



Investigation of University Students' Writing Problems: Two Public Universities in South West Ethiopia in Focus

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Abstract

Communication through writing demands various skills and sub-skills. However, it appears that university students in the Ethiopian context do not have various major writing skills and sub-skills as it is required. As a result, they face different problems when they write in English. Thus, the main objective of this study was to assess the writing problems of university students who learned at Jimma and Mizan-Tepi universities in 2015/16 academic year. The participants of the study were first year students who learned at the two universities. The necessary data for the study were gathered through writing tests at sentence and paragraph levels. The collected data were analyzed using textual analysis. The study showed that the students could not identify the basic elements of a sentence like the verb, complement and object. The majority of them could not identify and correct various sentence errors as well. The study also showed that nearly no student could pinpoint his/her writing problems and suggest possible solutions to his/her writing problems. Finally, recommendations have been suggested based on the major findings of the study.

Key Terms: Writing skill; writing error; error types in writing.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Needless to say, the writing skill has vital roles in communication. For instance, “Writing allows us to share our communication not only with our contemporaries, but also with future generations. It permits people from the near and far-distant past to speak to us” [1]. Therefore, since communication through writing plays significant roles to exchange messages among the past, the present and the future, university students need to involve in it at large to master their writing skill. It is obvious that university students write reports, assignments, essay questions, lecture notes, application letters, memos and the like. Every writing activity also demands integrated sub-skills, critical thinking and organizing of ideas. The writing skill requires various sub-skills, ample time and effort to produce an effective writing outcome. However, this activity appears to be very challenging for many university students, perhaps due to their lack of several sub-skills like the rules of grammar and tense, vocabulary choice, spelling, organizing of ideas, rules of punctuation and capitalization and rational thinking. Besides, “Writing is often taught in such a way that student failures, rather than successes, are focused on. The writing process is learned, by and large, in an environment of constant criticism and repeated failure” [1]. This way of teaching and learning process seems to be discouraging to students to take part in writing activities with full confidence and interest.

While offering writing courses, the researchers of this study observed that many university students were passive to involve in writing activities and to master the skill. This may be due to discouraging learning situations they have experienced or developed for years and the complexity and laboriousness of writing activities. Concerning the reluctance of students to participate in writing activities, Harmer also maintains, “One of the obstacles that writing teachers have to overcome, at times, is a reluctance on the part of their students to engage in writing activities with any enthusiasm” [7]. However, university students should learn the writing skill and they should involve in various writing activities This is because the writing skill determines their success at university and later on their career directly or indirectly. If the students do not master the writing skill adequately, they will commit various types of writing errors in their writing. This, in turn, affects their grades in particular and their success at university in general. Therefore, identifying university students’ writing errors and trying to design possible strategies to alleviate their writing problems is imperative. Sorenson suggests that students learn better, when the writing process is applied in writing activities than expecting a certain written product [11]. Thus, it seems essential that students should get enough guidance that facilitates their writing process rather than expecting a finished writing output from them. In general, it was based on this general background that the present researchers proposed that it is imperative to conduct a study on investigation of university students’ writing problems at two public universities found in south west Ethiopia.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As stated above, writing is an important language skill that facilitates communication among people. The writing skill is acquired through learning. Thus, the skill has been incorporated in textbooks as a subsection in each unit starting from lower grades (e.g. Grade 8) in Ethiopia to enable learners master it step by step.

However, when we offered the writing skill as a course at universities and gave written examinations and written assignments to university students, we repeatedly observed various errors committed by the students that were not expected from them. For instance, many students (e.g., students who learned at Jimma University) made serious mistakes of spelling, grammar, tense, punctuation, capitalization, conjunction and organizing of ideas.

As we observed from experience and from various sources, students' writing problems are multifaceted. The diversity and complexity of students' writing errors really initiate any concerned body to conduct a study to find out the types of university students' writing problems and to seek solutions to their writing problems. Since the students' writing problems were deep-rooted, we were motivated to empirically investigate the students' writing problems, thereby alleviating their writing problems.

The review of empirical studies conducted on writing in Ethiopia shows that there are other studies which have been conducted on related to writing. For instance, Tekle, Endalfer and Ehabu have conducted a study on "A descriptive Survey on Teacher's Perception of EFL Writing and Their Practice of Teaching Writing Preparatory Schools in Jimma Zone in Focus" [13]. The study showed that there was "a weak correlation between teachers' beliefs and their actual teaching practices. Gupta and Getachew on their part have investigated the influence of motivation and attitude on writing strategy use of undergraduate EFL students [6]. The study found the following result:

Undergraduate students with strong motivation demonstrated high levels of enjoyment, confidence, perceived ability and positive attitudes towards effective teaching methods. Those students, who obtained expected grades, practiced writing, exerted adequate personal effort and who got early encouragement from significant others were found to be high writing strategy users.

Gupta and Getachew's research findings are supportive to this research, especially in relation to encouraging students for better learning and material preparation to alleviate students' writing problems.

However, the research team of this study did not find a research that has been conducted specifically on "Investigation of University Students' Writing Problems" in the Ethiopian context. Thus, this study differs from the above studies in relation to content and the setting of the study. This study aims at filling research gaps by studying university students' writing problems at two public universities found in south west Ethiopia. To this end, the study attempted to answer the following two research questions.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the major writing errors of students who learn at Jimma and Mizan-Tepi Universities?
- How often do the students who learn at Jimma and Mizan-Tepi Universities apply their theoretical knowledge in their writing?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to assess the writing problems of university students who learned at Jimma and Mizan-Tepi universities.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Identify university students' writing problems;
- Investigate whether or not the students apply their theoretical knowledge in their writing.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Writing seems a challenging task to every student and to some instructors as well. However, this research is delimited to investigate only the writing problems of first year university students who joined Jimma and Mizan-Tepi universities in 2015/16 academic year.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The present researchers planned to collect the necessary data of the study in the mid of the second semester (first week of April, 2016) and then to implement an intervention activity. However, the necessary data of the study were not gathered as it was planned because part of the course offered to the participants of the study was not covered before this time. Hence, the present researchers were obliged to stay until the course was completed. Such a delay restricted the research strategy and magnitude to carry out it as intended from the beginning. The present researchers believe that such a delay had its own impact on the findings of the research. Moreover, since the data were collected from two public universities, the findings of the study may not be generalized to all other universities found in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Views towards the Writing Skill

Effective communication through writing increases our personal, academic and social contact and relationships. It also increases our efficiency and efficacy in the academic and social domain at large. Kruse in Bjorg, Brauer, Rienecker and Jorgensen describes, "It (effective writing) makes them (students) members of the discourse communities and allows them to communicate with their colleagues" [9]. On the contrary, ineffective communication through writing affects our smooth relationships and academic performance in various degrees. For instance, Sova states, "Sentence errors, incorrectly linked ideas and careless punctuation serve to project an uncaring attitude and raise questions in the reader's mind regarding the credibility and capability of the writer" [12]. Making writing errors in general affects every person's communication proficiency and personal relationship. This shows that trying to tackle university students' writing communication barriers is fundamental

to increase their efficiency and acceptability by others.

In addition, scholars state that writing is not only a means of communication, but it is also a unique learning strategy, which integrates the hand, the eye and the brain. For example, Emig in McDonald & McDonald asserts, "If the most efficacious learning occurs when learning is reinforced, then writing through its inherent reinforcing cycle involving hand, eye and brain marks a uniquely powerful multi-representational mode for learning"[5]. This scholar also compares writing and ways of learning based on the views of psychologists. He describes that Jerome Bruner, like Jean Piaget, through a comparable set of categories, posits three major ways in which we represent and deal with actuality: (1) enactive - we "learn by doing"; (2) iconic - we "learn by depiction" and (3) representational or symbolic - we learn "by restatement in words". He concludes "...all the three ways of actuality are simultaneously and almost simultaneously deployed in writing as a process" [5]. Hence, writing serves both as a means of communication and as a strategy for learning.

2.2 Learners' Writing Problems

As it has been observed from experience from university students' written tests, classroom writing activities and home-taken assignments, the students commit various types of writing errors. Among these writing errors, spelling mistakes, faulty agreement, sentence fragment, run-on (fused) sentences, inappropriate use of punctuation, wrong use of transitional words and organization problems can be mentioned as examples. In addition, the students do not have the required writing knowledge and competence. With regard to students' writing problems, Kruse in Bjorg, Brauer, Rienecker and Jorgensen mentions, "Beginning writers in the academic field are first of all handicapped by their limited knowledge which is usually accompanied by a feeling of being unable substantially to contribute to the existing knowledge" [9]. Students' feeling of incompetence has the potential to prohibit them from practicing actively during writing.

2.3 Identifying Errors in Writing

Writing errors can be identified through error analysis. Error analysis is the study or the analysis of errors made by second language learners. It developed as a branch of applied linguistics in the 1960s [10]. According to these scholars, error analysis is carried out in order to: identify strategies that learners use in language learning, try to identify the causes of learner's errors and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

Many learner's errors do not arise from the interferences of learner's mother tongue, but they reflect universal learning strategies [10]. Errors are also classified as intra-lingual and inter-lingual. An intra-lingual error results from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than from language transfer (inter-lingual error). Intra-lingual error may be caused by application of the result of one target language item on another. For example, a learner may say 'he is plays' based on his/her knowledge of the syntactic rules of 'he is playing' and 'he plays'. This kind of error seems to have been prevalent because learners are more reluctant to master the writing skill.

That means, ineffective communication affects our smooth relationships and academic performance in various

degrees. For instance, Sova [12] states, “Sentence errors, incorrectly linked ideas and careless punctuation serve to project an uncaring attitude and raise questions in the reader’s mind regarding the credibility and capability of the writer”. Committing writing errors in general affects every person’s communication proficiency and academic acceptability by others. Thus, tackling university students’ writing barriers is fundamental to increase their efficiency and efficacy.

2.4 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Individuals develop their writing skills through learning and/or social interaction. While interacting, learners acquire input from others and develop their cognitive skills. Clark [2] states how the writing skill develops through interaction in a social context as follows:

...writing is socially constructed because it both reflects and shapes thinking, a position that in composition studies is known as social constructionism. Social constructionist approaches to composition emphasize the role of community in shaping discourse and the importance of understanding community expectations when working with students....individuals perceive the world according to the shared beliefs and perceptions of the community or communities to which they belong to. That means ...knowledge is a socially constructed belief.

Therefore, a social constructionism framework guides the practice of writing where individuals (writers) develop their knowledge and skills through extended practice, high level thinking and sharing of views through interaction with friends, family members and instructors in formal and informal ways. Hence, social constructionism has been used as a theoretical framework for this study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design of the Study

In this research, case study research design was implemented because as Denscombe [3] notes, “The defining characteristic of the case study approach is its focus on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated”. Cases also exist naturally prior to any research but their impacts need to be examined in depth. Therefore, through case study research design, it was possible to investigate university students’ writing errors (cases) which were gathered from first year students in 2016 academic year. Vaus [14] also illustrates, “A case is the object of the study. It is the unit of analysis about which we collect information”. Hence, by means of the case study research design, the research team could investigate writing problems after careful analysis and then supplied alternative strategies to minimize the problems as much as possible.

3.2 Study Area and Period

The study was conducted at two public universities which are Jimma University and Mizan-Tepi University that are found in South West Ethiopia and it was conducted within a year (from September 24, 2015 –August 10, 2016).

3.3 Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were first year university students who took “Basic Writing Skill” as a common course at Jimma and Mizan-Tepi universities. These students were selected from similar colleges and from the same year entries in the aforementioned universities.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study areas (Jimma and Mizan-Tepi universities) were selected purposely on the assumption that they are relatively nearer to the researchers’ working place to manage the teaching-learning process and the research work in harmony. Furthermore, purposive sampling was implemented to select participants of the study because the data were gathered from students who took “Basic Writing Skill” as a common course in a semester based approach in 2015/16 G.C from colleges of social sciences and humanities found at the universities. However, students who learned in English department found at the universities were not included in the study to avoid differences in language skill with other department students. The Colleges of Social Sciences and Humanities found at the universities were selected deliberately as well. This is because students who learned in these colleges join the universities or departments relatively with lower passing grades in comparison to students who learned in colleges of natural science found at the universities. Thus, it was assumed that the writing problem of students who learned in the colleges of Social Sciences and Humanities might be serious. The number of participants was one hundred and sixty-one students from the two universities. Specifically, ninety-three students were selected from sociology department at Jimma University and sixty-eight students were selected from Mizan-Tepi University (thirty-nine students from sociology department and twenty-nine students from history department). The departments were selected using simple random sampling technique which is a lottery method to give equal chance to each department. Then, availability sampling was applied to select the respondents.

3.5 Instruments for Data Collection

The data were collected through giving tests on writing effective sentences and paragraph writing. The tests were given to respondents individually. The tests helped the researchers to investigate whether or not students identify the various types of errors in sentences and strategies they applied to correct those errors. The test on paragraph writing was also essential to investigate whether or not students could write paragraphs as they were instructed.

The validity of the instruments (questions) was also evaluated by two TEFL scholars (Dr. Tekle Ferede (Associate Professor) and Dr. Andinet Shimelis (assistant professor).

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

First, the data which were collected through sentence and paragraph writing tests were classified based on categories like errors related to syntax, spelling, organization of ideas, conjunction and punctuation and capitalization, etc. Then, the students’ writing errors committed during identifying and correcting errors in

sentence and paragraph (re)writing activities were analyzed using textual analysis. Finally, repeatedly committed writing errors were given attention in the analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Respondents were asked to identify the subject, the verb and the object of the sentence, “The students have broken all the windows.” In this sentence, the verb is “have broken.” However, only twenty-four (14.9%) of the respondents identified the verb correctly. The majority of them (81.3%) of the respondents could not identify it as required. The rest said unrelated things about it. Concerning the object of the sentence, sixty-three (39.13%) of the respondents did it wrongly and four respondents left it empty. Most respondents whose answers were considered as correct also said that the object of the above sentence is only ‘windows’. That means, they did not take “all and the” as part of the object. Based on the analysis, it is possible to infer that the majority of university students could not identify the elements of a sentence properly.

The respondents were also asked to identify the verb and the complement of the sentence, “Aysha is a clever student.” However, only twenty-four (14.9%) of the respondents identified the verb correctly. One hundred and five (65.2%) of the respondents also could not identify the complement of the above sentence fully. The respondents’ inability to identify elements of a sentence that seems elementary for university students indicates that university students had serious writing problems.

Such mistakes were reflected in respondents’ paragraph writing as well. A respondent’s response presented below illustrates how subject, verb, object, complement, spelling and other important elements in writing were misused in his/her paragraph:

first collected the fruited of the coffee, 2nd spreating the coffee seed from the wastes, 3rd washing the coffee then maked the coffee and powdered the coffee when until up to powdered the coffee it destilation the water, then collected the water and the powdered coffee seed and when the coffee evaporated pick up the coffee and destelited them until washed the cup finally dranked the coffee.

One can observe in the first sentence of the above paragraph that the appropriate use of capital letter, the past form of make (which is written as maked), spelling and how to use punctuation marks were violated. In addition, the organization of ideas was inappropriate. For example, what does “3rd washing the coffee then maked the coffee and powdered the coffee when until up to powdered the coffee it destilation the water” mean? Unluckily, since the grammar, organization of ideas, the use of punctuation marks and spelling of words are inappropriate, understanding the message of the written text is confusing. As it can be observed in the above paragraph, similar mistakes were committed in the other sentences of the paragraph. This implies that unless the students improve their writing skills, any writing activity will be very challenging for them both for their academic achievement and in their career later on.

Besides, the respondents were asked to identify the types of sentences based on structure and their function. For instance, “Although the rain is little here, farmers have harvested a lot with irrigation” is one of the sentences they were asked. However, ninety-nine (61.5%) of the respondents could not identify the type of the sentence

based on its structure even though the structure of the given sentence is not that much complicated. This indicates that the students could not identify sentences based on their structure.

Moreover, the respondents were asked to complete the verb form of the sentence, “Hirut and I _____ friends since 1998” by selecting from the given alternatives. To this question, the answer is “have been”. However, ninety-five (59%) of the respondents did not get the right answer. Similarly, the respondents were asked to choose the correct verb to the sentence, “I ____ grade twelve last year.” To this question, the right answer is “was”. But, ninety-five (59%) of the respondents wrote wrong answers. In the above two sentences, though the expressions “since 1998” and “last year” give clues to identify that the first sentence is present perfect and the second sentence is simple past, many of the respondents wrote wrong responses. These wrong responses indicate the students’ low level of understanding regarding the use of tense in communication.

In addition, respondents were asked to distinguish whether “their, there, it or theirs” can fulfill the sentence, “Many students are absent today. Is _____ any problem?” To this question, the right answer is “there”. Nevertheless, ninety-seven (60.24%) of the respondents did not give the right response. Identifying the correct answer from the given alternatives seems easy, but they could not do it as expected. This implies that the students had language use problems that can affect their efficiency in the teaching and learning process. Similarly, the sentence “The cat is cleaning _____ mouth” was given with alternatives “its’, it’s, it is and its’”. However, one hundred and twenty-one (75%) of the respondents did not use the possessive adjective “its” as a response. Only thirty-eight (23.6%) of the respondents wrote the right answer. This also entails that the students could not apply the rules of grammar, which was far below the expected standard.

Moreover, the respondents were asked to identify and correct errors in sentences. For instance, the sentence, “This man is very generous, he helps his neighbors properly” was given to them. The error in this sentence is called comma splice, but only thirty-three (20.49%) respondents got it right. But, the majority (72.04%) of them could not identify the type of error, and could not correct it even if they studied this particular type of sentence error in the course recently.

The next question was about subject verb agreement. The sentence is “Semira usually wash her clothes neatly”. Concerning this question, only eight (4.96%) of the respondents got the right answer (i.e. washes). Nevertheless, one hundred and thirty-seven (85.09%) of the respondents were unable to identify the type of error and correct the appropriate form of the verb. Furthermore, they were asked to identify what type of error occurred in the sentence, “My father has bought a new house to my sister that has two floors”. Twenty-three respondents did not give any response to this question. Only one respondent got it right, and the rest, one hundred and thirty-seven (85.09%) of the respondents tried to answer, but their answers were wrong. The type of error in the sentence, “This student is very clever he stands first every year” is called run-on or fused. However, only twenty (12.42%) of the respondents identified and corrected the error, whereas one hundred and twenty-six (78.26%) of the respondents could not identify and correct the error. Besides, the kind of error observed in the sentence, “Writing, speaking, reading and to listen are the four basic language skills” is faulty parallelism. The error in this sentence seems easily observable, but only thirty-four (21.11%) of the respondents pinpointed and corrected the sentence error. Nevertheless, the majority of them (68.94%) of the respondents did not recognize the error.

Question twenty-two is about sentence fragment that is unattached to a main clause to be meaningful. The given dependent clause is “When I was a kid”. Regarding this sentence fragment, forty-two (26.08%) of the respondents identified and corrected it. However, one hundred and three respondents responded it wrongly. For instance, many of them repeated the same text, and others changed the word ‘kid’ to kind, which is not related to the given idea.

Besides, the respondents were asked to rewrite the following sentences using punctuation marks and capital letters where necessary. One of the sentences says, “hayat leyila nuru and tolla are classmates”. Concerning this sentence, only sixty-seven (42.61%) of the respondents corrected it properly, whereas eighty-four (52.17%) of the respondents were wrong. The next sentence is “all childrens toys are lost”. Surprisingly, it is not really a new concept or content to university students because it exists at different levels in lower grades and in their learning material currently as well. However, only ten (6.21%) of the respondents identified the errors and rewrote the correct version, whereas the majority of them (86.33%) of the respondents could not correct it. This particular point signifies that students at university level have punctuation and capitalization problems.

In addition, a short paragraph was given to the respondents to examine their skills about punctuation marks and capitalization. Regarding this, a respondent rewrote the paragraph using punctuation marks and capital letters as follows:

When i was walking downtown. I saw a small boy wandering on the roadside it seemed that he was lost immediately a woman appeared suddenly from a house and she seized and slapped him on the face.

As it can be observed in the above paragraph, the respondent did not know when and where a writer needs to apply a comma, full stop, capital letter and the like. As a result, the respondent could not capitalize the pronoun “i”. Besides, the respondent did not capitalize the pronoun “i” in the word “it” which serves as the subject of a new sentence. The respondent also used a full stop instead of comma after the word ‘downtown’ wrongly. In addition, the respondent did not use a comma after the adverb “immediately”, and he/she did not put a period after the words “roadside,” “lost” and “face” which are the ends of sentences. The above errors witness that the students cannot apply punctuation marks and capital letters properly in their writing.

Moreover, the respondents were asked about the concept of a paragraph, its structures, paragraph unity, coherence and completeness to test their level of understanding. However, nearly all of them did not know such concepts. They were also asked to write a paragraph on the topic “How to prepare coffee”. Nevertheless, most of them wrote paragraphs which contain unclear organizations and ineffective sentence constructions. For instance, a sample paragraph written by one of the respondents reads as follows:

“How to prepare coffee”

first coffee seling the shop the clean water washing hand and coffee material and prpering the coffee materal. After that mitad siting the fiar. Second prpering different kinds of people drinking cops and after that go out the house dranging the coffee powder dranging until ends of the pair filter of material. finaly or thridily the collecting the eary people or family drinking together.

As one can observe in the above paragraph, the respondent could not put the grammatical structure of the language properly, so it is difficult to understand what he/she wanted to say in the paragraph. For example, what does “After that mitad siting the fiar” mean in the paragraph? It is complex to guess the meaning, especially to non-Ethiopian readers because the term ‘mitad’ is an Amharic word. Besides, the spellings of ‘seling’, ‘prpering’, ‘fiar’ are not correct, and the respondent did not use appropriate words to express his/her ideas clearly. The writer could not organize his/her ideas as required.

4.1 Results and Discussions

The study revealed that the students had serious writing problems. For instance, they could not identify elements of a sentence like the verb, complement and object as required. Besides, they could not distinguish types of error in sentences and they were unable to correct the errors as needed. In other words, they did not apply grammar rules, conjunctions, punctuation marks and capital letters where necessary at sentence level. Similarly, they were unable to write a paragraph as their level demands. Their paragraphs were full of errors. The errors include misspelling, inappropriate use of vocabularies, ungrammatical sentences and messy ideas as shown in the data analysis above.

Moreover, the students were not clever enough even to apply their knowledge to describe existing facts. That means, let alone evaluating or making their own higher-level analysis the students were not able to describe issues as existed in the real context. Concerning the level of university or college students, Duiga [4] states, “At university or college you (as a student) are expected to be able to discuss problems and ideas, rather than simply to report on facts...”

The prevalence of the respondents’ writing problems was also very wide-ranging. For instance, they did not apply the rules of grammar while they wrote a paragraph. As a result, communication breakdown occurred between them and readers of their writings. In this regard, Harmer [8] also asserts, “If grammar rules are too carelessly violated, communication may suffer.” The causes of the respondents’ writing problems are believed to be multi-layered and diverse which may be directly or indirectly related to the country’s system of education, recruiting candidates and training them as teachers and the respect and benefit given to teachers found in the country. Teachers’ lack of interest to teach and students’ lack of motivation and effort to learn have also their own negative impacts on students’ academic success in particular and the quality of education in general. If university students cannot effectively express their idea through writing, they cannot be effective particularly in their courses and in their future professional activities that demand the writing skills. Therefore, developing university students’ writing skill is very crucial. Harmer also states, “In the context of education, it is also worth remembering that most exams, whether they are testing foreign language abilities or other skills, often rely on the students’ writing proficiency in order to measure their proficiency” [7].

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The majority of the respondents were unable to identify the basic elements of a sentence like the verb,

complement and object. Besides, the majority of them could not identify and correct various errors (like sentence fragment, run-on, comma splice, agreement problem, dangling modifier, misplaced modifier, faulty parallelism, etc.) occurred in sentences. For instance, a significant number of the respondents could not apply the rules of grammar, spelling, punctuation marks and capital letters while writing. Nearly no respondent could pinpoint his/her problems and suggest possible ways to seek solutions to his/her writing problems as well. The respondents could not implement what they learnt about organizing and expressing ideas in their writing as required. In general, writing at sentence and paragraph level was a big challenge to first year university students.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded: University instructors and course material writers need to exert a lot of effort to enhance university students' writing skills in particular and the quality of education in general. Besides, students have to identify various errors found in faulty sentences, and they should be conscious enough to correct the errors. In other words, they should work hard to identify their writing problems, try to seek various mechanisms to get solutions to their writing difficulties and struggle to implement what they learn/know theoretically in their writing.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the participants of the study who provided the required data to the study. We also want to thank Jimma University for providing a research grant for this study.

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