE 321 (Communication in English V) examination questions as its raw data. This is because its content is continuous writing whereby students’ abilities in lexis, grammar among other language aspects will be show-cased and assessed. In order to achieve this, the research team selected 20 scripts randomly across the five (5) different Schools namely, Schools of Languages, Arts and Social Sciences, Sciences, Vocational and Technical Education and Early Childhood Care Education and Primary Education. The size of the population was 3,182 and a total of 100 scripts were randomly sampled using the stratification technique method. Stratification technique means that, for every five (5) scripts, the fifth was picked. The felt that the 100 selected scripts will serve the purpose of the team’s investigation and analysis.

**Table 1 : Population size and total number of sampled scripts from the five (5) schools**

| <b>School</b>  | <b>Population</b> | <b>Number of scripts randomly sampled from GSE 321</b> |
|----------------|-------------------|--|
| Languages      | 722               | 20   |
| Sciences       | 921               | 20   |
| Arts & Soc. Sc | 835               | 20   |
| Voc. & Tech    | 186               | 20   |
| ECCE & PED     | 518               | 20   |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>3,182</b>      | <b>100</b>   |

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

**Data Presentation**

Eleven (11) different errors related to English Grammar were detected from the sampled scripts. The number of occurrences of each error is shown in the table below:

**Table 2 showing the total number of Errors Related to English Grammar identified and the number of their occurrences in the 5 Schools**

| Error   | Total occurrence |
|---|------------------|
| 1 Wrong formation and spelling of words                 | 210              |
| 2 Incorrect use of verb forms/tenses                    | 140              |
| 3 Errors in the use of determiners                      | 12               |
| 4 Errors in the use of pre-positions                    | 30               |
| 5 Errors in subject verb agreement                      | 2                |
| 6 Errors in the use of pronouns                         | 38               |
| 7 Errors in the use of adverbs and adjectives (Concord) | 2                |
| 8 Continuous writing incomplete statements              | 7                |
| 9 Using vernacular (Hausa)                              | 8                |
| 10 Errors in singular and plurals                       | 20               |
| 11 Errors in punctuations                               | 65               |
| <b>Overall Errors and occurrences</b>                   | <b>535</b>       |

**Source: Field Work Survey, 2022**

Table 2 shows that 535 errors related to English Grammar were detected from the sampled scripts from the 5 schools. Out of this total, wrong formation and spelling of words has the highest with 210 occurrences representing 39.3%. This is followed by incorrect use of verbs/tenses with 140 occurrences representing 26.2%. Errors in punctuation came third with 65 occurrences representing 4.9%. Errors in the usage of Pronouns and Prepositions came fourth and fifth with 38 and 30 occurrences respectively. This respectively presents 7.1% and 5.6%. Other errors identified were Errors in Singular and Plurals which has 20 occurrences (3.7%); Errors in the use of Determiners 12 occurrences (2.2%); continuous writing incomplete statements 7 occurrences (1.3%) while Errors in subject verb agreement and Errors in the use of adverbs and adjectives has 2 each, representing 0.4% (concord).

**Table 3: Total Number of words per School, Errors and Ratio of words to one Error (Global Picture)**

| School      | Expected No. Words | Actual Total words Written | Total No. of Errors | Ratio of No. Words to one Error |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Languages   | 4000               | 1886                       | 282                 | 7:1                             |
| Arts & Sos  | 4000               | 765                        | 123                 | 6:1                             |
| Sciences    | 4000               | 2148                       | 208                 | 10:1                            |
| Voc. & Tech | 4000               | 1427                       | 212                 | 7:1                             |
| ECCE & PED  | 4000               | 551                        | 112                 | 5:1                             |

**Source: Survey Work 2022**

Table 3 shows the total number of words written by 20 (representative sample of each school) divided by the total number of their errors which will give us the number of words on the average a student writes before committing one (1) error. The students of the School of Sciences commit fewer errors as their ratio is showing ten words to one error. And interestingly, enough they are more fluent as they have the highest total number of words used, 2148. The School of Languages and that of Vocational and Technical Education come second place in committing fewer errors with the ratio of 7:1 each. Interestingly, enough, the two schools also come second position in being more fluent with the second highest total number of words used 1,886, 1,427 respectively. The School of Arts and Social Sciences comes third with the ratio of 6:1. In the same vain, the School of Arts and Social Sciences has a total length of 765 words. Trilling behind comes School of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) and Primary Education (PED) which has a total length of 551 words with the ratio of 5:1 which means for every five (5) words they write, there will be at least one error. These schools mentioned previously lack in their store- house, the basic vocabulary to communicate and even with the little they have, they make more error than the latter three schools mentioned.

**Table 4: Length of each student's essay, number of errors and ratio of words to one error in School of Languages**

| S/NO | Student Details                                 | Length of Essay/No. of words | Number of Errors     | Ratio of words to one error |
|------|---|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1    | Kamalu Tukur/ 160310144/English/Hausa           | Did not attempt the Section  | Cannot be Determined | Cannot be Determined        |
| 2    | Kasimu Yusuf/160310231/English/Hausa            | Did not attempt the Section  | Cannot be Determined | Cannot be Determined        |
| 3    | Yunusa Bala/160310118/English/Hausa             | Riddled with errors          | Cannot be Determined | Cannot be Determined        |
| 4    | Sumayya Salihu/English/Hausa/160310181          | 81 words                     | 17                   | 5:1                         |
| 5    | Saifullahi Alhaji Labbo/160310189/English/Hausa | 90 words                     | 22                   | 4:1                         |
| 6    | Lawali Ummaru/English/Hausa/160310125           | 48 words                     | 9                    | 5:1                         |
| 7    | Muhammad Sadiqu/English/Hausa/160310221         | 90 words                     | 22                   | 4:1                         |
| 8    | Mukhtar A. Muhammad/English/Hausa/160310073     | 90 words                     | 22                   | 4:1                         |
| 9    | Shuiabu Maniru Gangara/English/Hausa/160310122  | 63 words                     | 12                   | 5:1                         |
| 10   | Sahafiu Samaila/English/Hausa/160310140         | Riddled with errors          | Cannot be Determined | Cannot be Determined        |
| 11   | Abdulmajid Usman/English/Husa/1690310188        | 50 words                     | 15                   | 3:1                         |
| 12   | Aminu Labbo/English/Islam/160111681             | 90 words                     | 22                   | 4:1                         |
| 13   | Abdulkarim Aliyu/English/Islam/160111250        | 152 words                    | 17                   | 9:1                         |
| 14   | Shuaibu Ibrahim Alao/English/Hist/160310089     | 200 words                    | 25                   | 8:1                         |
| 15   | Yahaya Dantani/English/Hist/160310072           | 240 words                    | 30                   | 8:1                         |
| 16   | Mubarak Wadata/English/Hausa/160310225          | 144 words                    | 20                   | 7:1                         |
| 17   | Muhammad Garba B./English/Hausa/160310106       | 220 words                    | 19                   | 11:1                        |
| 18   | Musa Aliyu/English/Hausa/160310029              | 144 words                    | 21                   | 7:1                         |
| 19   | Aminu Muhammad/Eng/Hist/160310068               | 96 words                     | 8                    | 12:1                        |
| 20   | Ayuba Muhammad/English/Hausa/160310021          | 88 words                     | 11                   | 8:1                         |

**Source: Survey Work 2022**

Table 4 shows the number of words written by individual students, number of errors and ratio of words to one error. In order to arrive at this table, the researcher counted the number of words (length) of the Essay, the number errors made, divided by the numbers written by the number of errors in order to arrive at the ratio. As the table indicates, the good students amongst them will write 11, 10, 9, and 8 words before spotting one error. The average students will write 8, 7, 6, 5, and 4 words before spotting one error. The poor one, for every 3, 2 and 1 word, they spot error. Some of the scripts are completely riddled with errors. Some students could not even attempt the section for lack of what to say and how to say. Although, 5 schools were involved, the researchers decided to use the school of languages as a microcosm, as it will be too cumbersome for the nature of this research to show the individual students length of easy, errors and ratios of all the five schools.

### **Findings of the research**

This research has made the following findings:

1. There was prevalence of poor English Language understanding among majority of the students. This is evident in the fact that many of them have problems in formation and spelling of words and incorrect use of verb forms/tenses. These two aspects are very crucial in any language and the errors in the two constitute 350 (140 plus 210) as shown in table 2.
2. Consequent upon (1) above, there was poor performance among the students in the GSE 321 of 2019/2022 session
3. Students from the school sciences tend to perform better than the students from school of languages.
4. Majority of the students lack the background of English Language at the basic level
5. Time of one (1) hour given for GSE 321 as lecture period per week is grossly inadequate.

### **DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS**

Prevalence of poor English Language understanding among the NCE III students in GSE 321 of 2019/2020 session suggests that majority of them have no knowledge of the basic rules of the English language. Some of these basic rules include punctuations. According to Kirpatrick (2009), punctuation is the use of certain established marks (punctuation marks) or symbols within a piece of written text. Punctuation prevents a piece of text from being just a string of words by breaking up the string of words into meaningful units and by making the text more fluent. Odiaka (2007) sees punctuation as the correct use of capital letters, full stop (.), comma (,) question mark (?), hyphen (-) and the exclamatory mark (!). Punctuation makes what we read or write clearer, sensible, understandable and explicit, as they refer to symbols which are used to separate and join units of language or sentences into a cohesive text. Little (2006) states that punctuation helps to organise longer sentences that have several clauses.

It is evident from table 3 above where the skill of communication of the students vividly showed that they have little knowledge of grammar related issues of the English Language. Lack of know how in formation and spelling of words and incorrect use of verbs/tenses in any language can definitely affect the expressions of a person and performances in that language. Therefore, when we critically observe in Table 3, the number of errors in wrong formation and spelling of words and incorrect use of words and verbs, constitute the highest errors and incidentally, they form the backbone of expression and communication in any language. Impliedly, therefore, the performances of the students in GSE 321 must be poor due to this inadequacy.

As pointed out elsewhere, time is required to learn second language. The provision lecturer hour (s) in the Timetable for GSE 321 is not enough as for the category of the students we have. This view has been expressed by Grant (1973) who asserts that:



“Slow and sure should be the motto when teaching E-english: One lesson well understood is better than four lessons only vaguely understood. It does not matter if it takes four weeks to teach one lesson, if in the end the child can read it well and can tell the teacher clearly in good English what it is about. A good teacher does not push the child to fit in with the syllabus, but changes the syllabus to suit the child.”

## CONCLUSION

It is vividly clear from what has been discussed above that students of the College lack the adequate communication skills to enable them express their thoughts. With the great number of errors in the various aspect of English Language, it is very difficult for the majority of these students to perform well in the examination. What is important at present is how do we try to remedy this trends before they go out of proportion.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From what we have analysed above, the following recommendations are put forward in order to address some of the problems.

1. Effects should be made to improve the communication skills of the students particularly aspects related to formation of English words, correct use of verbs and tenses, acquisition of vocabulary, correction form of punctuations among others.
2. Syllabi of the National Commission for Colleges of Education being adopted by Shehu Shagari College of Education, should be written after conducting a research (like this) and finding out the actual level of the students not in the board room.
3. More time should be allotted to GSE 321 course to enable the students learn the basic rules of the English Language for enhancement of their communication skills and academic performances.
4. Intensive weekend four (4) hour communication courses should be introduced by the Department of General studies so that the students weak in communication skills be registered and make to attend.
5. Qualifying English course should be introduced into Colleges of Education and other higher institutions.

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