



## A Description of Grammatical Competence in the Written English of First Year University Students in Kenya

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### Abstract

This study delineates grammatical competence in the English of first-year university students in Kenya. This is a descriptive research that involves 405 students who were admitted by the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) into 15 private and public universities in Kenya in 2021. The study measures how far the study subjects can communicate clear meaning, choose vocabulary correctly, use correct sentence structures, punctuation, tense, aspect, spelling, as well as subject-verb agreement. Measured on a scale of 1 to 5, the level of grammatical competence of first year university students who comprise the study sample is 3.34 for formal English and 3.28 for informal English. The indicator of grammatical competence with the highest score is the ability to communicate a clear meaning with a score of 3.9. This is followed by choice of vocabulary and use of correct sentence structure, both of which have an average score of 3.3. Punctuation and syntax: tense, aspect, spelling, and subject-verb agreement have the lowest scores of 3.2 and 3.0, respectively. These findings suggest that at the end of the Kenyan secondary school English curriculum, learners have slightly above average competence in grammar: 66.8 percent for formal English and 65.6 percent for informal English. These levels are low for a curriculum that cites communicative competence as the goal of teaching English in secondary schools. The findings also imply that the study subjects are ill-prepared for the language demands of academic writing necessary at the university level.

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### Introduction

The term “competence” has been central in the study of language and has been defined variously by different linguists. Chomsky (1965) draws a distinction between “competence” and “performance” (p. 3). He defines “performance” as the actual use of language in real situations while “competence” is defined as the mental knowledge of the rules of a language by an ideal speaker/listener set in a completely homogeneous speech community. This speaker-listener is said to be one who is unaffected by non-linguistic factors such as memory lapses, fatigue, and slips of the tongue. Chomsky is of the view that studies of language should focus on competence as opposed to performance since competence is unaffected by non-linguistic factors.



The term “Communicative Competence” was coined by Hymes (1972) in reaction to what he believed was the inadequacy of Noam Chomsky’s definition of competence. Hymes holds the view that speakers of a language require much more than linguistic competence, as defined by Chomsky, to communicate effectively in a language. In Hymes’ view, for a speaker to produce and understand utterances, they not only need linguistic competence, but they also require contextual/sociolinguistic competence, which covers cultural values, norms and conventions. Hymes’ view is supported by other linguists such as Mukharramkhon and Parizoda (2024), and Qasserras (2023). Their consensus is that one requires more than knowledge of grammatical rules in a language to communicate effectively in the language. They believe that an effective communicator knows what to say, when to say it, how to say it and when to keep silent. Competence in all these areas makes a speaker communicatively competent.

Scholars have decried the low and declining standards of Kenyan undergraduates and secondary schools’ students’ writing (Mwangi, 2016; Mureithi, 2015). Mwangi (Ibid) identifies grammar, punctuation, choice of vocabulary and sentence structure as areas of difficulty as observed in the academic writing of Kenyan undergraduates. No study known to the researchers has evaluated grammatical competence in the written English of Kenyan first year university students. A study of this nature would; therefore, add to the increasing body of knowledge in second language acquisition, particularly the acquisition of English by second language learners of the language in Kenya.

A number of scholars have advanced several theories explaining communicative competence; among them is one by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) which has been lauded for its applicability and ease of implementation (Bagaric & Djigunovic, 2007).

They observe that communicative competence comprises four competencies: sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and grammatical/linguistic competence. In this view, grammatical competence is the comprehensive understanding of phonological, syntactic, morphological, lexical, and semantic principles of a language that empowers speakers to generate accurate structures. This investigation assessed the level of grammatical competence by identifying pertinent indicators within the study data.

The selected indicators were those that facilitate clear communication within a text, as well as those that ensure grammatical accuracy. These include the capacity to convey clear meaning, sentence structure, punctuation, diction or level of vocabulary, and the fidelity of constructions: tense, aspect, concord, and spelling.

### **Methodology**

The current study used the descriptive research design. According to Takona (2024), studies that describe the characteristics of an individual or a group fall under descriptive research. Since the current study describes the levels of grammatical competence exhibited in the English of first year university students, it is descriptive research.

The study was carried out in universities in Kenya that are recognised by the Commission for University Education. These are 67 public and private universities that admitted students through Kenya universities and colleges central placement service (KUCCPS) in 2021. Students admitted through KUCCPS ensure regional balance in the sample. The sample for this study comprised 405 first-year university students. This sample size was determined based on Gill et al, 2010 table of sample sizes as cite in Ahmed (2024), which assigns a sample size of 370 and above for a population of more than 10,000 with a 5% margin of error. These subjects were sampled from 15 Kenyan universities,



selected purposively to ensure they had programmes in the three career pathways followed at the tertiary level of education which are the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) pathway, the social sciences pathway and the sports and performing arts pathway. Selecting students from these three pathways was to ascertain that the whole spectrum of language ability is captured in the selected sample. From the 15 selected universities, 3 programmes were randomly selected from each of the three career pathways. From each selected programme, 9 participants were randomly selected. Thus, 27 students were selected from each of the 15 universities giving rise to a sample of 405. From each of the 405 students sampled in this study, two texts – one formal and the other informal – were collected. In total, 810 texts were analysed.

To ensure anonymity, each university that was selected for this study was randomly assigned a letter of the alphabet from 'A' to 'O' (15 letters of the alphabet for the 15 universities selected for the study). Additionally, each participant was, in turn, assigned the letter representing their university, and a randomly assigned numeral from numeral 1 to 27 for the 27 participants drawn from each selected university. For example, for the university assigned letter B, the participants were randomly coded as B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6 B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, B12, B13, B14, B15, B16, B17, B18, B19, B20, B21, B22, B23, B24, B25, B26, and B27. Further, the lower-case letter 'f' coded data as formal, while the lower case 'i' coded data as informal.

Thus, data coded as A1f refers to formal data collected from the university coded as A, for the student coded as 1.

### **Instrumentation**

The current study uses tests to collect data. Two written tests were administered: one that would elicit informal data and another that would elicit formal data. The formal test required study subjects to write a formal speech that they would deliver to high school students on "The Effects of Cheating in Exams", while the informal test required study subjects to write a letter to a friend studying abroad recounting a funny incident that happened during a lecture. Tests were considered adequate instruments for data collection in this study because the answers they would elicit would constitute authentic spontaneous formal and informal language necessary for measuring the study subjects' level of grammatical competence.

### **Results and Findings**

The researcher rated the subjects' responses and recorded them on rating sheets. Five indicators of grammatical competence were analysed. These include the ability to create clear meaning, sentence structure, punctuation, diction and level of vocabulary, accuracy of constructions (tense, aspect, spelling, concord). Measured on a scale of 1 to 5, the level of grammatical competence of first year university students is 3.34 for formal English, and 3.28 for informal English. The indicator of grammatical competence with the highest score is the ability to communicate a clear meaning, with a score of 3.9. This is followed by choice of vocabulary and use of correct sentence structure, both of which have an average score of 3.3. Punctuation and syntax: tense, aspect, spelling, and subject-verb agreement have the lowest scores of 3.2 and 3.0, respectively. Below is a table that summarises the level of grammatical competence evidenced in the study data.



*Table 1: Average Level of Grammatical Competence in the Written English of First Year University Students in Kenya*

<b>Grammatical competence: (25 marks)</b>	<b>Formal text</b> (on a scale of 1 - 5)	<b>Informal text</b> (on a scale of 1 - 5)
Ability to communicate clear meaning (5 marks)	3.9	3.8
Sentence structure (5 marks)	3.3	3.2
Punctuation (5 marks)	3.0	3.1
Diction and level of vocabulary (5 marks)	3.3	3.1
Accuracy of construction: Syntax, capitalisation, tense, aspect, concord and spelling (5 marks)	3.2	3.2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>16.7(32.4)</b>	<b>16.4(31)</b>

**Discussion**

All the five indicators of grammatical competence analysed in the study are discussed below:

***Ability to Communicate Clear Meaning***

Regarding the capacity to convey clear meaning, the study's data yielded an average score of 3.9 out of 5 for formal text and an average score of 3.8 out of 5 for informal text. This translates to percentage scores of 78 and 76, respectively. This indicates that first-year university students in Kenya, predominantly possess the ability to construct explicit expressions in English. However, this relatively high score in crafting meaningful texts does not imply that the texts are devoid of errors. Karakaşlı (2025) categorises errors into two distinct types: global errors and local errors. Local errors are characterised as those that do not impede communication or comprehension of a text. Conversely, global errors are more consequential, as they disrupt communication and obscure the intended meaning of a text.

In the study data, numerous instances of local errors are present. An example is data coded as K9i, where a portion of the introduction of the informal letter inquiries about the weather, as exemplified below:

**Example 1:**

*How the climate at your place fairing on?*

The reader can derive meaning from the above sentence: it asks about the weather conditions. However, it contains several errors, but despite these errors, the text was judged as having attained some level of clarity. Instances of local errors were numerous in the study data.

An example of a global error that obstructed meaning is from E22f below:

**Example 2:**

*The math teacher was very angry with the mad person and some students due to disruption of the mad person in his class.*

The sentence in example 2 presents an awkward, convoluted, and ambiguous construction. It remains unclear whether the teacher harboured anger towards both the students and the mad individual or if the students and the mathematics teacher were collectively displeased with the mad person for disrupting the class. An alternative interpretation suggests that the modifier "due to the disruption of the mad person" is misplaced. By repositioning it after the adjective "angry," which it qualifies, clarity can be reinstated. Consider the revised version of that sentence:



*The math teacher and some students were very angry due to the disruption of the class by a mad person.*

It is; therefore, possible to conclude that the sentence in example 2 is not able to communicate a clear meaning because of ambiguity and a misplaced modifier.

Other causes of lack of clarity in the study data are interlingual errors which De Leon and De Roxas (2024) call transfer errors. They are as a result of L1 influence. In the case of the study data, these interlingual errors are as a result of the influence of Kiswahili or L1 since the Kenyan first year university students who comprise the study subjects also speak Kiswahili in addition to their L1. An example of this kind of error that interferes with clarity of meaning is in the data coded as H11f in the example below:

**Example 3:**

*This may be brought about by lecturers standing for exams and request the sending away of the student.*

The verb phrase ‘standing for exams’ is a literal translation from Kiswahili. The intended meaning of the writer is ‘invigilating exams,’ which in Kiswahili is articulated as ‘*kusimamia mtihani*,’ directly translating to ‘standing for exams.’ A reader unfamiliar with Kiswahili or other Bantu languages exhibiting similar linguistic characteristics may encounter challenges in comprehending the intended meaning of the sentence presented in example 3. Consequently, this instance of linguistic transfer may impede clarity and understanding.

The preceding discourse reveals that the Kenyan first year university students’ ability to communicate a clear meaning is decidedly above average. Nevertheless, certain expressions, while conveying a modicum of clarity, are marred by a plethora of grammatical inaccuracies.

**Sentence Structure**

Bullions (2024) proffer three definitions of a sentence: a collection of words that convey a complete thought, a series of words that encompass a subject and a predicate, and a sequence of words that commences with a capital letter and concludes with a full stop. Bullions (Ibid) further notes that a sentence possesses structure, governed by rules that dictate the units that may co-occur within the sentence and the sequence in which they may appear. Within the study data, certain sentences adhere to the definition of a sentence and the structural conventions of a grammatically correct sentence in English, while others deviate from these standards.

Sentence structure, as a marker of grammatical competence, receives a score of 3.3 out of 5 for formal texts and 3.2 for informal texts, translating to percentages of 66 and 64, respectively. This indicates that first-year university students in Kenya demonstrate a commendable ability to compose grammatically accurate sentences. The data revealed that some subjects exhibited a notable adeptness in manipulating diverse sentence structures to convey various meanings and elicit distinct effects. Consider the following example, extracted from the data coded P4f.

**Example 4:**

*In addition to the above, cheating in exams in most cases later affects the society at large. Why? This is because as students successfully cheat without being caught, they obviously graduate and later get employed in their fields of study. Here is where real drama begins since what such students offer to the society is really disappointing.*

The paragraph above begins with a correctly structured simple sentence, followed by a one-word interrogative that draws attention to the explanation that follows it. The last two sentences in the



paragraph are complex sentences, correctly structured and astutely developing the idea introduced in the topic sentence.

On the other hand, the study's data contains numerous poorly constructed sentences. The errors related to sentence structure arise from the prevalence of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices, and deficiencies in both subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement. Additionally, the use of resumptive pronouns, dangling modifiers, and misplaced modifiers further exacerbates these issues. Such errors not only render the sentences incorrect but also obscure clarity and create confusion. Some of these errors are exemplified below.

**Example 5:**

*The fear of failure from pressure of excellence by colleagues, relatives and parents.*

Example 5 above is a fragment, given that it is not comprised of a subject and a predicate. Actually, it is just a subject; therefore, the predicate is missing. This makes it ungrammatical and unclear in terms of negotiating meaning. Below is an example of a run-on sentence.

**Example 6:**

*Cheating in exams leads to discontinuation of Education once a student has been caught cheating in exams he/she is suspended from school for a long time and finds difficult to go back to school to continue with studies. (I11j).*

The two sentences in example 6 have been punctuated as one sentence. The two sentences are,

*Cheating in exams leads to discontinuation of education.*

And,

*Once a student has been caught cheating in exams he/she is suspended from school for a long time and finds it difficult to go back to school to continue with studies.*

Lack of pronoun-antecedent agreement has also contributed to poor sentence structures in the study data. An example is drawn from data coded as G13i as below:

**Example 7:**

*There was this lecturer, who I won't mention his name.*

The antecedent for the pronoun "who" in example 7 above is the noun phrase "this lecturer". Since the pronoun is referring to the lecturer's name, it should be in the possessive case, "whose" and not in the subjective case "who". Therefore, the sentence should read:

*There was this lecturer, whose name I won't mention.*

Example 7 above also contains a resumptive pronoun. According to Yip and Ahenkorah (2023), a resumptive pronoun is a personal pronoun appearing in a relative clause, which restates the antecedent after a pause or an interruption. This is the case in example 7 above.

The personal pronoun "his" is a resumptive pronoun because it restates what has already been referred to by the relative pronoun "who". Resumptive pronouns are redundant, thus unnecessary.

Another error that contributed to a low score in sentence structure for some students is the use of dangling modifiers. According to Ojonugwa and Sule (2023), a dangling modifier is a phrase or a clause that is not clearly or logically related to the words it is placed next to. An example of this is from the data coded G10f:



**Example 8:**

*This results to wastage of resources example fees and time since the student is out of school and does not continue with classes hence of no benefit.*

Example 8 above contains the dangling modifier "of no benefit." It is a dangling modifier because the element modified by this prepositional phrase is implied but not explicitly mentioned in the sentence. From the context of this sentence, it is clear that it discusses cheating as being of no benefit, but rather wastage of time and resources. Therefore, the sentence can be revised by introducing the gerund "cheating" before the modifier "of no benefit," as shown below:

*This results to wastage of resources example fees and time since the student is out of school and does not continue with classes hence cheating is of no benefit.*

Despite the errors highlighted in the foregone discussion, majority of the study sample are able to construct correct sentences. This is what accounts for the high score in this aspect of grammatical competence.

**Punctuation**

Ganiyeva (2023) observes that punctuation marks serve two principal functions: marking separations between units and indicating specifications. Furthermore, it is noted that in fulfilling these dual roles, punctuation marks facilitate clear communication within a text, enhancing comprehensibility. This implies that for effective communication, a text must be meticulously punctuated. In the study data, out of a potential maximum score of 5, the average punctuation score is 3.0 for formal texts and 3.1 for informal texts. These scores are commendably above average, with some students demonstrating not only the ability to use punctuation marks correctly, but also the skill to employ them for stylistic enhancements. For instance, certain individuals skilfully used rhetorical questions to provoke the reader's contemplation regarding the pertinent issue. Consider example 9, extracted from the data coded H2i:

**Example 9:**

*Man, do you think that class went on?*

This rhetorical question emerges following a depiction of a humorous incident that transpired during a lecture. The question invites the reader to envision the scenario and deduce for themselves that it is highly probable that no learning occurred in the aftermath of the incident.

In the study data, numerous punctuation errors lowered the score for punctuation as an indicator of grammatical competence. These include a lack of punctuation in an entire text, errors involving the use of the colon to introduce lists that are, in fact, part of the sentence, and the failure to use a comma or a full stop where necessary, among others. The examples below, drawn from the study data, illustrate these errors.

Example 10 is drawn from the data coded as H19f. This data has no punctuation, and it is written in point form despite the question requiring that an essay on the effects of cheating in exams be written.

**Example 10:**

*effects of cheating in exams*

- i) Cheating is the same as lying and stealing*
- ii) Cheating causes stress and tension*



- iii) *Cheating is disrespectful to your teachers*
- iv) *Cheating kills trust*
- v) *Cheating hampers progress*
- vi) *Cheating can lead to punishment*
- vii) *Cheating can lead to suspension*
- viii) *Cheating is unfair to the faithful students*
- ix) *Cheating is unfair to you*

Example 11 below is from the data coded as C15f. In the example, the colon has been used to introduce a list inappropriately:

**Example 11:**

*In the education fraternity cheating entails: copying from someone, plagiarising of academic work and paying someone to do your homework.*

According to Hicks and Allen (2023), verbs such as “include,” “entail,” and various forms of the verb “to be” should not be followed by a colon when they introduce a list. This is due to their function of integrating the list, thereby rendering it an intrinsic component of the clause in which they reside; consequently, no punctuation is necessary to precede the list. This principle explains the inaccuracy in example 11.

The study data contains numerous examples of punctuation errors that are as a result of failure to use the comma or the full stop where they are required. Consider the example below from the data coded as A3i.

**Example 12:**

*It was so funny Jowee.*

In this example, the proper noun, “Jowee” is a vocative. According to Baskervill and Sewell (2022), a vocative is an optional element, usually a noun phrase denoting the person(s) being directly addressed. It is further noted that vocatives are set off from the rest of the sentence using commas. It follows, therefore, that the vocative “Jowee” should be preceded by a comma. The sentence should, therefore be as below:

*It was so funny, Jowee.*

This discourse on punctuation as a hallmark of grammatical competence reveals that certain participants in the study have acquired the requisite knowledge to enable them to punctuate with precision. These individuals contribute significantly to the high punctuation scores. Nevertheless, a pervasive lack of punctuation knowledge, as demonstrated above, is also evident within the study data.

**Diction and Level of Vocabulary**

Diction refers to the selection of words, and it plays a pivotal role in articulating messages within both written and spoken discourse. The fundamental prerequisite for effective communication is that chosen words convey meaning clearly and precisely. Consequently, the ability to select appropriate



and exact terminology serves as a testament to one's grammatical competence, empowering individuals to navigate and express their intended meanings with finesse.

The level of vocabulary in this study refers to the complexity and sophistication of words used by the study sample. It is expected that, as first-year university students, the study sample should have a vast repertoire of words that communicate different shades of meaning and nuances. This knowledge would provide resources for communicative ability; thus, it is considered an important indicator of grammatical competence.

In the study data, evaluated on a scale of 0 to 5, the sophistication of diction and vocabulary level received scores of 3.3 for the formal text and 3.1 for the informal text. These correspond to percentage scores of 66 and 62 per cent, respectively. Such scores indicate above-average competence, suggesting that the study sample possesses a good command of vocabulary and can employ it with a reasonable degree of efficacy.

The study data reveals instances of several students exhibiting notably advanced vocabulary levels. These are exemplified in the following examples drawn from the study data coded I16f, M1f, and C4f, respectively.

**Example 13:**

*...put their results into jeopardy*

**Example 14:**

*To get a good grade as a result of cheating is a misrepresentation of facts.*

*It is important to note that choices have consequences and the repercussions of cheating in exams are dire.*

**Example 15:**

*In addition, the habit of cheating becomes addictive and therefore it is likely to replicate in all aspects of one's life both socially and economically.*

The words "jeopardy," "misrepresentation," "repercussions," "dire," and "replicate" in the examples above represent more sophisticated vocabulary correctly used in the study data.

The study data, conversely, reveals instances of inappropriate choices and improper vocabulary usage. These errors related to vocabulary misuse include incorrect application of word forms, transfer or direct translation, erroneous preposition selection, easily confused terms, and unsuitable word choices. The following examples extracted from the study data illustrate the use of incorrect word forms, transfer, wrong use of prepositions and commonly confused words.

**Example 16:**

*The lecturer smiled brightfully. (C19i)*

**Example 17:**

*Our class teacher was a very good teacher and said to us that she was going to take a transfer and go to another school. (E24i)*

**Example 18:**

*The whole class was laughing at me as the lecturer was getting angry on me. (F14i)*



**Example 19:**

*The management of the school, that is the principle and other senior officials may be subjected to fear of job loss for entertaining cheating. (G3f)*

**Example 20:**

*It causes shame to those who are involved since they loose dignity and are seen as those who are academically poor. (G12f)*

**Example 21:**

*Lecturer was very happy and appreciate those who did there explanations well. (A18i)*

Examples 16, 17 and 18 are as a result of choice of wrong word form, direct translation and wrong choice of preposition respectively. Examples 19, 20 and 21 demonstrate errors that the study sample made with regard to words that have been documented as easily confused words (Mansoor, Mohammed, Ahmed, Munasser, Abdulfatah, and Sheikh, 2023). Thus *principle* has been used instead of *principal* in example 19, *loose* has been used instead of *lose* in example 20, and *there* has been used instead of *their* in example 21.

**Accuracy of Construction: Syntax, Tense, Aspect, Concord, Spelling and Capitalisation**

The final indicator of grammatical competence in this study is the accuracy of construction. This includes the grammar of a sentence by focusing on the arrangement of elements (syntax), tense, aspect, grammatical concord, and mechanics such as spelling and punctuation. In the study data, this indicator of grammatical competence scored 3.2 for both the formal and informal texts. This score is marked out of 5 and translates to a 64 percent. This implies that the average score for the accuracy of constructions for the study data is above average.

Indeed, several students in the study sample demonstrated the ability to form grammatically accurate constructions. An example is the study data coded as K7f. A paragraph from this data is provided below to illustrate its accuracy of construction.

**Example 22:**

*The ability of a nation to compete effectively on the international front hinges on the quality of its education. Cheating in exams undermines the standard of education in a country and consequently hinders its ability to compete at the world stage. Indeed, students who cheat in exams become poor decision makers in their careers. Academic dishonesty has risen to higher levels due to competition in the job market, therefore students have resorted to cheating in order to qualify.*

Some errors made by the study sample concerning accuracy in construction fall under syntax, tense and aspect, concord, spelling, and punctuation. These issues have contributed to lowering the score for this indicator of grammatical competence. Below is an example of such errors.

**Example 23:**

*Our lecturer early in the morning came to class. He wrapped the board rapidly. (L22i)*

In example 23 above, the underlined word has been misspelt. Misspellings can result from transfer from the writers' L1 (Perkins and Zhang 2024). In this example, phoneme /b/ has been replaced with phoneme /p/. This may occur because the phoneme /b/ does not exist in the writers' L1 sound system, and thus the closest available phoneme (both /p/ and /b/ are bilabial voiceless stops) is used in its place. Consequently, the students have written "wrapped" instead of "rubbed."



There is also the tendency for some students in the study sample to put together words that should be written as separate words. These include *infront* instead of *in front* (C6i), *inorder* instead of *in order* (A17f) and *alot* instead of *a lot* (A19f).

Other errors pertained where stative verbs were used with the progressive aspect. Quirk et al (1985, p. 202) observe that stative verbs do not agree with progression, and when they are used progressively, their interpretation changes. Examples of such errors in the data are given below:

**Example 24:**

*After all the flimsy reasons so that the exam can be postponed they find not agreeing with the lecturer and they try to engage in academic dishonesty.* (L2f)

**Example 25:**

*I have been knowing you* (A21i)

**Example 26:**

*He asked our lecturer if he was understanding the topic he was teaching.* (G8i)

The verbs *agree*, *know* and *understand* in examples 24, 25 and 26 above are stative verbs and; therefore, cannot be used in the progressive aspect.

The foregone discussion reveals that while some study subjects can accurately construct sentences, others demonstrate inadequate knowledge of this important indicator of grammatical competence.

**Conclusion**

The level of grammatical competence of the written English of first year Kenyan university students is slightly above average. The grammatical errors made by the study data are as a result of the use of resumptive pronouns, dangling modifiers, misplaced modifiers, transfer errors, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices wrong choice of prepositions among others. This implies that though the study sample can communicate in written English fairly well, they face challenges that may affect their communication. This is a grave matter considering that these first-year university students are embarking on an academic career where academic communication will impose English language competence demands on them.

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