







An Examination of Concord Errors in the Academic Writings of Students at a Technical University in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

A typical student in Ghana uses the English language to write, from primary school to the tertiary level. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that few or no concord errors could be found in the writings of Higher National Diploma students. However, many errors plague students' writings, one of which is concord errors. Therefore, this study attempted to examine, classify, and analyse the errors in the writings of HND students at a technical university in Ghana while also exploring their impact on language teaching and learning. This research, using an exploratory qualitative technique, investigated the content of 25 randomly chosen examination scripts from five faculties. The analysis was based on the Error Analysis Theory. This study found that HND students at a technical university in Ghana committed widespread and systematic concord errors, including mistakes in subject-verb agreement, tense, and determiner-noun use. These persistent errors highlight gaps in students' understanding of grammar and weaknesses in English instruction. To address this, the study recommends revising the curriculum to include grammar teaching in all three years, organising grammar workshops, strengthening lecturer training, establishing a writing centre, and encouraging students to practice self-editing and use digital grammar tools. The study contributes to scholarship by focusing on an under-researched group, offering a detailed classification of concord errors, and providing practical strategies to improve English language teaching and students' academic writing proficiency.

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INTRODUCTION

As Ghana's official language, English plays a substantial role in several areas: politics, science, administration, communication, governance, and education. All educational institutions in Ghana use English for their academic writing. According to Smith, academic writing is any writing that disseminates knowledge to a larger audience of academics.¹ Writing is paramount in the academic

¹ S. Smith, "Academic Writing. EAP Foundation," 2022.

discourse community, playing a crucial role in student performance and retention. It serves as the primary medium of academic communication at the university level, facilitating the exchange of ideas, research findings, and scholarly discussions.² Although writing is very significant, according to Zhang, of the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), writing is the hardest skill for second and foreign-language learners to acquire.³ Zhang asserts that writing is a very difficult process that calls for appropriate intervention that would assist novice writers in generating content that is precise, cohesive, and comprehensible.⁴

The elements of the writing, including vocabulary, mechanics, content, and grammar, must be well understood and effectively controlled to produce successful writing. Fenyi and Morrison state that, of all the writing aspects, grammar is a major challenge in the writing of students.⁵ Grammar dictates the structure and arrangement of words in sentences. Failure to follow its rules can result in some structural ambiguity and ultimate misinterpretations may occur.⁶ Subject-verb agreement, sometimes known as "concord," is one component of grammar that is challenging to students. Stilman postulates that concord is one of the topics under grammar that poses frequent challenges that even well-educated and sophisticated English language users often struggle with.⁷

Merriam-Webster defines concord as a situation in which the various components of a statement or phrase agree with one another. This grammatical harmony ensures that elements such as subjects and verbs match in number and tense. The MacMillan English Dictionary further describes concord as the proper way words are combined following grammatical rules, emphasising the importance of proper word usage to maintain grammatical accuracy and coherence. Grammar rules serve as guidelines to help us write consistently and uniformly.⁸ A verb can be used to indicate the number of arguments, such as the subject and object, person, and gender of those arguments. Therefore, subject-verb agreement involves selecting the correct form of a verb to match a given subject.⁹ According to Wiredu, concord is described as the grammatical relationship between two units, where the presence of a particular feature in one unit necessitates a corresponding feature in the other.¹⁰ Concord occurs when the morphosyntactic features of a sentence element, such as number, tense, or gender, align with those of other elements in the sentence.¹¹ In other words, the verbal element should be inflected to match the singularity of the noun if it has an inflectional form in the sentence, such as a singular noun, and vice versa. In the same vein, the pronoun and its antecedent should agree on number, gender, and person in noun-pronoun constructions. Anytime a pronoun does not agree with the antecedent (the word the pronoun refers to) or an inflected subject does not agree with the verb in terms of number, tense, gender, etc., a concord error has occurred. Mensah explores the five types of English concord: proximity concord, pronoun-antecedent concord, notional concord, grammatical (subject-verb) concord, and sequence of tenses (verb-verb) concord.¹²

² R. Ivanic, "Writing and Student Success in Higher Education: A Critical Review.," *Journal of Education and Developmental Psychology* 14 (2024): 1–15.

³ Ruofei Zhang and Di Zou, "Self-Regulated Second Language Learning: A Review of Types and Benefits of Strategies, Modes of Teacher Support, and Pedagogical Implications," *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 37, no. 4 (2024): 720–65.

⁴ Zhang and Zou, "Self-Regulated Second Language Learning: A Review of Types and Benefits of Strategies, Modes of Teacher Support, and Pedagogical Implications."

⁵ D.A. Fenyi and R. Morrison, "Concord Errors in Postgraduate Theses in Ghana: A Descriptive Analysis.," *Journal of Language and Linguistics in Society (JLLS)* 3, no. 1 (2023): 20–30.

⁶ Anne Stilman, "Grammatically Correct. The Essential Guide to Spelling," *Style, Usage, Grammar*, 1997.

⁷ Stilman, "Grammatically Correct. The Essential Guide to Spelling."

⁸ Jarek Krajka, "Macmillan English Dictionary and Cambridge Learner's Dictionary-A Comparative Review," *Teaching English with Technology* 2, no. 3 (2002): 48–58.

⁹ Richard Nordquist, "Definition and Examples of Corpus Linguistics," *English Grammar*, July 3 (2019).

¹⁰ John F. Wiredu, "Organized English Grammar," *Accra: Academic Publication*, 1998.

¹¹ Mark Aronoff, and K. Fudeman, *What is Morphology?* (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2011).

¹² Ernest K. Klu, "An Analysis of Grammatical Concord in Selected Examination Scripts of Students of the Ghana Technology University College," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2014): 727–31; Boahemaa, "The Study of Concord Errors in the Writing of Students of Koforidua Senior High Technical School.," Mohammed Nuruzzaman, A B M Islam, and Israt Jahan Shuchi, "An Analysis of Errors Committed by Saudi Non-English Major Students in the English Paragraph Writing: A Study of Comparisons.," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 31–39; Silas Afeadie and Samuel Bruce Kpeglo, "Impact Of Errors On The College Of Education Students' written Communication," *International Journal of English Language Teaching* 10,

Numerous studies have examined concord errors in Ghana and beyond, but studies on concord errors in the academic writings of HND students in technical universities are virtually non-existent.¹³

Students in Ghana have been taught to write in English from elementary school through to the university level, but several studies have shown that university students in Ghana have so many errors in their academic writing, one of which is concord error. There seems to be virtually no extant literature on the HND tertiary students in the technical universities in Ghana; therefore, it is imperative to know what happens at the HND level as well since students at that level also engage in academic writing. Due to this, this study seeks to look at the concord errors in HND students' writings and the implications those concord errors have on the instruction of English at the HND level. The objectives of this study are to:

- To describe the different concord errors found in HND students' examination scripts.
- To emphasise the implications of these errors for English Language instruction at the HND level.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What types of concord errors are found in the examination scripts of HND students?
- What implications do the concord errors have for HND English teaching?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted on errors in second-language writing in Ghana and elsewhere. All the studies mentioned are conducted in the African context. Chele investigated the concord errors in English in the writings of level three students at the Lesotho National University.¹⁴ In this study, two study designs were adopted in this study. Firstly, students took a test related to their field of study, and the test scripts were analysed to identify the subject-verb agreement errors along with the linguistic contexts in which these errors occurred. Secondly, the students were presented with sentences containing a mix of correct, incorrect, and ambiguous structures and were asked to assess their grammatical accuracy. The key findings of the study revealed that subject-verb agreement errors were most common in simple sentence constructions and complex linguistic environments.

Oludare investigated concord errors in postgraduate dissertations and theses. In this study, eight postgraduate students from the University of Ibadan's Linguistics Department had their dissertations and theses reviewed.¹⁵ Grammatical errors due to inadequate internalisation of the concord rules were responsible for the forty-six deviant constructions extracted from the postgraduate theses.

In 2021, Nurmalia and Nuraeni looked at the writing mistakes made by Bina Sarana Informatika University students. To find grammatical, semantic, and content flaws in written compositions, the study selected and analysed ten pieces of writing. The results showed that spelling errors predominated, followed by punctuation and fragment issues. Furthermore, mistakes in prepositional, adjective, and subject-verb agreement were found in the compositions. Also, it was discovered that the pupils made mistakes with capitalisation, verb tenses, and literal translation. Most of the students did not include a subject in a phrase when they made fragment errors in spelling, which is the most common error. Students committed spelling errors by adding extra letters, switching letters, or skipping a letter in a word.

In a South African university, Demana investigated the errors in a collection of essays written by first-year students.¹⁶ The researcher analysed fifty (50) essays from students enrolled in English Communication Skills (ECS 1541) during the 2021 academic year. The study used a document analysis

no. 1 (2022): 23–34; S.T., Mensah, "Concord Errors in Academic Writing: A Study of First-Year Students at Offinso College of Education and Strategies for Improvement.," *Universal Journal of Literature and Linguistics*, 2024, 22–43.

¹³ Klu, "An Analysis of Grammatical Concord in Selected Examination Scripts of Students of the Ghana Technology University College."

¹⁴ Mampoi Irene Chele, "An Analysis of Subject Agreement Errors in English: The Case of Third Year Students at the National University of Lesotho," *Ghana Journal of Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (2015): 32–40.

¹⁵ Oluwado Jacob Oludare, "Concord Errors in Postgraduates Dissertations and Theses," *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–7.

¹⁶ V. N. Demana, "Aspects of Written English Language Errors Made by Level-One Students in a South African University" (2023).

technique in which participants completed an essay task on a predetermined topic to provide data. To enable a more thorough analysis and description of errors from various analytical angles, the study combined the Linguistic Category and Surface Structure taxonomies. The findings revealed that the students committed errors in several language aspects, including the copula 'be' and other auxiliaries, third person singular forms, pronouns, prepositions, the plural markers '-s/-es', articles, the coordinating conjunction 'and,' the apostrophes and possessives as well as past tense markers.

In the context of Ghana, Bayiri investigated concord errors among Form One students at Kintampo Senior High School. Tests, observations, and questionnaires were employed as the research tools to examine students' spoken English and their performance during concord classes with their English instructor.¹⁷ After analysing the data, it became clear from the study that because of the weak foundation they had in junior high school before moving on to senior high school, students were not adept in the application of grammatical concord. Inconsistent concord rules, overgeneralization of the rules, and interference from the mother tongue (L1) in English are just a few of the causes of concord errors. The study provided several measures that teachers and English language learners might use to reduce concord errors.

Agor conducted research regarding the overt and covert causes of concord mistakes made by some University of Ghana Faculty of Arts final-year students.¹⁸ A total of two exams were given to level 400 students reading Linguistics, Theatre Arts, English, Economics, French, Psychology, Political Science, Information Studies, Archaeology, and Philosophy. The initial test required the students to select the correct form of two sets of verbs and provide an explanation for their selection. In the subsequent test, a paragraph of five sentences was given to the students, and five gaps were left for them to choose the best form of the verb 'be' to fill in the gaps. Regrettably, the students' performance was really poor. The researcher concluded that the students did not receive enough explicit teaching in English grammar during their pre-university years.

Mandor conducted a study on English language errors in the writing of level two students at a Ghanaian university.¹⁹ The qualitative aspect of the mixed method used revealed that students demonstrate weak writing skills with intrinsic grammatical errors in their written compositions. Sixteen (16) error categories with choice of words and concord were found, amounting to 25% of all the errors observed.

Similarly, Mensah investigated concord errors in academic writing among level-one students at Offinso College of Education in Ghana.²⁰ The study aimed to establish common errors and suggest remedial strategies for improvement. The sample consisted of level-one students from the college. Employing a mixed-method research design, the study explored the effects of concord errors on academic writing. Through questionnaires, interviews, and writing assessments, it was observed that students frequently committed errors such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, and agreement between articles and nouns. The study highlighted the need for focused interventions to deal with these concord issues and improve the students' writing abilities.

In another study, Fenyi and Morrison looked at concord errors in postgraduate theses in Ghana.²¹ The purpose of the study was to detect, classify, and explain the faults found in postgraduate theses in Ghana and to highlight how these flaws may affect language instruction. 20 MA, MPhil, and PhD dissertations that were randomly chosen and published between 2020 and 2021 were the subjects of this exploratory qualitative study's content analysis. The theory of error analysis was adopted to analyse the data. Following a detailed analysis of the dissertations, seven (7) types of concord errors were identified and documented.

¹⁷ N. P. Bayiri, "Concord Problems among Students of Senior High School Form One, a Case Study in Kintampo Senior High School" (University of Education, 2018).

¹⁸ J. Tetteh Agor, "Investigating English Concord Problems in the Writings of Teacher-Trainees," *Unpublished M. Phil Thesis, University of Ghana*, 2003.

¹⁹ E. J. Mandor, "Analysis of English Language Errors in the Writing of Second Year Students in a Ghanaian University" (2021).

²⁰ Mensah, "Concord Errors in Academic Writing: A Study of First-Year Students at Offinso College of Education and Strategies for Improvement. ."

²¹ Fenyi and Morrison, "Concord Errors in Postgraduate Theses in Ghana: A Descriptive Analysis."

Although students spend most of their time learning English, they perform poorly in both the spoken and written portions of exams. Their levels of grammar generally and in concord between subjects and verbs are a significant area of concern that has contributed to students' poor performance in the English language.

Previous studies have primarily focused on pre-tertiary students, undergraduate students, and postgraduate students.^{22,23} Errors in the writings of Higher National Diploma (HND) students in the technical universities in Ghana have not received maximum attention. Therefore, this study seeks to highlight the errors in the essays written by HND students and how they affect language instruction in Ghana.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of error analysis (EA) underpins the study. An error, according to Corder, is a variation in a learner's language that arises from ignorance of the proper rule.²⁴ By analysing these errors, educators can gain valuable insights into the learning process, identify specific areas where learners struggle, and develop targeted strategies to address these challenges. This method not only increases the overall efficacy of language training but also enhances the overall effectiveness of language instruction. Maruti (2023) describes error analysis as a systematic approach to identifying, categorising, and examining the errors learners make, especially in language learning.²⁵ This method helps educators uncover the root causes of these errors, which can stem from factors like the learner's native language interfering, developmental stages in language acquisition, or the complexity of the target language itself. By recognising the types and underlying causes of errors, lecturers can adapt their teaching methods to better address learners' specific needs and learners can also become more aware of their errors, encouraging them to reflect on their learning processes. Yang also describes errors as identifying the prevalence, types, causes, and effects of ineffective language usage.²⁶ Al-Khreshheh asserts that Error Analysis (EA) addresses how individuals acquire and utilise a language-based approach.²⁷ This involves examining the errors committed by language learners to gain insight into the fundamental processes of language acquisition. By identifying and analysing these errors, educators can gain insights into the learners' interlanguage development and the specific challenges they face.

Thus, errors are intentional blunders or incorrect application of grammar rules that demonstrate a learner's command of the desired language (second language). EA provides students with examples of how to learn a language, what they already know, and how to apply what they have learned. EA examines these modifications made by the learner of a second language. It is essential to continuously and empirically investigate the various types of errors that ESL students make to develop strategies that will help to alleviate the issue since making mistakes is an inevitable part of learning a second language. The results of an EA help language teachers recognise, classify, and describe the errors made when learners are learning a second language. Language teachers can use the information provided by EA to make decisions about the methods, best practices, tactics, strategies, and resources to employ in the classroom to assist learners in overcoming obstacles. Language teachers can use the insights gained from Error Analysis (EA) to determine the most effective methods, techniques, strategies, and resources to implement in the classroom, helping students overcome learning challenges.

²² Alexander A. Agordoh, "Music in African Communities," *Africa in Contemporary Perspectives: A Textbook for Undergraduate Students*, 2013, 430–44; Mandor, "Analysis of English Language Errors in the Writing of Second Year Students in a Ghanaian University"; Fenyi and Morrison, "Concord Errors in Postgraduate Theses in Ghana: A Descriptive Analysis."; Bayiri, "Concord Problems among Students of Senior High School Form One, a Case Study in Kintampo Senior High School."

²³ Agor, "Investigating English Concord Problems in the Writings of Teacher-Trainees"; Fenyi and Morrison, "Concord Errors in Postgraduate Theses in Ghana: A Descriptive Analysis."

²⁴ Stephen Pit Corder, "The Significance of Learner's Errors," 1967.

²⁵ P. T. Maruti, "Error analysis: An overview." *Epitome: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 9 no. 4 (2023): 23–29.

²⁶ AndrewMkh Enaifoghe and Sandile Blessing Wanazi, "The Polity of Regional Integration Development and the Challenges Hampering Southern Africa Economic Growth," *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 12, no. 5 (2020): 44–52.

²⁷ Mohammad Hamad Al-Khreshheh, "A Review Study of Error Analysis Theory," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research* 2 (2016): 49–59.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory qualitative design was used for this study. Researchers can examine a particular phenomenon (students' writing), determine its systematic nature, and, if relevant, determine the phenomenon's source and impact by using the exploratory qualitative design. This makes it easier for researchers to produce solid results that might either strengthen or weaken the phenomenon. The study aimed to identify and describe the concord errors in the examination scripts by conducting a content analysis of selected examination scripts of students at a Ghanaian Technical University. To achieve the study's aim, Israel's exploratory qualitative design was adopted to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives, thereby offering a rich and nuanced exploration of the concord errors in the academic writings of students at a technical university in Ghana.²⁸ The university had five faculties: the Faculty of Applied Sciences, the Faculty of Applied Arts, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Built and Natural Environment, and the Faculty of Business. A total of twenty-five (25) examination scripts comprising five (5) scripts from each of the five faculties were randomly selected for the study. Several phrases that had concord errors were removed from the chosen test scripts, examined, and categorised based on the various kinds of concord errors. For every incorrect expression, the researchers suggested the right version. The authors' anonymity and confidentiality were protected because the study's main objective was to argue for the introduction or expansion of English language courses at the HND level rather than to criticise any HND students. For data analysis, the study used the four stages outlined by Hassan et al.²⁹

All scripts were selected from the second semester of the 2022 - 2023 academic year. Because the materials are current, it is easier to spot the faults that persist in today's academic environment, making it possible to take immediate action to correct the faults when necessary.

Secondly, to find concord errors, the researchers thoroughly read all the examination scripts from the faculties. The researchers read each of the examination scripts several times in the detect of errors. Highlighters were used to make it simple to identify the structures that had errors during the description, classification, and analysis of the problems.

Next, after locating and highlighting the errors in step two, those deviances were then classified according to the types of concord. The errors were described and classified following Alghazo and Alshraideh, Israel, and Fenyi and Morrison.³⁰ The study adopted the methods of these scholars to categorise errors and describing them. These classifications are effective and efficient in classifying errors, so it was appropriate to adapt them for a study like the one being conducted now.

Finally, the systemic nature of the errors was reviewed and highlighted. Moreover, the systemic nature of errors is a key aspect. That is what appears to distinguish an error from a mistake. The Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics states that a student makes errors in writing or speaking due to inattention, exhaustion, negligence, or another performance-related factor.³¹ Errors cannot self-correct, but mistakes can be corrected when attention is focused on them. Therefore, the researchers did more than simply point out and label the erroneous structures. Before identifying the incorrect structures as errors, the researchers first determined whether they were present consistently across the examination scripts selected. The researchers explored how the findings should affect the teaching of English at the HND level after identifying, classifying, and characterising the faults.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

²⁸ Peace Chinwendu Israel, "Exploring Grammatical Errors in Teaching Materials," *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics* 10, no. 05 (2020): 620–33, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2020.105038>.

²⁹ Isyaku Hassan, Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi, and Engku Suhaimi Engku Atek, "An Analysis of English Concord Errors in Selected Nigerian Newspapers," 2020.

³⁰ Khitam Mohameed Alghazo and Mohamed Khaliefah Alshraideh, "Grammatical Errors Found in English Writing: A Study from Al-Hussein Bin Talal University.," *International Education Studies* 13, no. 9 (2020): 1–9; Israel, "Exploring Grammatical Errors in Teaching Materials"; Rebecca Arthur and Daniel Arkoh Fenyi, "Metadiscourse Markers of Hedging in Classroom Interaction: A Descriptive Analysis," *International Journal of Education, Technology and Science* 2, no. 3 (2022): 288–309.

³¹ J. Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

This study aimed to describe the different concord errors found in the examination scripts of HND students and to highlight their implications for language teaching and learning. The data consisted of 25 scripts randomly selected from five faculties of a technical university in Ghana. The 2022/2023 second semester examination scripts selected from the five faculties were read thoroughly to identify the errors. The identified errors were then categorised based on the basis of the types of concord. Following the identification, classification, and description of the faults, the researchers looked at how their findings could affect English instruction at the HND level. The number of sampled examination scripts that contained errors is illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

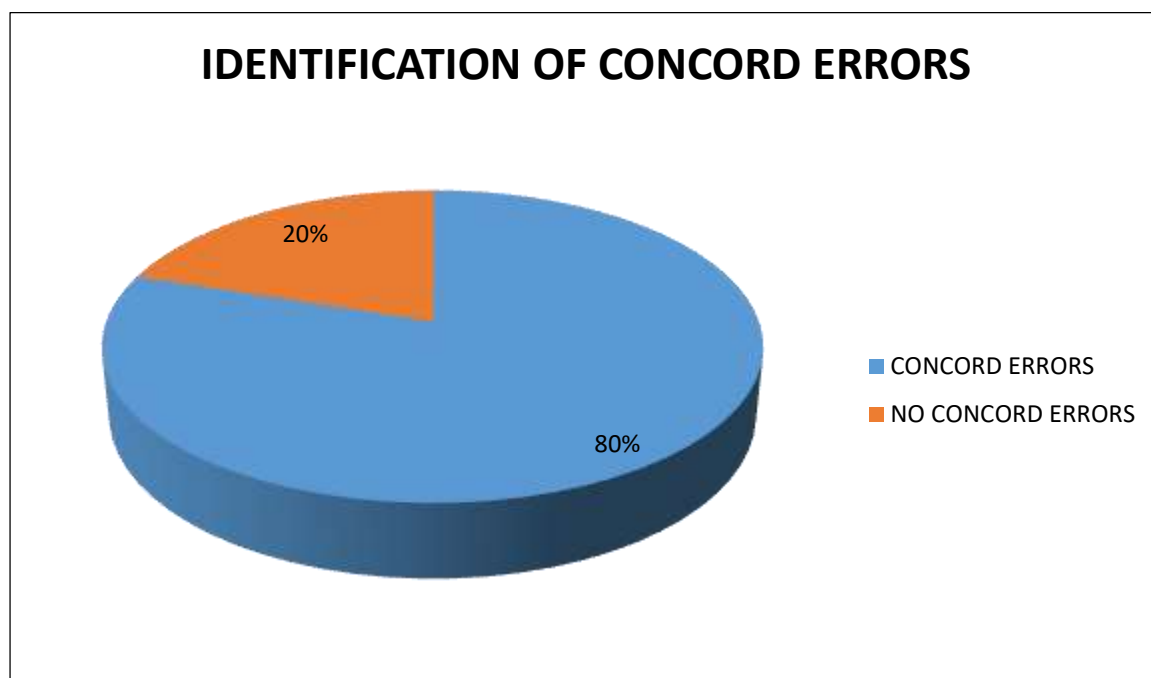


Figure 1.1 Source: Examination scripts, 2023

From Figure 1.1, it is evident that of the 25 examination scripts assessed, 80%, representing 20, had concord errors while the remaining 20%, representing 5, had no concord errors. Some scripts, though few, had no concord errors but had other errors such as punctuation, spelling, and ambiguities. A greater number of the scripts had concord errors plus other errors, thus confirming what Alghazo and Alshraideh proclaim: “Errors occur in the writing of almost all [majority] of non-native writings.”³² After a critical analysis of the examination scripts, the following concord errors emerged:

Subject-verb Concord Errors

The most significant concord issue in grammar, according to Quirk and Greenbaum, is the concord of numbers between the subject and verb or subject-verb concord.³³ A singular subject is expected to have a singular verb, whereas a plural subject is expected to have a plural verb. Unfortunately, this rule is violated in some HND students’ examination scripts, as illustrated in excerpts 1 to 10, in which learners attempt to merge subject and verb.

Excerpt 1: *Moreover, there is more programmes at the auditorium.*

Excerpt 2: *Most of the lecturers doesn’t speak louder.*

Excerpt 3: *Students were putting blame on social activities that is held every*

³² Alghazo and Alshraideh, “Grammatical Errors Found in English Writing: A Study from Al-Hussein Bin Talal University.”

³³ Quirk R. and S. Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English*. (London: Longman, 2000).

year in the school.

Excerpt 4: *Some activities takes place during teaching hours.*

Excerpt 5: *Some of the student were interviewed.*

Excerpt 6: *It cause people who speak different languages to become united.*

Excerpt 7: *Since every student were affiliated to hall on campus.*

Excerpt 8: *It affect them academically.*

Excerpt 9: *The student don't get much time to study.*

Excerpt 10: *The committee are going to interview students and give them some questionnaires to fill.*

Looking at excerpts 1 to 4, it was revealed that the subjects are plural, so the students should have used plural verbs. The plural verbs *are*, *don't*, *are*, and *take* should have been used, but singular verbs were used. In excerpt 5, the correct form of the verb is used, but the students failed to add 's' to *student* to make it plural and agree with the plural verb 'are'. In the same vein, from excerpts 6 to 10, it was also revealed that the subjects are singular; hence singular verbs like *causes*, *students*, *affects*, *doesn't*, and *is*, were to be used, but plural verbs were rather used by the students.

Errors in subject-verb agreement related to 'has' and 'have'

While "have" is plural and requires a plural subject, "has" is singular and requires a singular subject. However, the rule is broken from excerpts 11 to 15 as illustrated below.

Excerpt 11: *The social activities **has** led to a drastic fall in academic performance.*

Excerpt 12: *From the interviews conducted we found that some students **has** been attending the social activities alone and not attending lectures.*

Excerpt 13: *Excerpt Social activities **has** to be banned in the school.*

Excerpt 14: *Some social activities that **has** affected academic performance of students are Hall Week celebration and church activities.*

Excerpt 15: *The University **have** three different campuses.*

Excerpt 16: *The University **have** always been known to be a place for matured students.*

From excerpts 11 to 14, the subjects are all plural, and therefore the verb 'have' which is plural should have been used, but students used the singular verb 'has' thus violating the concord rule. On the other hand, excerpts 15 and 16 have the singular subject 'university', and so, the singular verb 'has' was supposed to be used, but students used 'have'.

Determiner-Noun Concord Errors

A singular determiner item should precede a singular countable noun. In the same way, a plural determiner should be followed by a plural noun count. Students violate this concord rule by having a singular determiner following a plural noun count, as illustrated in excerpts 17 to 20.

Excerpt 17: *This students fail to attend lectures during Hall Week celebrations.*

Excerpt 18: *These student are always participating in the social activities on campus and not attending lectures.*

Excerpt 19: *This methodologies were used to acquire information from students.*

Excerpt 20: *Those lecturer who were interviewed confirmed that students don't attend lectures when there are social activities on campus.*

Tense Concord

A verb changes its form to indicate the timing of the action. The present, past, and future tenses are determined by the time frame with one another. As a result, verb tenses are employed to convey time. When using the incorrect verb tense or the present tense in place of the past tense, for example, writers may make concord errors connected to tenses.³⁴ The following sentences all have tenses-concord faults.

Excerpt 21: *We **approach** about 70% of the students.*

Excerpt 22: *The committee **observe** that most of the students are not serious.*

Excerpt 23: *The committee was **form** as a result of the fire outbreak at GetFundHostel.*

Excerpt 24: *I have **work** in many companies in Ghana.*

Excerpt 25: *In the course of investigation, we **use** the following means to acquire information.*

Excerpt 26: *Taxes are **use** to pay salaries of government workers.*

Excerpt 27: *Any student who does not attend lectures for five days in a semester should not be **allow** to write exams.*

Excerpt 28: *Social activities are always **organise** every semester.*

All the sentences from excerpts 21 to 28 are in the past, but students still maintained the present tense of the verbs. The verbs *approach*, *observe*, *form*, *work*, *use*, and *allow* are all in the present tense, even though the sentences are past tense.

Concord Errors on Numbers when specific numbers are involved

The number's quantity and the noun that comes after it should match. Therefore, the word that follows must also be singular if the number is, and vice versa.

Excerpt 29: *Every student was asked three **question** on why social activities hinder academic performances.*

Excerpt 30: *Twenty **student** were interviewed on why social activities lead to poor academic performance.*

Excerpt 31: *We distributed fifty **questionnaire** but only thirty **response** were received.*

Excerpt 32: *After interviewing some students, fifteen **questionnaire** were given to some students to fill.*

Excerpt 33: *The university has three different **campus**.*

Excerpt 34: *One effects of social activities on students' academic performance is Hall Week celebration.*

³⁴ Quirk and Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English*. .

In excerpts 27 to 34, specific numbers are involved. We have three, twenty, fifty, thirty, fifteen, and one. The quantity of the numbers does not agree with the nouns that follow. Thus, it should be three questions, twenty students, fifty questionnaires, thirty responses, three campuses, and one effect, but the students failed to match the specific numbers with the nouns that followed.

Compound-Subject Concord Errors

When we have a coordinated subject, it is treated as plural. However, we can have a coordinated subject that refers to the same person. In a case like that, the coordinated subject is no longer treated as plural but singular.

A coordinated subject takes a plural verb. However, when it refers to the same person, it should be treated as singular and paired with a singular verb. However, excerpt 35 violates this rule.

Excerpt 35: *A lecturer and a student were interviewed on the effects of social activities on the academic performances of students.*

Excerpt 36: *The president and leader of the School Representative Council (SRC) were interviewed on the effects of social activities on the academic performances of students.*

In excerpt 35, students could choose the right verb for the coordinated subject 'lecturer and student.' However, in excerpt 36, the students used the same principle they used to choose the verb for excerpt 35 to choose the verb in excerpt 36. They are unable to identify that in excerpt 35, 'lecturer and student' are two different entities, while in excerpt 36, 'president' and leader refer to the same person. Therefore, instead of choosing the singular verb 'was' in excerpt 36, the plural verb 'were' was chosen by the students.

DISCUSSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

English is a language that was first inherited from the British and has become the official language in Ghana.³⁵ In addition to English, between 65 and 80 different languages and dialects are spoken across the 16 regions of Ghana.³⁶ Based on the country's regional distribution, Ghana's Ministry of Education has chosen and approved 11 languages to be used as a language of instruction in all lower primary schools nationwide and adapted English as the only language of instruction from primary four onwards.³⁷ This means that, in all our academic writings at the tertiary level, the English language has a significant role.

Writing in the English language is vital to the academic discourse community. Graham and Perin aver that writing helps students finish valuable assignments, develop a capacity for critical thought, and grow their cognitive performance and functioning.³⁸ To impart the necessary language skills, writing included, which students need throughout their courses in the university, there is a mandatory course called Communication Skills for every first-year student in all Ghanaian universities. It is expected that after this course, university students will be able to use academic language to fulfill the requirements of their tertiary education, yet research shows that university students exhibit weaknesses, of which concord is one.

In the data collected, the study revealed that there were systematic concord errors in the students' writings, as their writings depicted different forms of concord errors. This is in congruence with the position of Chele, since this scholar avers that subject-verb agreement errors are prevalent in

³⁵ M. A. Ansre, "Assessment of the Medium of Instruction on Pupils Academic Performance in Literacy: A Study of Selected Lower Primary Schools in Ghana" (2017).

³⁶ Adams Bodomo, Jemima Asabea Anderson, and Josephine Dzahene-Quarshie, "A Kente of Many Colours: Multilingualism as a Complex Ecology of Language Shift in Ghana," *Sociolinguistic Studies* 3, no. 3 (2010): 357–79.

³⁷ Ministry of Education, "A White Paper on the Report on the Education Reform Review Committee" (Accra, Ghana., 2004).

³⁸ Steve Graham and Dolores Perin, "Writing Next-Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools," 2007.

students' writing.³⁹ As Atodo indicates, it is impossible to avoid errors or correct all errors committed among students, but, as much as possible, errors by English as a Second Language (ESL) learners should not be overlooked or tolerated; they should be noted and corrected - a situation where scholars are researching into students' writings to find the challenges and offer solutions to them.⁴⁰ The findings that HND students commit subject-verb concord errors, concord errors related to the use of 'has' and 'have,' determiner-noun concord errors, tense concord, concord errors on numbers when specific numbers are involved, and compound-subject concord errors are worrying since most of these errors often impair the quality of written work and make communication more difficult. Mensah and Kwaning are among the scholars who have found that concord errors do not allow effective communication and harm written work.⁴¹ This situation could ultimately lead to a decline in their English language proficiency, resulting in poorer performance in their examinations since marks will be deducted for errors, of which concord is one. Concord errors pose a significant challenge to students' writing proficiency and are concerning; hence, the need for targeted interventions to eradicate this challenge. The urgency of this intervention is highlighted by Vethamaiccam and Ganapathy, and Mensah, who propose remedial strategies for improvement.⁴² Similarly, Bayiri highlights the need for focused interventions to eliminate concord errors and improve students' writing abilities.⁴³ If concord errors continue to manifest in students' essays and no interventions are made to curb the situation, the result is that students will not be able to communicate effectively either orally or in their written essays. This is consistent with Kouadio who warns that errors can lead to communication breakdowns in students' essays.⁴⁴

When sentences are straightforward, errors in agreement do not occur often. From the data collected, most of the sentences are straightforward; thus, they have the subject and verb placed close to one another, yet students were unable to select the appropriate verbs for the topics. Another challenge is when students begin a sentence with the pronoun 'it'. They mostly forget to add 's' to the verb. Again, students do not pay attention to writing sentences in the past. They use the present tense of verbs when writing sentences in the past. Students were also unable to differentiate between the singular determiner 'this' and the plural determiners 'these' and 'those;' hence, when using a singular determiner, they choose a plural noun and vice versa. There were other sentences extracted from the data collected that had compound subjects. Once students see compound subjects, they treat the sentence as plural without considering whether the coordinated subject refers to two different entities or it refers to the same person.

All these concord errors identified show that the students have not adequately mastered the English concord rules. Although the students have been taught concord in the first semester, they do not pay much attention to concord rules when they are writing, or they do not fully understand the rules of concord. This confirms the findings of scholars Atodo and Fenyi and Morrison.⁴⁵ These affect how languages are taught and learnt at the Higher National Diploma level. If concord rules are taught and students do not apply them or apply them badly, the results would be what we see in the excerpts of the selected students' scripts in this paper. First, English instruction needs to be strengthened at the HND level with special emphasis on concord rules. Communication Skills should

³⁹ Chele, "An Analysis of Subject Agreement Errors in English: The Case of Third Year Students at the National University of Lesotho."

⁴⁰ O. W. Atodo, "A Study of Concord Errors among Students of The Federal Polytechnic Idah," *International Journal of Innovative Language, Literature & Art Studies* 9, no. 2 (2021): 9–14.

⁴¹ Mensah, "Concord Errors in Academic Writing: A Study of First-Year Students at Offinso College of Education and Strategies for Improvement. "; J.K., Kwaning, "An Analysis of Concord Errors a Case Study of Presbyterian Senior High School Students, Begoro Form Two Students in the Eastern Region" (University Of Education, 2019).

⁴² Madahvi Vethamaiccam and Malini Ganapathy, "Analysing Errors among Form One Students' Written English Composition in a Private Chinese School," *Asian Journal of Education and E-Learning* 5, no. 1 (2017); Mensah, "Concord Errors in Academic Writing: A Study of First-Year Students at Offinso College of Education and Strategies for Improvement. ."

⁴³ Bayiri, "Concord Problems among Students of Senior High School Form One, a Case Study in Kintampo Senior High School."

⁴⁴ Fodouop Kouam Arthur William, "Delving into the Principles and Application of Positivism in Research: A Guide for Scholars," *International Journal of Research Publications* 146, no. 1 (March 16, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1001461420246237>.

⁴⁵ Atodo, "A Study of Concord Errors among Students of The Federal Polytechnic Idah"; Fenyi and Morrison, "Concord Errors in Postgraduate Theses in Ghana: A Descriptive Analysis."

not only be taught in the first year but should be taught throughout the three years of their HND programmes so that students will have more time to learn and practise what they have been taught. Also, the notion of concord is paramount to syntax in general, because it deals with harmonisation among linguistic structures; as such, instructors of the English language should prioritise this challenging topic when teaching grammar. According to this study, incorrectly applied and concord taught rules result in errors, hence teachers should always note and correct any errors their students make to avoid becoming ingrained and fossilised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations are proposed. Curriculum developers should revise the Communication Skills syllabus to span all three years of the HND programme and integrate specific modules focused on grammar and concord. Additionally, grammar workshops should be introduced as compulsory components of the curriculum. Lecturers should place greater emphasis on teaching concord explicitly, use real examples of student writing during lessons, and provide regular, formative grammar assessments to reinforce learning. It is also recommended that school management establish a writing centre where students can receive targeted writing support and offer professional development programmes to enhance lecturers' grammar-teaching strategies. Students themselves should be encouraged to practice self-editing using concord-focused checklists, engage in peer review activities, and use digital grammar tools to assist with preliminary corrections, while still developing manual proofreading skills.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study aimed to characterise, classify, and analyse concord errors while highlighting their impact on language instruction. Using 25 examination scripts, this qualitative study examined concord errors in Higher National Diploma students at Takoradi Technical University in Ghana. Based on the main findings, six categories of concord errors were identified and discussed. Firstly, the students committed subject-verb concord errors. Another error they committed was concord errors related to the use of 'has' and 'have'. Additionally, errors in determiner-noun concord were also found in the students' examination scripts. Moreover, tense concord was also a challenge to the technical university students. Another error present in the examination scripts of the student was concord errors related to numbers, particularly when specific numbers were used. The last error was compound-subject concord errors. Having all these errors in students' writing will eventually influence their English language performance.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The possible causes of concord errors in the technical university students' works were not examined in this study. To determine the causes of these errors, more investigation is required. The findings of this study, based on data from a single technical university, do not represent the whole country and cannot be generalised to all of Ghana. Future studies should consider including a broader range of participants from various technical universities across Ghana. Again, future studies may also consider concord errors committed by Bachelor of Technology students in a technical university. Finally, other aspects of grammatical errors in HND students' writing could be considered.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have declared that there are no potential conflicts of interest.

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