

AN ANALYSIS OF SYNTACTIC ERRORS IN SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION: A  
CASE STUDY OF SELECTED UNDERGRADUATE FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH  
MAJORS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

by

NDOU THOMPHO

Student Number:19012967

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Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics  
Faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

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Supervisor: Dr MJ Maluleke

Co-supervisor: Mr VT Bvuma

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## DECLARATION

I, **Thompho Ndou**, hereby declare that the dissertation proposal for a Master's in English Language Teaching at the University of Venda, which I have submitted, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university and that it is my work in design and execution and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature  \_\_\_\_\_

Date. 27-11-2026

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study provides an analysis of syntactic errors in sentence construction by first-year undergraduate English students in one of rural-base university located in Limpopo. The process of arranging words to form comprehensible sentences is governed by a set of rules, known as syntactic rules, which ensure that sentences are constructed coherently and convey concise meanings to readers. Some research studies conducted in South Africa and other countries have indicated that writing is challenging, particularly for students with limited knowledge of a second language (L2). English sentences commonly consist of three important components: the subject, the verb, and the object. These components should be effectively aligned in both simple, compound, and complex sentences to convey a complete, meaningful thought. If the subjects and verbs are not effectively aligned, it may be difficult for the readers to grasp the intended messages. Therefore, this study aims to investigate syntactic errors made by the first-year English majors in simple, compound, and complex sentences at a selected South African university. This study is underpinned by error analysis theory (EA) and grounded theory (GT).

An exploratory qualitative approach was adopted in this study, using a combination of document analysis, group discussions, and case studies as primary data collection methods to gain in-depth insights into sentence composition. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used to select 20 students as participants. A deductive approach, which is one of the thematic data analysis techniques, has been used to analyse the data collected from students' essay writing and group discussions. Descriptive analysis has been employed to interpret the collected data and report the findings in words, making it easier for readers to understand the study's findings quickly. The results revealed that the students know about constructing simple sentences but faced difficulties in linking independent clauses with each other or with dependent clauses to form grammatical compound and complex sentences. It was because most students were identified as having a low proficiency level in the correct use of punctuation, coordinating, and subordinating conjunctions. Furthermore, the results revealed that most students were able to distinguish the structural variations between phrases, clauses, and sentences, but found it challenging to link phrases and clauses to form grammatically correct sentences, particularly complex sentences. Based on the data analysis and interpretation in Chapter 4, it was found that the

omission of a comma, subject-verb agreement errors, run-on sentences, redundancy, comma splices, and pronoun-noun agreement issues were common types of errors committed by the students.

In conclusion, the study wanted to identify critical challenges faced by the students in sentence construction. It is found that the students are able to align words properly to form phrases and sentences. However, most of the faced difficulties in using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions to form comprehensible sentence, which is a challenge in academic writing. Most of the students demonstrated lack of knowledge in concord rules. Some corresponded plural subjects with singular verb forms while other aligned singular subjects with verbs that are in plural states, which is regarded as subject-verb agreement errors. Lastly, the students can also use grammar books and study syntax chapters to have deep understanding in linking different words to form well-organised simple, compound, and complex sentences. The results of this study are expected to help the curriculum advisors, L2 lecturers, syllabus designers, and future researcher to be able to identify the critical challenges faced by the students in sentence construction.

**Keywords:** *Syntax, L1, L2, transfer, limited knowledge, and low proficiency*

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## CHAPTER 1

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY, AIMS, THE OBJECTIVES, AND THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

#### 1.1 Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world has become a global community where English is commonly used by people of different languages in various digital communication platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok to share ideas and information (Jaka, Yuni, Anggraeni, and Anwas, 2020; Rana, 2021; Ryan, 2024). Rao (2019) stated that there are approximately 6,500 languages spoken by people of different cultures worldwide, and English is the second most widely spoken language globally (Rao, 2019). This is a clear reflection of the significance of English as a powerful tool to unite people, create a global community, facilitate effective communication, and strengthen their relationships. Hassain (2024) states that English is commonly used worldwide as a lingua franca to facilitate intercommunication and connecting people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, this study investigates errors in sentence construction by selected English majors in one of rural base universities found in Limpopo. The study findings are expected to help student to be proficient and competent in L2, not only in academic writing, but also in various aspects of their lives so that they can express their ideas logically and clearly in a written form. The study will be underpinned by Error analysis theory and will be explained more on the section of background of the study.

Ronel (2019) stated that every language has a set of rules that ensure effectiveness in academic writing. Richard (2025) poses that in English (L2) learning, there are syntactic rules that govern the arrangement of words to form logical and grammatically correct sentences. Despite most students having learned English as a First or Second Additional language from primary to secondary levels, some of them were still struggling to construct sentences that are logical and grammatical (Phethani et al, 2025; Mgodana and Mukuna, 2023, Khumalo and Reddy, 2021).

A study conducted by Khumalo and Reddy (2021) claims that most of the first-year English major students commonly face challenges in arranging words and following the correct use of syntactic rules to form grammatical sentences. The study further stated that constructing simple, compound, and complex sentences requires students

who have an in-depth understanding of the syntactic rules, as well as proper use of punctuation marks. In contrast, Mdoana and Mukuna (2023) posited that most of the students know how to arrange words to form both simple, compound, and complex sentences. However, they lack understanding of the correct syntactic rules that should be employed during the formation process, especially when constructing compound and complex sentences. Due to students' limited knowledge of the syntactic rules, Mdoana and Mukuna (2023) further revealed that students sometimes tend to merge independent clauses to form compound sentences, which is regarded as a run-on error. Others used commas to link independent clauses, which is a comma splice error.

Therefore, this study uses scripts of essay writing of 20 selected students, and group discussions as data collection methods to investigate the challenges faced by students in one of the rural-based universities found in Limpopo in 2025. The study focuses on simple, compound, and complex sentences that only contain errors. The aim of this study is to investigate the common syntactic errors in sentence compositions committed by first-year undergraduate English majors at one South African university in Limpopo province. The importance of focusing on ungrammatical sentences is to: (1) clearly identify the most common types of sentences that are difficult for students, (2) identify the common challenging syntactic rules, and (3) evaluate students' knowledge capacities to differentiate between phrases, clauses, and sentences. After the evaluation, analysis, and interpretation of the results in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 provides recommendations that are expected to help students construct well-organised and meaningful sentences in academic writing to express their ideas.

Dacrat and Russel (2019) stated that South African universities are considered the highest institutions of Further Education and Training (FET), encompassing students who speak different native languages. Therefore, Mayers (2023) and Rao (2019) argued that English is commonly used by both L2 lecturers and students for teaching and learning in most undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to facilitate communication and ensure that lecturers and students understand each other. Pauzan (2024) indicated that errors are natural and are part of learning. However, a study by Intan et al. (2020) clearly showed that errors in sentence construction can alter intended messages, creating a communication barrier. In addition, they clearly stated that errors are a sign of students' knowledge. Therefore, students should be scaffolded

and equipped with knowledge on how they should align words to form meaningful sentences (Malatji, 2021)

To avoid communication barriers in written production in L2 at the university level, this study was conducted focusing on three categories. The first category focuses on identifying errors made by students in aligning subjects and verbs within written sentences. The second category focuses on the errors that the students committed when linking clauses to form compound and complex sentences. The third category is about the most common rules that were too difficult for the students. This study also examines the contributing factors that limit students' ability to construct comprehensible and grammatical sentences such as limited exposure in L2, difficulty of grammar rules, spending more time on social media than studying, limited knowledge in punctuation, weak grammar foundation, lack of reading and practice, L1 interference, and lack of study resources as stated in Chapter 4 of this study.

The findings are expected to empower students to achieve a high level of proficiency or in-depth knowledge in sentence composition, enabling them to express their ideas and thoughts logically and clearly. If students receive inadequate lessons in class, the module facilitators/lecturers will therefore have the opportunity to implement suitable pedagogical strategies to effectively impart lessons to students in the classroom. The curriculum designers will also be able to identify the most difficult areas in sentence composition. In response, they may provide available learning materials or revise the sentence construction chapters so that students can understand how to construct simple, compound, and complex sentences.

Sibanda (2020) conducted a study to investigate challenges faced by the university's first-year students. The results of his study show that students commonly struggle to construct compound and complex sentences due to limited knowledge in the correct use of coordinating and subordinating clauses to link clauses. The findings also revealed that most of the students demonstrated high proficiency in connecting words to form simple grammatical sentences. Majara (2018) and Sari (2019) stated that although students have an in-depth understanding of simple sentences, it is not always necessary to use them to express their ideas. They clearly indicated that other situations would require them to construct compound and complex sentences.

However, a study by Sibanda (2020) revealed that compound and complex sentences are challenging for some students, particularly those with low proficiency in grammar.

Therefore, it was worthwhile to also analyse the errors the students committed in both simple, compound, and complex sentences to help students obtain in-depth knowledge in constructing sentences that are well-organised and meaningful, and to develop an in-depth understanding of the differences between simple, compound, and complex sentences.

Ngidi (2022) stated that although English provides most graduates with opportunities to obtain better jobs, some first-year undergraduate English students were still struggling to organise words effectively to compose simple, compound, and complex sentences that are comprehensible, meaningful, and grammatical. They sometimes construct sentences that contain numerous errors, such as run-on sentences, subject-verb disagreement, omission of prepositions, comma splices, misuse of articles, redundancy, conjunction errors, etc. Therefore, it was important to conduct this study to investigate how the students organise different words to form ungrammatical sentences.

The studies by Khumalo and Reddy (2021), Phethani et al. (2025), Mdogana and Mukuna (2023), Khumalo and Reddy (2021), Dacrat and Russel (2019), and Sibanda (2020) were conducted at universities in urban areas. Their research focused more on common errors in simple, compound, and complex sentences, but did not establish that these are contributing factors or that they are the most difficult syntactic errors for students. These studies also did not assess students' ability to differentiate between phrases, clauses, and sentences, which is challenging because phrases and clauses are the building blocks of sentences and should be mastered by students.

Therefore, it was important to conduct this study at one of the universities in rural Limpopo to investigate the common errors students make in sentence construction and, at the same time, evaluate students' ability to differentiate between phrases, clauses, and sentences. Datchuk and Langford (2020) clearly indicated that sentence structures are the organisation of words, phrases, or clauses. Therefore, analysing students' knowledge of differentiating between phrases, clauses, and sentences will help them arrange them cohesively and coherently to form grammatical sentences. Lastly, investigate how the students align sentence subjects and verbs. The findings

are therefore expected to empower students to link words effectively to form grammatically simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatically correct while adhering to the assigned syntactic rules in their academic writing.

## 1.2 Background to the study

### 1.2.1 Importance of English

According to Marivate (2020), every continent has different languages used by people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and ethnicities. If one uses their mother tongue to communicate with people who do not speak the same native language, they may hardly understand one another, which can create a communication barrier (Kulaeva, Khasueva, & Grozny, 2024).

South Africa is a multilingual country with 12 official languages spoken in all nine provinces (Makoni, 2016). Among the 12 languages, English (L2) is commonly used as a medium of instruction and for learning and teaching purposes in most private and public primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. The use of English in tertiary schools facilitates learning and accommodates students from diverse mother tongues (Rachid, 2022). Thuketana (2022) stated that English connects and unites people globally, allowing them to share ideas and information daily. Xiao (2022) poses that universities' memoranda and acknowledgement communiques are commonly written in L2 to ensure that all stakeholders understand the intended messages. Furthermore, lecturers use English in various modules to teach students in the classroom. Additionally, some of the examination question papers, assignments, and tests are commonly written in English (Ozer, 2020).

### 1.2.2 Error analysis in sentence construction

Error analysis of English sentence structure is important for recognising grammatical problems and for developing students' language competence. According to Sari et al. (2022), most students in South Africa often commit errors, such as omissions, run-on sentences, fragments, comma splices, incorrect verb forms, subject-verb agreement errors, and incorrect word order, indicating that students are not able to master the use of composition in English. Different studies have demonstrated that this is mostly due to mother tongue interference, overgeneralization of grammar rules, and inappropriate teaching methods. For instance, students might simply translate

thoughts from their native language into English, violating English syntax, or overgeneralize rules, producing inappropriate verb forms or even sentence fragments (Bryson, 2020). Bad teaching compounds these problems (Javed et al., 2023).

A number of research studies have been conducted to unravel the composition of students' English sentences, revealing the issues they face, especially in forming grammatically correct and effective sentences. One relevant study is that by Amalia and Rahayu (2021), which aimed to identify errors in the sentence structure types used by tertiary students in English. The most common errors found were omission, addition, misformation, and misordering of sentence elements; fragments; comma splices; and subject-verb agreement, which were attributed to causes such as mother tongue interference and overgeneralization of English rules. However, a study by Sari et al. (2019) found that students primarily have problems with subject-verb agreement.

According to Khosa (2021), a simple sentence typically consists of one or two subjects, a single main verb, and focuses on a single idea. A compound sentence consists of two or more independent clauses joined together by commas and coordinating conjunctions such as *but*, *nor*, *and*, *or*, *for*, *yet*, and others (Mtumane, 2020 & Jacobs, 2020). A Complex sentence is a product of a combination of one or two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause linked by subordinating conjunctions such as *because*, *though*, *since*, *until*, *while*, and *if*, or adverbial conjunctions such as *thereafter*, *meanwhile*, *subsequently*, *hence*, and *consequently* (Torres & Gouzerh, 2019). Some of the students hardly struggle to combine words to construct simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatical either as the result of ignorance of syntactic rules, low proficiency, or limited knowledge on grammar, which leads them to commonly merge two or more independent clauses without using any conjunction or any form of punctuation, which is run-on errors (Motseki, 2021).

A study conducted by Magaba (2023) at the University of Esten Cape reveals that most first-year English majors commonly struggle to effectively apply syntactic rules to form meaningful sentences. The results show that students struggle to organise words to form meaningful sentences; they tend to construct long sentences (run-on sentences) without proper punctuation, while others join two or more independent clauses without using coordinating conjunctions, which is regarded as a run-on error.

Nyawose (2025) argues that students know how to arrange words to construct different sentences in L2; however, they find syntactic rules so challenging, especially for students with low proficiency in grammar. Nyawose (2025) also noted that grammar is challenging for some students because they do not allocate sufficient time to studying grammar books. Ellis (1997) stated that errors are important aspects of L2 learning, as they reveal students' knowledge gaps regarding the content being learned. Chen and Yu (2019) added to Ellis' (2019) statement by posing that writing is very difficult in L2, and sometimes the students commit errors as they attempt to construct sentences because some of them are not fully exposed to L2. Nemathithi (2025) and Tetzner (2021) stated that students commonly commit errors in compound and complex sentences because they lack knowledge of when to use the coordinating conjunctions (For, and, but, nor, or, and yet) and subordinating conjunctions (because, while, although, whereas, etc).

Moyo (2021) and Jones (2021) conducted their studies to explore common syntactic errors that students commit in sentence composition. The findings reveal that most students, especially those with limited L2 knowledge, struggle to combine words coherently and cohesively to form well-organised, grammatical, and meaningful sentences. As a result, they end up constructing sentences that lack proper subject-verb-object-complement-predicate order, leading to errors. Makananise and Madima (2021) and Lia (2024) noted that students sometimes place words together to form sentences without adhering to the assigned syntactic rules. The results of their research studies revealed that sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement errors, word-order issues, transfer of students' mother-tongue structure (L1) into English (L2), omission of subjects, and poor use of punctuation were common errors students commit when constructing sentences. However, a study by Rakgogo (2024) indicated that students sometimes commit errors in sentence construction because some of the L2 lecturers do not provide enough support or lessons that focus on sentence composition.

According to Komane (2025), students commit errors in sentence construction due to low proficiency in grammar, limited exposure to L2, and the transfer of L1 elements into L2. Komane's statement is clear. However, a study by Charkitey (2016) found that students commonly commit errors in compound and complex sentences due to a lack of knowledge of proper use of conjunctions and punctuation marks. Ngoepe

(2022) from the University of Limpopo stated that errors reflect that the students are still in the process of acquiring and learning the language. A study by Munna and Kalan (2021) posed that learning is a process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and ideas within a specific discipline. In other words, Ngoepe (2022) and Munna and Kalan (2021) are saying that in the process of learning sentence composition, students may unconsciously commit errors as they try to master how to organise words to compose sentences to express their ideas.

Ndlovu (2024) and Mudau (2025) conducted research studies to investigate how challenges encountered by the first-year English majors affect sentence formation. The results of their studies show that the students can organise words properly from the subject position to the complements. However, a study conducted by Nejla (2023) reveals that students with limited knowledge of punctuation find it difficult to use appropriate punctuation, resulting in long, poorly punctuated sentences that constitute run-on errors. Students need to use punctuation correctly, be familiar with the language, have a passion for reading grammar resources, and understand the syntactic rules that govern their formation. They should also understand the structure of simple, compound, and complex sentences.

According to Thai (2021), Tyler (2023), and Matthias and Richter (2023), mastering punctuation is a challenge, but it is a skill that should be developed at the tertiary level to construct well-organised, meaningful sentences. Luvuno and Ajani (2021) and Priyanka (2022) stated that some students appear to have limited knowledge of the basic functions of auxiliary verbs in sentences. They sometimes unconsciously omit auxiliary verbs such as will, can, shall, is, are, etc., in their sentences, which results in many errors and poor word arrangement.

Nkgadima and Mapase (2022) conducted a study at the University of Limpopo to identify types of errors that first-year students commit in sentence construction. These researchers found that most students have learned L2 as a foreign language, or as a first or second additional language, during their secondary level. The findings showed that punctuation, sentence tenses, subject-verb agreement, unorganised sentence structures, incorrect use of determiners and sentence connectors, and incomplete sentences (fragments) were among the common errors students commit in sentence formation. Nkgadima and Mapase's (2022) findings are clearly presented; however, a

study by Mudau (2025) highlighted that writing is very difficult, particularly in academic writing, where students are required to follow the syntactic rules to construct well-organised and meaningful sentences. Although writing is difficult for some students, as stated by Mudau (2025), Tursunovna (2019) argues that students should master writing to construct logical sentences that express their ideas meaningfully.

According to Mona (2024) and Taylor (2024), English, like other languages, has its own sentence structures and a set of syntactic rules that must be followed to construct comprehensible sentences that convey clear messages to readers. The research studies conducted by Lulama and Mukuna (2023) indicated that writing is a challenging task, not only for first-year English students, but also for second-, third-, and possibly postgraduate English major students. It is because writing requires active, strong cognitive abilities, practice, extensive reading, and a strong commitment to studying other people's works to achieve high proficiency in constructing grammatical sentences. Furthermore, Dison, Drennan, and Rambiritch (2024) stated that writing involves flexible multi-mechanisms, such as critical thinking, generating ideas, organising words, and mastering grammatical rules, that guide how language is used effectively to facilitate intercommunication in writing. Although various researchers have stated that writing is challenging, particularly in sentence composition, this study's findings are expected to empower students to link words effectively to produce logical, grammatically correct sentences at a South African university.

Susan (2023) conducted a study to evaluate how first-year English majors correspond the subjects and verbs with their sentences. The results show that the ability to align verbs and subjects to form meaningful and grammatical sentences is one of the challenges faced by some students. Students align plural subjects with verbs in the singular, which is a subject-verb agreement error. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the omission of subjects and objects, and the redundancy of subjects within a single sentence, are also critical issues that contribute to students' errors in written production. Julia (2021) stated that every sentence should contain at least one subject performing an action and one verb that expresses action or a state of being. In other words, a sentence without either the subject or the verb is incomplete and can be considered a phrase. In addition to Julia's (2021) statement, Abdul and Raad (2019)

posed that an expression without a subject or main verb is regarded either as a phrase or a dependent clause since they do not provide a complete thought to the readers.

A study conducted by Nkgadima (2022) showed that students lack knowledge of the structural variations among phrases, clauses, and sentences, to the extent that they often treat dependent clauses and phrases as complete sentences; hence, the three expressions are different. Clauses and Phrases are the building blocks of sentences. Oliver (2022) posited that clauses (independent clause and dependent clause) are combined to form a sentence that is either grammatical or ungrammatical, depending on whether a student has followed the assigned grammatical rules or not. The results of her study revealed that students commonly write clauses that contain either the verbs or the subjects, but consider them as complete sentences, which is ungrammatical. Pretorius (2022) claims that a complete sentence should contain both the subject and the verb.

Mitari (2024) and Emvula (2020) identified that article omission, misuse of prepositions, and incorrect verb forms are among the challenges that students encounter in sentence construction due to L1 interference. They also stated that learners employ a transfer strategy, wherein they take L1 structural and grammatical features into L2 sentence construction, leading to errors. This phenomenon stems from the distinct properties of L1 and L2, encompassing divergent word order, syntactic patterns, and grammatical rules, which learners struggle to master. Kasema (2022) and Chauke (2022) identified that comma splices, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments are typical errors that some undergraduate students commit. Dastuti (2023) also conducted a study to investigate students' errors in sentence formation. The results identified three types of errors students committed: comma splices, run-ons, and fragments. Therefore, Dastuti's (2023) statement is in line with Kasema's (2022) and Chauke's (2022) as they both identify that students use commas to join independent clauses instead of coordinating conjunctions, leading to comma splice errors. Both studies also found that run-on and fragment sentences (incomplete sentences) are among the errors students commit, which is a challenge in academic writing.

Jannifer (2022) defines a sentence fragment as a group of words that do not have either the subject or main verb (s). For example: *The river and the mountains.*

Natanson (2020) stated that run-ons occur when two or more independent clauses are placed together as sentences without being joined by any form of conjunction or punctuation. Ryan (2022) defined a comma splice as an error that occurs when students join two or more independent clauses with a comma, which is grammatically incorrect. Shinaed (2023) stated that a sentence containing errors can significantly alter the intended meaning, leading to a misinterpretation of the message. In addition, Mita and Herlina (2018) found that sentences containing errors can lead to miscommunication or a language barrier.

Victor (2019) reported that students' cognitive abilities are distinct, whereby certain students demonstrated high proficiency in constructing logically structured sentences, adhering to the conventional sequence of subject-verb-object, while others showed a lack of this understanding, resulting in poor sentence constructions that fail to follow the syntactic rules required to guide the formation. Other students produce sentences that are ambiguous, vague, and potentially perplexing to readers, thereby altering the intended message (Austin, 2021).

To conclude, the background in this chapter demonstrates that English sentence construction remains a critical area of difficulty for students. As noted by Austin (2021), Jannifer (2022), Kasema (2022), Chauke (2022), Julia (2021), Ndlovu (2024), and Mudau (2025), learners frequently struggle with run-ons, comma splices, sentence fragments, and subject-verb agreement errors. These structural inaccuracies are primarily driven by native-language interference and the overgeneralization of grammatical rules, ultimately impeding clear written communication. However, as Chauke (2022) illustrates, rigorous error analysis enables precise categorisation of these mistakes, offering educators actionable insights into learner difficulties. It is this gap between pervasive syntactic errors and the need for targeted pedagogical interventions that underscores the necessity of the present research.

### 1.3 Problem statement

English proficiency is a critical determinant of academic success in South African higher education. Given the country's multilingual landscape, most first-year undergraduate English students have learned English as a first or second additional language from primary through secondary school levels (Liziwe F & Vusumzi, 2021). While some students acquire English as a "home language," it often remains distinct

from their mother tongue (Gertrude M, Rongedzayi F, & Tasreaq F, 2024). Consequently, students are expected to have mastered the syntactic rules of sentence construction during their prior schooling (Mulaudzi, 2014). However, despite this extended period of exposure, a significant number of first-year students demonstrate low proficiency in constructing grammatically correct and comprehensible sentences.

The core problem lies in the students' inability to effectively arrange words to form meaningful, simple, compound, and complex sentences. As noted in theoretical frameworks on Error Analysis (EA), errors are not merely "failures" but are indicative of the learner's linguistic stage and the strategies they employ to acquire a second language (Corder, 1967; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). In this study, these errors manifest in specific, persistent ways. Students frequently struggle with subject-verb agreement, where plural subjects are erroneously corresponded with singular verbs, violating the fundamental rule of number agreement (Fiona, 2019). Furthermore, there is a prevalent misunderstanding of the structural differences between phrases, clauses, and sentences (Benguega, 2022). Students often incorrectly treat phrases as complete sentences or merge independent and dependent clauses without appropriate subordinating conjunctions or punctuation, resulting in run-on errors (Khalo, 2022). Additionally, the ungrammatical pairing of full stops and subordinating conjunctions indicates a gap in understanding syntactic boundaries.

The challenges posed by these errors are compounded by pedagogical constraints at the tertiary level. English studies encompass multiple genres, including poetry, novels, and language structure, leaving lecturers with limited time to re-teach basic grammar rules that should have been acquired in secondary school (Plessis, 2021). Therefore, without targeted intervention, these errors persist, hindering students' academic writing capabilities.

Although the issue of L2 writing errors is well documented, a critical analysis of the existing literature reveals two distinct gaps that this study seeks to address. First, there is a geographical and contextual bias in existing research. Studies conducted by Bertus VR (2006), Roux KL (2014), Sibanda (2020), and Magaba (2023) have provided valuable insights into sentence construction errors; however, these studies were predominantly conducted in urban universities. Mailula and Ngope (2022)

emphasise that, while there is a plethora of studies on error analysis in South Africa, there is a scarcity of data on students at rural universities or previously disadvantaged institutions. Given the linguistic resource variances between urban and rural education contexts, the error patterns of rural students remain underexplored.

Second, there is a syntactic scope limitation in previous analyses. James (1998) argues that comprehensive error analysis must account for the full spectrum of syntactic complexity. However, Chauke (2022), Mudau (2025) and Nemathithi (2025) stated that most of South African studies have largely focused on identifying errors in simple and compound sentence structures. There is a noticeable lack of data regarding students' proficiency in constructing complex sentences, which is a challenge in academic writing. As complex sentences require the integration of multiple clauses using subordination, they present a higher cognitive load and different error patterns than simple coordination.

Therefore, this study is necessary to employ Error Analysis (EA) to identify, classify, describe, and analyse the common errors students make when constructing simple, compound, and complex sentences. By focusing on a context that addresses the rural-urban divide and expanding the analytical scope to include complex syntax, this research aims to fill the identified gaps and provide data-driven strategies to help students differentiate between phrases, clauses, and sentences, and effectively align subjects with correct verb forms. This study will also help students to construct simple, compound, and complex sentences that are comprehensible and grammatical.

#### 1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance the quality of academic writing by fostering a mastery of sentence construction, which serves as the foundation for clear communication. According to Kubuzie (2025), well-structured sentences are instrumental in ensuring that students articulate their ideas logically, thereby facilitating easier comprehension by lecturers and significantly lowering communication barriers. Consequently, this research is pivotal in equipping students with in-depth knowledge of word organisation and syntactic rules, a necessity underscored by linguists such as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), who argue that grammatical accuracy is essential for conveying complete thoughts. Specifically, this study addresses the

critical challenge of subject-verb agreement, aiding students with limited grammar proficiency in aligning subjects and verbs correctly to form comprehensible statements. Moreover, the study extends its significance by enabling students to distinguish between the structural nuances of phrases, clauses, and sentences; by understanding the functional differences between independent and dependent clauses, students will be better positioned to construct compound and complex sentences. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader pedagogical goal of promoting student development in composition by providing the tools necessary for syntactic precision and academic expression.

This study holds significant value for curriculum planners, English lecturers, and researchers by illuminating the specific challenges first-year undergraduate students encounter in constructing grammatical sentences. By identifying these difficulties, curriculum planners will be equipped to supplement existing instructional frameworks with advanced resources, ranging from specialised texts and academic journals to digital media that emphasise effective lexical cohesion and sentence structure. Concurrently, the findings will assist English lecturers in recognising the need for pedagogical advancement, enabling them to recommend targeted support materials that enhance student proficiency in word organisation and synthesis. Furthermore, this research provides an impetus for educators to critically evaluate and refine their facilitation of syntax lessons, while offering researchers investigating error analysis a comprehensive understanding students' difficulties in linking words to form grammatical sentences.

### **1.5 Aim of the study**

This study aimed to investigate the common syntactic errors in sentence compositions (simple, compound, and complex sentences) in the present and past tense forms committed by first-year undergraduate English majors.

### **1.6 Research objectives**

This study seeks to achieve the following research objectives:

- To advance students' proficiency in aligning the subjects and verbs to form comprehensible, meaningful, and grammatical sentences that express complete thoughts.

- To establish the basic structural variations between phrases, clauses, and sentences by considering how words are organised to form phrases, clauses, and sentences in academic writing.
- To provide the common syntactic rules that the students should use to construct grammatical sentences.

## 1.7 Research questions

The following are the set of the research questions:

- Why it is so essential to initiate the advancement of students' proficiency in aligning the sentences' subjects and verbs to compose complete sentences?
- What is the significance of establishing the structural variations between phrases, clauses, and sentences in students' written texts?
- What are the common syntactic rules that the students should master to compose comprehensible sentences that are grammatical?

## 1.8 Definition of key terms

### 1.8.1 Syntax

Johan Nicolai Madvig (2024) defines syntax as part of grammar, focusing on the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses to form grammatically well-structured sentences. In other words, syntax refers to the ways in which words are organised and combined to form phrases, clauses, and complete sentences. This process is governed by the syntactic rules used in sentence composition (Khalo, 2022; Robert et al, 2024)

### 1.8.2 L1 (Students' mother-tongue languages)

L1 refers to students' native language, also known as their mother tongue. It is the language that individuals acquire from birth, typically from their family or caregivers (Margaret, 2016). In this study, L1 refers to students' home languages that they use

to share ideas and information in their daily lives. Students commonly use L1 at home and sometimes within the school premises.

### 1.8.3 L2 (English/Target language)

L2 is any language that students learn, except for their first language/mother-tongue language (Nunan, 2024). In this study, L2 refers to English, which the students learn it as a major module.

### 1.8.4 Transfer

Rahmed (2024) stated that language transfer occurs when students transfer grammatical rules, language structure, and language usage of their L1 into L2 learning. In this study, transfer refers to the state in which the students capture their mother-tongue grammar rules and sentence structures to use them in English learning, thinking that the pattern is general, whereas there are limitations. Some L1 grammar rules are transferable into L2, but others are not.

### 1.8.6 Limited knowledge

Limited knowledge refers to the condition or situation in which a person has limited information about a specific subject (Cuofano, 2024). Scott (2024) defines limited knowledge as the state of being not well-equipped in a certain discipline about a particular subject. However, he stated that it is difficult for a person to be knowledgeable about everything, even though they have a strong cognitive ability to learn. Therefore, it means that the students cannot know everything about a language.

### 1.8.7 Low proficiency

Low proficiency occurs when a person has poor fluency in the language, either in a written or spoken form (Islam and Stapa, 2021). In this study, low proficiency refers to the circumstances where students have a low level of understanding of a target language, resulting in the construction of sentences that are unorganised and ungrammatical.

## 1.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduces the study, its background, problem statement, significance, research aims and objectives, research questions, and definitions of key terms. This study aimed to identify challenges faced by the students in constructing simple, compound, and complex sentences, as stated above. Therefore, the results obtained in Chapter 4 are believed to empower students to link different words to form

comprehensible and grammatically correct sentences in academic writing. The chapter focused on the theoretical framework and the literature review.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of scholarship surrounding syntactic errors committed by first-year English major students in the construction of simple, compound, and complex sentences. It synthesises the findings of various researchers and philosophers who have investigated this phenomenon, while also examining the contributory factors that negatively impact students' learning trajectories. Key determinants identified in the literature include an inadequate grasp of syntactic rules, limitations in educational resources, insufficient time allocated to the practice of sentence construction, and the inherent intricacies of grammatical principles.

To interpret these findings, the study adopts Error Analysis (EA) and Grounded Theory (GT) as primary frameworks, offering concise explanations of the diverse L2 errors and their underlying causes. While both frameworks are employed, EA is utilised more extensively due to its specific focus on erroneous data, which optimises time management during data collection and allows for a flexible examination of both intralingual and interlingual errors (Chauke, 2022). The preference for EA in this instance is not intended to undermine the efficacy of GT; rather, EA served as the primary tool for identification. However, GT remained indispensable for the systematic categorisation of error types and the isolation of their root causes, a process that would have been difficult to achieve using EA alone. Ultimately, the combined application of these methodologies ensured the generation of valid and reliable results for this research.

#### 2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Although numerous errors were previously identified in different studies (Mungungu, 2010; Matindike, 2015; Herholdt, 2014; Khalo, 2014; Mtuntum, 2020; Ngcobo, 2020; Sehole, and 2023), the selected students face difficulties in constructing grammatical sentences as presented in Chapter 4. Therefore, this shows that there is a gap of knowledge in sentence composition that should be accounted by the students to produce sentence that are coherent and grammatical in academic writing. Swartz (2021) stated that is worth noting that errors are essential indicators that reveal the

areas where students encounter difficulties. Furthermore, they enable L2 lecturers to identify areas where students require additional support to gain in-depth knowledge of the content being learned (Zhu, 2019). Pule (2025) poses that errors also help the students to gain an in-depth understanding through the corrections they receive from their lecturers or tutors. Therefore, errors in students' written production cannot be ignored.

## 2.2.1 Types of errors

### 2.2.1.1 Punctuation errors

According to Gayi (2025), punctuation marks such as commas (,), full stops (.), semicolons (;), apostrophes ('), exclamation marks (!), etc., play important roles in sentence composition. They enhance readability, separate items in a list, shape sentence structures, clarify meanings, indicate pauses, convey tone and emphasis, and demonstrate command (Ndlovu, 2024). In sentence composition, commas are used with coordinate conjunctions to link two or more independent clauses to form compound sentences (Hadi, 2021; Nejla, 2023). This shows that the correct use of punctuation in sentence composition is important. Therefore, Giacobazzi (2021) states that students should master the functions of various punctuation marks to use them effectively in their sentences and express their ideas clearly.

According to a research study conducted by Martin (2024), which focused on investigating errors in sentence punctuation use by students. It was found that punctuation is particularly challenging for students with low proficiency. It requires students who have high proficiency in it or are more exposed to grammar. The findings revealed that some students, particularly those with limited knowledge of grammar, struggle to determine when and where to use commas, semicolons, full stops, quotation marks, hyphens, exclamation marks, and other forms of punctuation. Due to limited knowledge of punctuation, it has been identified that some of the selected students joined independent clauses using commas to form compound sentences, which is considered a comma splice error.

According to Weiler and Melanie (2014), under normal circumstances, two or more independent clauses should be joined by commas and coordinating conjunctions, such as, and, but, for, or, yet, etc., to form complete, grammatical compound sentences. On the other hand, if the two independent clauses are closely related or

carry related semantic values, semicolons (;) can be used to link the two independent clauses to form complete, meaningful, and grammatical compound sentences (Oetting, 2024). However, Nathania (2023) stated that if students lack knowledge of the basic functions of commas and semicolons, it may be difficult for them to combine independent clauses in a coherent and cohesive manner to form compound sentences.

A study conducted by Permatasari and Yuliasi (2020) showed that the students with low proficiency or limited knowledge inadvertently produce structurally flawed sentences (incorrect word order and lack of correct punctuation), leading to ambiguous interpretations, which sometimes make it difficult for the readers to grasp the intended messages carried by those sentences. Similarly, Pablo and Lasaten (2018) in their study examining common syntactic errors in sentence formation by first-year students of universities' English majors, found that students often construct sentences that lack coherence and exhibit poor punctuation due to a lack of grammatical components, which makes the conveyed messages unclear. Despite the errors committed by students in sentence compositions, Gautam (2019) suggests that most of the time, students face difficulties not only in sentence composition but also in other aspects, such as morphology, phonetics, poetry, short stories, and novels. This indicates that L2 is challenging for some students.

#### 2.2.1.2 Run-on sentences

Run-on errors occur when two or more independent clauses are joined to each other without coordinating conjunctions between the clauses (Jordan, 2022). Karen (2024), Pornthanachotan (2020), Princess and Syarif (2021), Milliams, Bethany, and Betts (2023), and Fransiska (2023) conducted their research studies, focusing on the frequent errors that the students commit during the process of organising words to form sentences. The findings revealed that the most common errors that the students commit are run-on sentences, comma splices, sentence fragments, and fused sentences. Some of the students joined the independent clauses using full stops, which is considered a fragment error.

According to Nkgadima (2022), fragment sentences are sentences that consist of both the subjects and verbs, but do not express complete thoughts to the readers. The results of their studies also posed that other students used commas to link

independent clauses to form compound sentences, which is a common error known as a comma splice. Others fused the independent clauses without coordinating conjunctions, which is a run-on error. In contrast, Nzama (2010) and Swartz (2021) stated that errors in L2 are natural phenomenon that reflect students' limited knowledge towards the target language. He also stated that sometimes L2 lecturer do not give themselves enough time to teach sentence construction. Cohen (2023) argues that the students should rely on their learning than lecturers because they are the ones who are going to sit for examination. Chuene (2024) revealed that lack of resources, poor pedagogical strategies, lack of exposures in, and L1 transfers are some of elements making it difficult for students to construct meaningful grammatical sentences. Sibanda (2020) pointed out that English is complex, particularly to the students in rural universities. In the process of composing sentences, they may commit errors due to insufficient knowledge in syntax.

Mlompart (2023) stated that low-proficiency students find grammar rules difficult. They sometimes construct sentences without adhering to the rules that govern how words should be linked to form grammatical sentences. Kurniasih (2022) states that the students often merged two or more simple sentences without using coordinating conjunctions or semicolons, which is a run-on error. This is because students often struggle to distinguish between subordinate and coordinate conjunctions. Abubakari (2023) reveal that most students know the differences between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, but they have limited knowledge on whether to use the coordinating or subordinating conjunction when combining independent clauses, and with dependent clauses to form compound and complex sentences.

Kherroubi (2023) poses that constructing compound and complex sentences can be challenging for some students, particularly those with low proficiency in grammar, because these types of sentences are composed of the combination of independent and dependent clauses using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, or other forms of connectors. Constructing simple sentences can be easy for both low and high-proficiency students because they normally consist of one or two subjects, one main verb, and one object (Reza and Fakor, 2023). Therefore, it might be difficult for students with low proficiency in grammar to handle run-on errors because they lack knowledge of the correct use of punctuation and grammar rules (Petja, 2023)

Based on the research study conducted by Sundari, Febriyanti and Hendrawats (2017), it was found that some students struggle to construct compound and complex sentences due to a low proficiency in linking independent and dependent clauses. They tend to construct long, illogical sentences by combining independent and dependent clauses without using any form of conjunction or punctuation, which is considered a run-on error. Millies et al. (2024) and Bostanci (2020) added to Febriyanti's and Hendrawats' (2017) statement by posing that students struggle to construct grammatical compounds and complex sentences due to ineffective teaching strategies, a lack of resources, interference from their mother tongue, and the overgeneralization of grammar rules. Louw (2024) and Atas (2019) argue that, since students have smartphones, libraries, and laptops, they simply do not give themselves enough time to study syntax. Munjanja (2025) stated that it is not a matter of students not studying; some students naturally have poor cognitive ability. They hardly master how to combine clauses to form complex and compound sentences while adhering to the correct syntactic rules.

Although students' native languages and poor pedagogical strategies were identified as some of the limiting factors as stated by Millies et al. (2024) and Bostaci (2020) on the above paragraph, one would assume that the students have different proficiency levels in sentence composition as supposed by Mutinta (2022) in the sense that the same teaching strategies used by lecturers to facilitate L2 syntactic lessons can effectively and efficiently work for others. In other words, the students can understand or grasp what they are being taught in class and apply it to their writing, producing grammatical sentences, while others find it difficult to do so. Focusing on the issue of students' mother-tongue (L1) influences, students at the high school level should be aware that there are differences between L1 and L2 sentences, and the same applies to syntactic rules used during the formation process (Mareva, 2016)

First-year university English students effectively link words to form various sentence types in their writing (Ayakoob, 2015; Brenes, 2017; Widhianto, 2022). The findings further showed that some students hardly differentiate between compound and complex sentences, and others lack knowledge of the grammatical rules governing the joining of independent and dependent clauses to form compound and complex sentences. As a result, the students tend to construct long and flawed sentences, which is regarded as an error. Flawed sentences are sentences characterised by poor

punctuation, hence constructed without following syntactic rules, poor alignment of words, and poor cohesion (Hendrawati, 2018; Datchuk and Rodgers, 2019).

Ramadhianti (2023) also conducted a study to investigate the difficulties students face in constructing simple and compound sentences in their academic writing. The finding shows that compound sentences are very challenging for low-proficiency students. The students rarely use subordinate and coordinating conjunctions (such as "nor," "for," "and," "but," "or," "yet," and others) to link simple sentences or independent clauses to form compound sentences. As a result, students combine two or more simple sentences without using coordinating conjunctions or any other connector to link them cohesively and coherently, which is regarded as a run-on error. However, Mera, Gabriel, and Garcia (2022) explained that errors are unavoidable because they reflect areas of difficulty in the learning process. In addition, Rosana, Yamin, and Fatchul (2017) have conducted a study to examine the effect of students' errors on their academic writing. They found that errors indicate low proficiency and competency in the target language, and if the facilitators (teachers and lecturers) cannot address them effectively, students may struggle to write grammatical compound sentences, which is a challenge in academic writing.

Yamin and Fatchul's (2017) statement on the above paragraph, even if the lecturers can spend days and nights correcting or treating all different types of errors being committed by the students in sentence composition, it will be time-consuming because it happens that the students might not be definitely committed to advancing their knowledge in sentence composition (Ratau, 2025). Masito (2019) claims that students should be responsible for acquiring and advancing their knowledge, rather than relying solely on lecturers. Moraka (2024) states that students can visit the library to read grammar books and research papers, or visit academic websites on the internet to search for articles on sentence formation. By doing that, they might gain in-depth knowledge about the syntactic rules required to be followed in sentence compositions.

Another issue is that compound and complex sentences are more complex than simple sentences. They require students to be knowledgeable about the different types of conjunctions and to know when to use them correctly in sentences, as stated by Sari, Syarif, and Amri (2019). Therefore, it might be helpful if the students try their

best to master the structural differences among simple, compound, and complex sentences. By doing so, students may find it easier to join simple sentences or independent clauses to form grammatically compound sentences and complex sentences in academic writing (Madadzhe, 2019)

### 2.2.1.3 Subject-verb agreement errors

Busane (2024) stated that a complete sentence typically consists of three components: the subject, the verb, and the objects. However, Scheumann (2021) argued that other sentences contain only the subject and verb and express complete thoughts to readers. He indicated that subjects perform the actions. In other words, subjects refer to the person or people performing the action. Alternatively, Yusuf (2025) indicated that the functions of the verbs are to express the actions done by the subjects and to show tenses. Mailula (2021) claims that sentences that lack subjects and verbs are incomplete and cannot convey complete and meaningful thoughts.

Ramamala (2002) argues that effective alignment of subjects and verbs is governed by a syntactic rule, subject-verb agreement, which ensures that the subject and verb agree in number. In other words, the plural subjects should correspond with plural verbs, and the singular subjects should be aligned with the singular verbs. For example: *John loves apple*. 'John' is a singular proper noun, and it corresponds with the singular verb 'loves', which is grammatical. However, according to a study conducted by Hardi (2022), some students have difficulty applying the subject-verb agreement rule correctly in sentence composition. They commonly correspond singular subjects with plural verbs, which is ungrammatical because there is no agreement in number between the subjects and verbs.

In addition to Hardi's (2022) claim, Ellis (2022) and Ting and Liu (2023) noted that the subject-verb agreement rule, although seemingly straightforward, poses significant challenges for some students, especially those with limited knowledge of the L2. Therefore, both Ellis (2022) and Hardi (2022) found that low-proficiency students often encounter difficulties in applying the subject-verb agreement rule correctly during sentence composition. Matt (2022) and Nemathithi (2025) argue that the subject-verb agreement rule is easy to understand; students only need to identify whether the subjects are in the plural or singular form to use the correct verb forms. Also argues

that some students do not know verb forms and might hardly assign the correct verbs to the subjects of the sentences.

There are three (3) types of personal pronouns that are commonly used in L2, namely first-person, second-person and third-person (McKinsey, 2023). First-person pronouns are used by writers and speakers to refer to themselves, such as "me," "I," and "we." The second-person pronoun (you) is used when the speaker or writer is addressing another person. Lastly, the third-person pronouns such as "it," "they," "he," and "she" are used to address someone or a group of people. Furthermore, McKinsey (2023) identified that the singular third persons, *such as he, she, and it*, should be corresponded with the singular verbs that come immediately after them in sentences. For example, *He aims to score high marks in Physical Sciences*. The third-person pronoun '*he*' corresponds with the singular verb '*aims*', which is grammatically correct. Sullivan and Waldmann (2019) and Frizelle (2025) clearly indicated that, despite errors in corresponding the personal pronouns with the correct verb form, L2 syntactic rules are too complex for students with limited knowledge of grammar.

Nord (2019) also conducted a study to explore the use of different kinds of persons in sentence composition by first-year L2 major students at universities. He found that most of the students corresponded with the singular first person (I) using singular verbs that end with the suffix 's', which is ungrammatical. For example: *I loves to eat cake*. Bettley (2021) stated that all verbs that should correspond with the first-person pronoun '*I*' should not end with the suffix 's'. However, a research study conducted by Brayan (2023), revealed that the correct use of verb forms in sentences depends on the singularity and plurality of the main subjects, and it requires students who are more exposed or have mastered the subject-verb agreement rule, which ensures that all verbs that correspond with singular first-person '*I*' should not contain the suffix 's' at the end, so that the subject and the verb agree as in the following example '*I love chocolate cake*'.

Brayan's (2023) statement on the above paragraph is clear in the sense that the ability to correspond to the first and third person pronouns with the correct verb forms requires students who have the knowledge of how to correspond the subjects and verbs. If the students still find it difficult to identify that '*he*', '*it*', and '*she*' are singular third-person pronouns while '*I*' is a singular first-person pronoun, they may struggle to

use the correct verb forms which will agree with the above provided pronouns (he, it, and she), which is a challenge in academic writing (Li, 2009). In addition, if students hardly distinguish between plural and singular verb forms, they may sometimes correspond with singular verbs with plural subjects, which is regarded as a subject-verb agreement error (Molin, 20202)

Maldonado (2022) stated that students should occasionally visit the library or explore various websites on the internet to study the relationship between subjects and verbs in sentence composition. It might help them stay awake when aligning singular verbs with singular subjects; the same applies to plural subjects. In some universities, lecturers who teach first-year students also teach second and third-year students (Sidoni, 2021). Therefore, they may not focus more on teaching the subject-verb agreement rule, as there are many topics to be covered within a specified period. It may be beneficial for students to expand their knowledge in sentence composition by reading various books and articles independently (Joseph, 2025). If there is something they do not understand, they may ask for clarity or support from their lecturers. It is wise to encourage students to learn to be independent in their studies. Read different grammar books, use dictionaries, and use slides to acquire knowledge, so that their performance in sentence composition will improve (Merga, 2017). The students will sit the examination, not their lecturers or tutors. If they hardly understand sentence composition and never invest their time in studying, they may fail or perform poorly (Solak, 2014).

#### 2.2.1.4 Errors in using conjunctions

Ligege (2023) states that conjunctions are essential aspects during sentence composition, particularly in compound and complex sentences. It is because they link the independent clauses with each other, or with dependent clauses to form comprehensible compound and complex sentences that are grammatical (Luo, 2022). A study conducted by Pangaribuan (2018) indicated that although conjunctions are important for linking different components of sentences, some students still struggle to use them effectively, combining independent and dependent clauses without using subordinating conjunctions, which is regarded as an error. Others merge the independent clauses without coordinating conjunctions, leading to run-on errors. Julia (2021) stated that the importance of conjunctions in linking clauses is to maintain the

logical flow of ideas. This means that conjunctions are crucial aspects in linking clauses to form well-organised sentences.

Yusti (2022) stated that some students construct long sentences without using any form of conjunction that links words, phrases, or clauses together, while others repeatedly use the same conjunction, such as 'because' and 'but', which is a tautology error. Yusti's (2022) claim is in line with Pangaribuan's (2018) statement, as stated in the above paragraph, because both studies revealed that the students sometimes omit coordinating and subordinating conjunctions when joining clauses to form compound and complex sentences.

Riadi, Nathania, Valentino (2023) and Chen (2024) conducted their studies to examine how the students struggle to use conjunctions in sentence composition. The results revealed that some of the selected students linked independent clauses with coordinating conjunctions, without commas, which is a comma splice. Furthermore, their findings demonstrated that the students with low proficiency commonly struggle to differentiate between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and lack knowledge of when and where to use them. When they link two or more independent clauses, after the first independent clause, they put full stops, followed by the coordinating conjunction 'but', which is ungrammatical. For example, *I am writing a test tomorrow. but I am feeling lazy to study.* Plessis (2010) stated that to effectively link the independent clauses, students should first use commas, followed by coordinating conjunctions such as "for," "and," "or," and "but," among others.

Based on Riadi, Nathania, Valentino's (2023) and Chen' (2024) findings, as stated in the above paragraph, stated that if students want to gain an in-depth understanding of the use of conjunctions, they should allocate sufficient time to study the differences between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and how to use them effectively. Additionally, the students should also study the correct usage of punctuation in sentences. Commas, full stops, apostrophes, semi-colons, colons, etc., play an important role in sentence composition (Rautenbach, 2014). Conjunctions ensure that sentences have logical structures, especially compound and complex sentences (Najat, 2020). In addition, punctuation ensures the logical flow of ideas in sentences and makes them readable.

Coordinating and subordinating conjunctions have different functions in sentence composition (Najafi & Bonn, 2023). Coordinating conjunctions are conjunctions such as *and*, *yet*, *for*, *but*, *yet*, etc., commonly used to join two or more independent clauses of equal value to form compound sentences. On the other hand, subordinating conjunctions are used to link independent and dependent clauses, forming complex sentences (Alli, 2020).

Riadi (2023) proposed that students face difficulties using subordinating conjunctions to link independent and dependent clauses, thereby forming complex sentences. In her study, she identified that some students commonly use the subordinating conjunction '*although*' and the coordinating conjunction '*but*' in the same sentence, which is ungrammatical. It is because these two conjunctions are used to introduce adverbial clauses or dependent clauses in sentences. They are sometimes used to show contrast. For example:

(1) *Although it was raining yesterday, Lucia managed to go to school.*

(2) *Blessing wants to go to Cape Town, but her father does not have enough money for transport and accommodation.*

The following example shows one of the typical errors that the students commit in using the conjunctions '*although*' and '*but*': *Although it was raining yesterday, but we managed to reach at church earlier.* In this example, the subordinating conjunction '*but*' was not supposed to be used after a comma because it makes the sentence ungrammatical. L2 has many conjunctions that the lecturers may find difficult to teach to the students. It is because lecturers have a limited period to cover all aspects of the syllabus. In my opinion, students are expected to have mastered the correct use of both coordinating and subordinating conjunctions at the secondary level. Thus, if the students want to gain understanding of using subordinating and coordinating conjunctions during sentence composition, they can use dictionaries, read grammar articles and books, or visit websites focusing on the effective use of conjunctions.

Riadi stated that if students are struggling to differentiate between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, the possibilities are that they might find it challenging to use subordinating conjunctions to link independent and dependent clauses to form complex sentences. They may also face difficulties using coordinating conjunctions to join independent clauses and form compound sentences, as supported by a study by

Hawa (2019). Conjunctions are essential to sentence construction because they connect words, phrases, and clauses to form sentences that convey complete thoughts (Luo, 2022). Therefore, Kate (2021) poses that without the use of both the coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, it is highly impossible to have compound and complex sentences that are grammatical.

Bostwick (2023) conducted a research study to investigate how students use conjunctions to connect independent clauses to form compound sentences. The findings showed that the students with low proficiency in grammar use coordinating conjunctions only without commas to join independent clauses, which is ungrammatical. This can be shown in the following example:

*The president arrived late yesterday at the parliament and the cabinet was laughing while clapping hands.*

The omission of a comma before the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ may influence the readers to have two or more possible interpretations of this sentence. One would consider that the president and the entire cabinet (stakeholders) arrived late, laughing. Others would consider that the cabinet was laughing in parliament when they saw the president arriving late. Lastly, others may consider that the cabinet was laughing about other issues at the time the president arrived. Both interpretations are correct because the above sentence is ambiguous because of the omission of a comma before the coordinating conjunction ‘and’. If a comma had been introduced immediately before the coordinating conjunction ‘and’, the semantic value of the sentence would be straightforward and understandable to the readers.

#### 2.2.1.5 Misuse of prepositions

According to Chimbeva (2022), prepositions such as at, on, in, above, below, besides, among, and others play important roles in sentence composition by indicating the direction, location, and time in which the events happen. Sometimes they are used to introduce objects in sentences (Jeluso, 2022). However, Shahbon (2022) conducted a study to investigate the challenges that first-year students encounter in using prepositions in sentences. The findings indicated that the students find it challenging to know when to use ‘in’, ‘at’, and ‘on’ in their sentences. For example, *Grade 12 students will be on London this Friday*. Based on this example, ‘London’ is a city; therefore, the preposition ‘at’ was supposed to be used instead of the preposition ‘on’

to specify that 'London' falls under a category of proper nouns, and it is a city, not just any place in general. Despite errors that the students commit in the use of prepositions, Gass et al., (2020) stated prepositions are challenging to most of the students and are sometimes used interchangeably, depending on the situation or circumstances.

A study conducted by Riya and Riry (2020) showed that students lack knowledge of the correct use of prepositions such as "in," "at," "on," and "above." As a result, they sometimes omit them in their sentences, which leads to errors. Malek (2013) claimed that the omission of prepositions sometimes leads to the alteration of the intended messages carried by sentences. For example: *After Millicent has arrived the house of her friend, she asked the drinking water.* The omission of the preposition 'to' after the main verb 'arrived' makes this sentence difficult to interpret in the sense of how someone could carry the house and deliver it somewhere. A study by Bunyelles (2017) identified that students commit prepositional errors in sentence construction because they do not practice or give themselves enough time to study the basic functions of prepositions. Bunyelle's (2017) statement is understandable; however, Gumede, Xulu, and Sithole (2025) stated that it is essential to note that in some instances, students may have four or more modules in one semester. They should balance when studying to ensure that they cover all modules for examination purposes. This simply means that students may not focus too much on studying prepositions.

In most situations, students often align different words properly and apply the correct rules assigned to govern the sentence formation process. However, the challenge that hinders their progress lies in using correct prepositions (Gamariah et al., 2020; Phommavongsa et al., 2021; Agustin and Walandari, 2022). Their studies revealed that students commit errors when they use 'in' in instances where they should use 'on'. They also use 'at' in a place where 'in' should be used, which is an error. The students were identified as having low proficiency in the effective utilisation of prepositions in sentences, which caused them to use incorrect prepositions in their sentences (Wasil & Elaagip, 2021). For example: (1) *I am going in town.* (2) *The book is in the table.* (3) *Kids have gone at school today early in the morning,* (4) *The roots are found above the trees' stems.* These are typical errors that students commit due to misusing prepositions in their sentences.

Mabizela and Bruce (2022) stated that at the tertiary level, students are expected to have a background knowledge of the effective use of different prepositions in sentences. The lecturers have many aspects to teach, except prepositions. Therefore, students should commit themselves to mastering the use of prepositions (Mutanga and Kadyamatimba, 2017). Whenever they face difficulties, they may enquire of their L2 lecturers for assistance or use dictionaries. In doing so, they may gain an in-depth understanding of how prepositions are used to link different sentence components, such as subjects, verbs, and objects.

#### 2.2.1.6 Omission of Prepositions

Setyaningrum (2020) conducted a study focusing on the omission of prepositions in sentence construction by first-year English major students. The results revealed that the omission of prepositions such as 'in', 'on', 'at', 'by', 'to', and 'into' emerges as a serious challenge. In other words, the students sometimes unconsciously construct sentences without considering the use of prepositions, ending up constructing sentences that contain prepositional errors, making those sentences difficult to interpret. I support Setyaningrum's (2020) findings in the sense that sentences without prepositions make it difficult to grasp the intended meanings.

Prepositions perform similar roles as adjectives by providing a direction in which a subject is located, the time at which the scene or event takes place, or the period in which something will take place (Antonio, 2025). Mona (2024) states that the omission of the prepositions is not only considered an error, but it also makes it difficult to interpret the intended messages. For example: *The president Cyril Ramaposa will be Parliment tomorrow to deliver speech for annual budget.* The omission of the preposition 'at' before the common noun '*parliament*' makes the sentences have multiple interpretations. Other readers can assume that the president changes into a human form and becomes a parliamentarian, while others might assume that the president will deliver the speech at the parliament as usual. Both interpretations are acceptable and understandable because the omission of the preposition 'at' makes the above sentence open to multiple interpretations.

Students sometimes omit prepositions in their sentences because they do not give themselves enough time to study the grammar rules required for sentence construction (Alex, 2024). Due to the students' limited knowledge of the basic functions

of prepositions, some students construct sentences that lack prepositions, leading to prepositional error. In contrast, Xenon (2019) stated the art of mastering the effective use of prepositions in sentences requires students who have strong cognitive abilities to know when to use prepositions for direction, time, position, relationship, etc.

The omission of prepositions and the word order system pose challenges in academic writing, especially for students with low proficiency levels (Akbar, 2017). He further indicated that the omission of prepositions such as on, in, to, into, above, below, and beside makes L2 sentences have poor structures. Based on the study conducted by Omenogor (2024), the students lack knowledge of different types of prepositions, their functions, and the places where they should be used in sentences. This statement is in line with Alex (2024) in the above paragraph. Ogude (2021) revealed that the students have been studying word classes, including prepositions, from the primary level; they should have mastered them and be able to use them in their written productions. Kotze (2025) and Baloyi (2025) posed that Akbar's (2017) and Omenogor's (2024) findings are clear; however, the challenge can be that organising words from the beginning of the sentences until the end may require students who will be able to navigate the correct syntactic rules that should be applied. Secondly, the positions and functions of basic sentence components (the subjects, the verbs, and the objects) so that the messages carried by those sentences will be understandable to the readers.

#### 2.2.1.7 Absence of commas after introductory statements

Commas play crucial roles within sentences; they can be used to separate items in a list, applied after introductory statements or phrases, and can also be employed immediately before coordinating conjunctions to join two or more independent clauses to form compound sentences (Usman, 2024). Shona (2019) stated that after the introductory statement, a comma should be used to separate the introductory statement from other parts of the sentence (complement) to avoid an ambiguous statement, which may lead to multiple interpretations by the readers. However, the findings of the research study conducted by Gustico and Magno (2012) revealed that most students commonly merge introductory statements, clauses, or phrases with the rest of the sentences without using a comma, which is ungrammatical. For example, *When Merry went home she found her car stolen*. 'When Merry went home' is an introductory statement that introduces the time when Merry arrived at the place where

she lives. The comma was supposed to be placed immediately after the word 'home'. Wati (2021) responded to Gustico and Magno's (2012) statement that the ability to use a comma after an introductory statement requires students who have mastered the correct use of punctuation marks. Furthermore, students should also know what introductory statements mean.

Commas are used to separate a series of ideas (Nichol, 2023). A study conducted by Criaiker (2022) showed that students with low proficiency in grammar often use commas unnecessarily multiple times in their sentences, which is ungrammatical. For example: *The car, I love the most, will be hired for my cousins', wedding, late this month.* Ryan (2023) stated that sentences containing multiple commas can cause inappropriate pauses and unorganised sentence structures, complicate the flow of ideas, and sometimes make interpretations of those sentences difficult, leading to ambiguous statements. According to Luo (2019), some students, after introducing commas in sentences, begin with capital letters, which are ungrammatical. Basically, Kate (2018) stated that words that start with a capital letter after a comma should be proper nouns or abbreviations. Behrens and Susan (2024) revealed that students sometimes use a full stop after an introductory statement instead of a comma, which is considered a fragment error. For example, *although twenty soldiers have been rescued from being killed. approximately 10 of them were already injured.*

#### 2.2.1.8 Possession errors

Based on the research study conducted by Marianus, Maximilianus, and Fransiskus (2024), it was found that showing possession appears to be difficult for most students. These researchers posited that some students, especially those with low IQ (Intelligence Quotient), sometimes get confused about when to use an apostrophe and 's' to indicate possession, and when to use an apostrophe alone to indicate possession. Caufield (2023) stated that students do not prioritise studying punctuation when studying L2, as there are many aspects that they should study, such as morphology, phonetics, novels, and short stories. Alfariha (2024) argues that regardless of multiple aspects to be taught in L2, the effective use of punctuation marks remains significant as they ensure the logical flow of ideas and well-organised sentences.

The following sentences reflect the difficulties faced by the students in showing possession: (i) *This is a Marvis car* (no apostrophe and addition of 's' on 'Marvis'), (ii) *The apple in the refrigerator belongs to Martin's* ( no need to add apostrophe and 's' on 'Martin' because 'belongs' shows possession), (iii) *My uncle car involved in accident last year* (absence of addition of apostrophe followed by suffix 's' on common 'uncle' to show possession). Matambirofa (2000) stated that although students have varying proficiency levels and knowledge of showing possession when constructing sentences, using an apostrophe to indicate possession appears relatively easy.

Denovan (2023) posed that in situations where the nouns end with the consonant 's', students can be confused on whether they should use the apostrophe alone or are required to add an apostrophe followed by the suffix 's'. This can be so challenging for most students with limited knowledge of using punctuation. This is because the students will, therefore, be required to navigate when to use an apostrophe and where they should use it with the suffix 's'.

According to Albert (2024), when showing a possession in a sentence, the apostrophe should be added to the word that expresses ownership, followed by the suffix 's', only when the word is in singular form and does not end with 's'. For example: *This is a John's car*. Furthermore, Trusler (2024) stated that if a word showing possession ends with 's', the students may simply add an apostrophe to show possession, as in the example: *Chris' daughter has been nominated as the best student in Mathematics*. In some situations, when the noun ends with 's', the apostrophe is required to be added and preceded by another additional 's' (Cox, 2022). For example, *Chris's house has been sold at the lowest price because he did not pay SARS for the past six months*.

Based on the findings of Denovan (2023) and Marianus, Maksimilianus, and Fransiskus (2024), students often face difficulties in knowing when to use an apostrophe alone and where to use it with the suffix 's'. Gayi' 2025 concern is that the students have been learning punctuation for many years, from primary level to tertiary level. They were supposed to have mastered how to correctly use an apostrophe and the suffix 's' to show possession. Since the use of apostrophes and 's' seems to be challenging for most students, as indicated by various researchers ( Denovan ,2023; and Marianus, Maksimilianus, and Fransiskus, 2024; Albert, 2024; Cox, 2022),it important to indicate that the students should try to use alternative styles to show

possessions as in the following examples: (i) *This book **belongs** to Merry.* (ii) *Albert is the **owner** of this book.* (iii) *This homework book is **owned** by Merry.*

Sing (2006) stated that the issue of using apostrophes to show possessions in sentences can sometimes be difficult, especially for low proficiency students, because it is not the instances where an apostrophe (') should be used with the suffix 's' to show possessions. Based on Denovan's (2023) findings on the above paragraph, I can conclude that demonstrating possession is challenging for students with limited knowledge. It requires students who have in-depth knowledge or high proficiency in L2 so that they will be able to navigate the proper places and circumstances where they should use an apostrophe alone, and where they must use an apostrophe and the addition of the suffix 's' to express the possessions. Knowledge of possession can be acquired using grammar books, slides that focus on sentence formation, or online lessons.

#### 2.2.1.9 Errors in plural form

The ability to change irregular common nouns from singular to plural form is a challenge for students, particularly those with low proficiency in a second language (L2) (Stein, 2022). The findings revealed that the students have overgeneralised that most of the L2 singular nouns should be attached with the suffix 's' at the end to be in plural form, which is correct, but there are exceptions. According to Charles et al. (2020), regular singular nouns commonly require the addition of the suffix 'ies', 's', and 'es' to be in plural form. In contrast, irregular singular verbs change spellings only. A study by Fanani and Fatholi (2021) showed that the students tend to add the suffix 's' and 'es' to the singular irregular nouns that only change vowels and consonants to be in plural form such as *man-men, toot-teeth, mouse-mice, woman-men, foot-feet, phenomenon-phenomena, etc.*

Reed (2022) indicated that students often get confused about when to add the suffixes 'ses', 's', and 'ies' to change singular regular nouns to their plural forms. Due to students' limited knowledge in converting singular regular nouns to plural form, they sometimes add the suffix 'ies' on instances where they should add 's'. Alternatively, where they should add the suffix 'ses', they add 'ies'. The following are some of the typical errors that the students certainly commit: (1) *Most of South African companis are poor due to high level of corruption among their stakeholders,* (2) *All my*

toothbrushies are no longer good enough to be used, (3) *Joseph babis were found dead after the collision of his private car with the truck.*

Kgosana (2005) posed that the process of changing singular regular nouns to plural forms may require students with advanced knowledge to be able to negate nouns that should be attached with the suffix 's', 'es', and 'ies' to be in plural form. The findings of Stein (2022) and Reed (2022) make it clear that converting nouns from singular to plural is a challenging task for most students, especially those with low proficiency in English. I agree with their findings because if the students hardly navigate when to use the prefix 's', 'ies', and 'es', it might be sometimes difficult for them to convert nouns that they are not sure which suffix among 's', 'ies', or 'es' should be added to change them from singular to plural state. However, Fazel (2025) states that students are determined and committed to mastering this convention process, seeking help from their lecturers, visiting different internet websites that focus on irregular and regular nouns, and using dictionaries, they may gradually gain in-depth knowledge on how to change regular and irregular singular nouns to their plural forms.

#### 2.2.1.10 Errors in using first-person and reflexive pronouns

According to Porkaew (2025), a complete sentence commonly consists of the subject, verb, and object. Huang (2025) argues that some sentences (intransitive) only include the subjects and verbs, but do not have the objects that receive the actions done by the subjects. Norris (2020) states that the subjects of the sentences can be proper nouns, common nouns, or pronouns, depending on the context being studied. Tyler (2021) claims that the role of the subject is to perform the action or state of being within a sentence. On the other hand, other sentences consist only of subjects and verbs, without direct objects that receive the actions performed by the subjects; hence, they are grammatical and convey complete, meaningful messages to the reader (Sossaman, 201). This statement is in line with Huang' (2025) claim.

Rabecca (2021) and Marvin (2021) conducted their studies focusing on how the students use the pronouns in their sentences. They found that some students hardly understand the relationship between nouns and pronouns. The results revealed that students sometimes tend to write personal pronouns such as *he, she, they, him*, etc., immediately after the proper nouns, which is considered an appositive error. For example, *My brother he is married to a white man.* However, Caulfield (2022) states

that placing a pronoun immediately after a noun is regarded as a redundancy error. A study by revealed that the act of writing a proper noun, followed by its pronoun in a sentence, is ungrammatical because a pronoun stands in the place of a noun to avoid repeating the same noun multiple times, which is regarded as a tautology error.

A study conducted by Lumentut and Lengkoan (2021) indicated that grammar is difficult for most students. It is because it encompasses a lot of rules, which students find difficult to master all at once. Furthermore, although the use of nouns and pronouns may seem straightforward, other students sometimes misuse them during sentence composition, leading to errors. Lumentut and Lengkoan's (2021) statement is clear; however, it is important to also indicate that at the university level, the students are expected to align the nouns and pronouns in coherent and cohesive manners to produce sentences that are grammatical and meaningful, as stated by Maillart (2019). Therefore, Jake (2021) states that students should master the use of nouns and pronouns in sentences to avoid errors.

According to Nokas (2021), placing first-person (*I*) and reflexive pronouns (*myself*, *himself*, *herself*, *themselves*) next to each other in the same sentence is ungrammatical, and it is a redundancy error. Andrew (2022) also conducted a study to examine how students use first-person and reflexive pronouns in their sentences. The finding revealed that some students lack the knowledge that '*I*' and '*myself*' are first-person pronouns that represent the person speaking in the moment. For example, *I myself will visit my grandmother tomorrow*. Hussein (2024) stated that mastering the use of personal pronouns such as "he," "she," "they," "we," and "myself" is simple, but may require students who are familiar with grammar books. Amart (2024) Argues that that it is not about mastering the use of pronouns in sentence construction, the students should also be able to differentiate between first, second, and third person pronouns because they are the ones that are commonly used as the subjects of sentences Durham (2024) clearly indicated that the students were expected to have mastered using the first person '*I*' and the reflexive pronoun '*myself*' in sentences during their secondary education.

#### 2.2.1.11 Redundancy errors

Redundancy is a broad term referring to the unnecessary repetition of the same aspect (Trypke, Albers, Stebner, Wirth & Plass, 2023). In L2, redundancy/tautology is when a

word, phrase, clause, or sentence is repeated many times (Nordquist, 2019). In compound or complex sentences, when the subject of a sentence is a proper noun and is mentioned in the independent clause, it is often substituted by its pronoun in the dependent clauses to avoid redundancy errors (Caulfield, 2022 and Depraetere and Langford, 2020). For example, *Abraham failed to go to university because he did not have money for registration*. According to the study conducted by Mahowald (2023), most of the students with low proficiency certainly repeat the same multiple times, which is considered as a redundancy error (Mahowald, 2023). For example, *The students failed English in term 2 because the students did not study*. Therefore, to avoid repeating the noun 'students' unnecessarily, the sentence can be constructed as follows: *The students failed English in Term 2 because they did not study*. Wieben (2019) and Yang (2021) found that students sometimes place two or more words with the same semantic value in a sentence, which is ungrammatical and constitutes a tautology.

Leszczynski (2022) conducted a study to investigate how students use articles in sentences. He found that the students face challenges in using the definite article '*the*'. The results further revealed that the students often lack the knowledge of when and where to use the definite article '*the*' to the extent that they repeat it unnecessarily, which is a tautology error. Tshimbeva (2022) pointed out clearly that most students have mastered that '*an*', '*a*', and '*the*' are all articles, but some of them find it difficult to use them correctly in their sentences. For example: *The school will reopen on the Monday of the 20<sup>th</sup> and all students are required to come with their parents who take of them*. The repetition of '*the*' in students' sentences is an error.

According to Ryan (2022), the definite article '*the*' is commonly used in sentences to describe, modify, or introduce a noun. Furthermore, Rongione (2024) posited that the definite article '*the*' is used to introduce a noun that is already known by the reader or listeners. Sometimes '*the*' is used to refer to the specific person, place, idea, or time (Koonig, 2018). Ndou (2021) stated that the students need to strongly visit library or different internet websites that describe in detail the functions of definite article '*the*' and indefinite articles respectively in the sense that in most cases, the sentences that contain many unnecessary '*the*' are not readable, not organised, poor flow of ideas, and sometimes the messages being conveyed might be difficult to be interpreted or tend to be ambiguous.

### 2.2.1.12 Omission errors

Omission refers to the situation in which certain basic sentence components are missing, leading to errors (Zulfaiaiti, 2021). Essentially, prepositions, verbs, articles, nouns, and other word classes play significant roles in sentence composition because they ensure that words are connected coherently and cohesively to convey complete and meaningful messages to readers (Beare, 2024). Yogyakarta (2020) conducted a study to identify the most frequent omission in word classes by the students. The findings reveal that the most omitted elements by students were subjects (nouns), verbs, articles, and prepositions. The findings revealed that the students have low proficiency levels in using verbs, nouns, adjectives, articles, and other grammatical elements, as well as understanding how they should be used in sentences. () argues that students certainly find it difficult to identify all word classes and their basic functions in sentences, to the extent that they sometimes unconsciously omit some, leading to errors. For example: (1) *Merry is home* (omission of the preposition 'at'), (2) *The Minister of Health did not the meeting yesterday* (omission of main verb 'attend'), (3) *Always feel tired in class* (omission of the subject), (4) *Water substance that no smell, color, and test* (omission auxiliary verbs 'is' and 'does').

In my understanding, in some instances the omission of prepositions and articles can alter the intended meaning, as in the first example in the above paragraph. Based on the first example in the above paragraph, one might ask how it is possible for a human being to be at home in the sense that the word '*home*' commonly refers to a place where people live with their family members. If students can be more committed and invest most of their time in mastering word classes and their functions, they may be able to use them effectively in their sentences, which may reduce errors in the omission of verbs, nouns, articles, etc. Reading grammar books or articles that focus on word classes can help students obtain an in-depth understanding of how they should be used in sentences and when to use them. Students who are more committed and willing to improve their sentence construction and sentence functions may perform better in sentence composition, resulting in well-organised and grammatical sentences.

However, Rahmawelly (2019) stated that it is normal for students to commit errors in sentence formation because they are still learning the language, and it is not their

native language. Dewi and Sonya (2023) argue that at some point, students should strive to improve and develop themselves because, at the tertiary level, they are expected to construct well-structured sentences to express their ideas.

Under normal circumstances, the subject of the sentence is considered the major component because it is the one performing the action or state of being (Devilin, 2024). If the sentence is composed of two or more clauses that are linked together by the subordinating or coordinating conjunctions, the name of the person performing the action should not be repeated in the second clause; as it appears in the first clause, it should be substituted by its pronoun (Edwin, 2021). A study by Amjad (2024) shows that students with low proficiency in the functions of basic sentence components, such as the subject, verb, and objects, sometimes omit the pronouns that substitute proper nouns, which makes their sentences poorly structured and ambiguous, leading to pronoun omission errors. For example: *Devine did not come yesterday because sick*. The omission of the pronoun 'he' in the given example makes the sentence not clear, and one would ask if 'Devine' is a male or female person.

According to Mara and Marco (2019), omitting pronouns in sentences can make it difficult for readers to grasp the intended message. At the university level, students are expected to understand that, in complex and compound sentences, when the subject is a noun and has been mentioned in a first clause, it is often replaced by its pronoun in the second clause (Caulfield, 2022). Andi, Abbas, and Muhammad (2022) posited that although third-person pronouns appear to be simple for most of the students, some of them often unconsciously omit them in their sentences, which is an error.

Mara and Casentinii (2019) stated that if students are still omitting third-person pronouns, which are simple to understand, it is likely that they may struggle to effectively use other types of pronouns, such as demonstrative, reflexive, interrogative, relative, and possessive pronouns. Tsotesi (2023) argued that students have been learning parts of speech from the primary level; they are supposed to have mastered them at the university level.

### 2.2.1.13 Misuse of interrogative pronouns

There are different types of pronouns, as I indicated in the above paragraph, such as first-person pronouns, interrogative pronouns, possessive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, reflexive pronouns, intensive pronouns, and impersonal pronouns. Ryan (2022) conducted a study to explore how students use the interrogative pronouns such as '*whom*' and '*who*'. The findings revealed that students commonly use the pronoun '*whom*' in situations where the subject is performing an action, which is regarded as an error. For example, *Joyce is a girl whom she loves to eat Pizza during the weekend*. The use of the interrogative pronoun '*whom*' and the unnecessary application of the person pronoun '*she*' immediately after the interrogating pronoun can make the readers suspicious if the students are at the tertiary level, because such a typical error reflects their incompetence and limited knowledge towards the exposure in L2 as well as the sentence formation process. stated that although students have different cognitive levels in learning L2 and varying proficiency levels, it is their responsibility to master different types of pronouns and how to use them during sentence composition. Ruano et al. (2021) argue that many aspects should be taught in L2, except for pronouns; therefore, it would be time-consuming if lecturers focused solely on helping students master the use of pronouns in sentences.

Mettee, Bonn and Batts (2023) and Wad (2024) maintained that '*who*' and '*whom*' are all interrogative pronouns, and they perform different assignments in sentences. They stated that the pronoun '*Who*' is commonly used when the subject of the sentence is at the beginning of the sentence (subjective case). In addition, Wad (2024) posited that the interrogative pronoun '*who*' can also be used in a sentence in instances of asking questions. In other words, the pronoun '*Whom*' is used when the subject is near or at the end of the sentence (objective case), receiving the action done by the subject. Yuliana et al. (2023) stated that some students often commit errors in their sentences by misusing these two pronouns, resulting in sentences that contain errors. Elana and Roumyana (2019) stated that it might be beneficial for students to read and master this rule, enabling them to use interrogative pronouns correctly when constructing sentences.

#### 2.2.1.14 Incorrect verb tenses and forms

Verbs are words or groups of words that show the actions or state of being in sentences (Nordquist, 2020). In other words, verbs show the actions performed by the subjects in sentences. Verb tenses play essential roles in sentences by determining the time, seasons, periods, and years of actions (Gunner, 2023). According to her, there are three main verb tenses: the present tense, the past tense, and the future tense. She states that the present tense focuses on the action happening at the time of speaking, while the past tense focuses on events or actions that have already occurred in the past.

The future tense indicates actions that will happen in the future. A study conducted by Richard (2019) and Herewati (2020) focused on the use of verb tenses by students in sentence composition. The findings revealed that some students unconsciously shift from one verb tense to another within a sentence unnecessarily, which is ungrammatical and constitutes a verb inconsistency error. In other words, in simple past tense sentences, students sometimes mix verbs in the past perfect tense with those in the present tense, which can make it difficult for readers to grasp the intended message (Henning, 2013). Njemanze and Abana (2023) added that the students, especially the ones with low proficiency in grammar often struggle to define verb tenses and having limited knowledge on the functionality of verb tenses, forms, and positions during sentence composition, making them to unconsciously use incorrect verb forms as in the following complex sentence: *My principal went to Durban last week and he **buy** two new Physical Sciences books while the students **are** enjoy travelling and seeing beautiful areas.*

According to Bram (2018), shifting from past to present tense does not necessarily indicate a lack of L2 knowledge; rather, it indicates that students should work hard on their studies to master the past, present, and future tenses to advance their knowledge in sentence composition. Despite the challenges that students face in using correct verb tenses in their sentences, Dalton (2023) notes that L2 is a complex language with grammatical rules that can be challenging for low-proficiency students. She also maintained that the correct use of tenses in sentences requires knowledgeable and sophisticated students, those who are always conscious of shifting between verb tenses, and who have advanced knowledge to differentiate between the present simple, present continuous, present perfect, and present perfect continuous. The

same applies to both the future and past tense. Bukiti (2020) states that some of the students have the perception that tenses are too difficult to master.

Most students know the basic structures of simple, compound, and complex sentences; however, the challenge lies in using incorrect verb tenses and word order (Kraichoke, 2017). The findings revealed that the students use verbs in the present form in sentences that are in the past tense form, which is ungrammatical and can often confuse readers in grasping the intended message. For example: *Yesterday I buy Kota for me and my friends*. Students sometimes fail to use the correct verb tenses and forms in their sentences because of not having enough time to study verb tenses (Caleffi, 2023). Despite numerous verb inconsistency errors committed by the students, Kit (2022) stated that verb tenses are challenging and require considerable effort to master, enabling them to use them correctly in sentences. Therefore, I cannot firmly say that the students do not study grammar books or are not serious in mastering verb tenses because the correct use of tenses requires deep understanding and sophisticated minds capable of shifting from present to past tense state, and vice versa, as stated by (Binti, Monib & Nijat, 2020; Sabra, 2020)

The research studies conducted by Dana and Ayda (2013), and Kate (2023) identified that most of the students have high proficiency in constructing simple present, simple past tense, and simple future tense. However, some students often use verbs in the past tense form in present simple and compound sentences, which is considered a verb inconsistency error (Hawazen, 2024). Essentially, sentences in the past tense focus on events, scenes, or actions that have already occurred, meaning the verbs used must be in past tense forms. Both Kate (2023), Ayada (2013), Muhajir and Sulaiman (2019), Demneri (2024), Farhanah, Hadi, Afifah, Shahrudin (2024), and Ejona (2024) placed an emphasis that the correct use of verb tenses is striking most of the students because it requires students who are familiar with grammar or at least have background knowledge about it. Permatasari and Yuliasri (2020) argued that students not only face challenges with verb tenses but also encounter difficulties with appropriate lexical choice, incorrect verb forms, ambiguous statements, and the addition of unnecessary verbs.

Based on the findings of Permatasari and Yuliasri (2020), students generally have low proficiency in L2 because the use of lexical choices and ambiguous statements does

not fall under the category of syntax, which primarily focuses on sentence composition. If these aspects were part of syntax, it would be clear that sentence construction is difficult for the students. Therefore, this simply means that students find English difficult for them, either because it is a foreign language, due to the complexity of the grammar rules, or for other reasons.

The syntactic rules primarily govern the linking of words, phrases, and clauses to form meaningful sentences in academic writing (Gupta, 2023). Additionally, they maintain the connectedness and logical flow of ideas within sentences. However, Ramli (2020) conducted a study to investigate the difficulties first-year students commonly face in applying syntactic rules in sentence composition. The findings revealed that incorrect application and misuse of syntactic rules, such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions, pose a major challenge for students in the academic discipline. In contrast, Theodora (2020) in his study, which focused more on the violation of syntactic rules, found that students commonly commit errors regardless of their age and educational levels. This is because the syntactic rules are challenging for some students, particularly those with limited knowledge of grammar. Narciss (2024) states that errors are part of the learning process, and that when addressed effectively, students may gain a deeper understanding of how to group words to form meaningful, grammatically correct sentences while adhering to the assigned syntactic rules.

#### 2.2.1.15 Personal pronouns errors

The students find it difficult to use the reflexive pronoun '*myself*' and the first-person singular pronoun '*I*' correctly in their sentences (Albert, 2021). Some students place the first-person pronoun '*I*' and the reflexive pronoun '*myself*' next to each other in their sentences, which is ungrammatical. The students start by placing the first person '*I*' and then follow it with '*myself*', which makes their sentences not well-organised. For example: *I myself want to go to the river to bath*. Laura (2024) added that in some circumstances, the students start with the reflexive pronoun '*myself*' and then place the first-person pronoun '*I*' when constructing sentences, which is considered an error as in the following example: *Myself, I need to drink grape cool drink*.

Nick (2022) stated that if the first-person pronoun '*I*' is used as the subject of a sentence, it performs the action of that sentence. Therefore, it is not allowed to place

the reflexive pronoun *'myself'* next to the first-person pronoun *'I'* because it is considered a redundancy error (Caulfield, 2023). He stated that the students have been learning L2 for many years; they were supposed to have mastered different types of pronouns and their functions in sentences.

#### 2.2.1.16 Errors in using articles

Articles are words that indicate whether the nouns are general or specific in sentences (Muhammad Ova, 2023). According to Eiselen (2016), *'The'* is a definite article which is commonly placed before a noun known by the reader, while *'a'* and *'an'* are all indefinite articles. *'a'* is used before a noun or any word that starts with the consonant sound, whereas *'an'* is positioned before a noun that begins with the vowel or vowel sound (Langa, 2020). Hanafiah (2019) conducted a study examining how students use articles in their sentences. The finding shows that the students sometimes get confused about when to use the indefinite articles *'a'* and *'an'* in their sentences. Some of them use the indefinite article *'a'* before nouns that start with a vowel sound, which is ungrammatical.

Some students keep repeating the definite article *'the'* many times unnecessarily, which is considered a tautology error (Tikhonova, Mezentseva & Kasatkin, 2024). In the above paragraph, the students were found to struggle in using the reflexive and first-person pronouns. In this paragraph, Hanafiah (2019), Ozkayaran (2020), and Tikhonova, Mezentseva, and Kasatkin (2024) indicated that the students faced difficulties in using articles. Based on the data presented by the above researchers, students have limited knowledge in the use of articles, which becomes a challenge when they construct sentences, as they tend to misuse them, leading to errors. Robert (2017) stated that It is advisable that students study grammar books, articles, or a dictionary to master how to use the articles correctly, as lecturers may find it time-consuming to place more emphasis on the correct use of articles in sentences.

A study conducted by Bakri (2023) revealed that the students sometimes forget that the indefinite article *'an is not limited to be used before nouns that begin with a vowel; it can also be used before any noun or word that starts with a vowel sound, such as 'honours, hour, honest. etc. Basically, 'honours' is a common noun it begins with the consonant 'h', which is pronounced as a vowel (Khamis, 2023). Therefore, the indefinite article 'an' should be used before the noun 'honours' instead of 'a'. According*

to Ekiert (2021), most of the students, particularly the ones having low proficiency in grammar, have mastered that the indefinite article 'an' should be used before any noun that begins with a vowel or vowel sound. Therefore, the findings of Hanafiah (2019) and Bakri (2023) are similar because they both revealed that the students hardly know when and where to use the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an'.

The correct use of articles in sentences commonly requires students who have mastered parts of speech, so that they can link them with other words in a cohesive and coherent manner (Adelaide, 2024). According to her, the students unconsciously omit the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' in their sentences, which sometimes affects semantic value of the sentences. For example: *Robert is garden boy, and he specialises with sweet-potatoes, onions, tomatoes and other.* The omission of the indefinite article 'a' before the common noun 'garden' can lead the reader to have an assumption that 'Robert' is a garden, not a human being. My point of view is that the omission of articles can be addressed or minimised if students can read books, journal articles, or research studies that focus on the correct usage of articles, as well as use dictionaries or consult designated lecturers.

Cook (2016) posited that If students can fold their hands and never take any action to improve their ability to use articles correctly in sentences, the possibility is that omission errors will continue to occur, which may lead to poor performance in syntax. At the tertiary level, students are expected to possess advanced knowledge to construct various sentence types, including simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences, which are grammatically correct (Fitria, 2022). Therefore, the students use available resources to master how these types of sentences are effectively constructed, so that their ideas in a written production will be clear and understandable.

## 2.2.2 Causes of errors

### 2.2.2.1 Lack of resources

Lack of resources refers to the scarcity of study materials that are essential for effective learning and teaching, leading to students' poor performance in academic writing (Maffea, 2020). According to Damaiyanti (2021), there are two types of factors that limit students from constructing logical and grammatical sentences, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors within students themselves include

anxiety, lack of confidence, lack of seriousness, inadequate study habits, and limited proficiency (Respati et al., 2022). In contrast, external factors are the negative influences beyond students' abilities in learning L2, such as a scarcity of resources (books, dictionaries, slides, computers, smartphones, etc.), limited libraries, L1 influences, the complexity of syntactic rules, inadequate pedagogical strategies, etc. (Ren, 2023).

According to a study conducted by Ramesh (2024), a lack of resources, including advanced books, dictionaries, articles, smartphones, computers, and tablets, is one of the factors contributing to students' difficulties in learning L2 effectively. As a result, students sometimes produce sentences that contain several grammatical errors, such as subject-verb agreement, comma splices, redundancy, etc. This is because the students do not have advanced grammar books that they can use to study different types of sentences, their structures, and the syntactic rules required to be followed. Both Ramesh (2024) and Respati et al. (2022) identified similar factors hindering students from obtaining in-depth knowledge in sentence composition.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most South African universities have libraries that provide free access to computers, as well as numerous hard copies and online articles focusing on sentence composition. In my understanding, students may not have enough time to study grammar books, or they find sentence composition so challenging, as L2 is not their native language. At some point, some students may have limited knowledge, while others have low proficiency in sentence construction, which may be one of the reasons they struggle to organise different words into grammatical and meaningful sentences. Gabriel (2020) proposed that most universities have resources, including books and computers, that help students obtain a high-quality education. Based on his findings, carelessness, poor cognitive abilities in mastering grammatical rules, and a lack of practice are major limiting factors that cause students to commit errors.

In my understanding, Gabriel (2020), Ren (2023), Respati et al. (2022) mentioned different factors causing the students to be proficient in L2; however, it is wise to also indicate that many universities today have libraries that encompass so many books that the students can use to advance their knowledge in syntax. The students also have access to smartphones and computers, which they can use to browse online articles, slides, and other resources that focus on sentence composition. Failing to

construct simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatical is often considered a sign of laziness or a lack of seriousness, despite the availability of many resources in universities. Another point to consider is that some students lack access to grammar books, advanced smartphones, or computers.

Other students do not have full access to internet websites that focus on sentence formation, but they are performing wonderfully, and they can even construct complex-compound sentences with ease, going beyond simple, compound, and complex sentences. I believe that strong determination, combined with a thorough understanding of the grammatical rules required for sentence formation and extensive study of sentence structure, can help students achieve a high proficiency level in sentence composition.

#### 2.2.2.2 Limited exposure in L2

Atashian and Al-Bahri (2018) conducted a study to investigate why students struggle to construct L2 sentences, despite being proficient in their L1 sentences. The finding indicated that L1 is simple for most of the students, while L2 is sometimes too difficult because it is a foreign language to them. Furthermore, the finding also posited that writing is too difficult for students, especially those with low proficiency, due to their limited exposure (low level of familiarity) in L2 and poor mastery of grammatical rules, leading to the construction of ungrammatical sentences. Based on my opinion, sometimes the students can read grammar books a lot or be extensively exposed to L2, but the challenge could be that the students may find some of the rules so difficult to understand, and the possibility is that they may fail to apply them in their sentences correctly, which may lead to errors. I think it is beneficial for students to be more exposed to grammar to understand it, rather than reading a book like a flowing river without grasping the grammatical rules they should follow when constructing sentences to convey logical and meaningful messages to the reader.

#### 2.2.2.3 Transfer

Noursi (2018) and Cole (2024) conducted research studies to investigate the common factors that hinder students from constructing grammatically and meaningfully structured sentences. Their findings show that sometimes lecturers and teachers use students' L1 in class when facilitating L2 lessons with the intention of easing the content being learned by the students. As a result, students tend to be in a comfort

zone and rely more on their L1 grammar (syntax rules and sentence structure formats) to compose L2 sentences, which often consist of many errors due to the variation between L1 and L2 grammar. In addition, Ammar, Lightbown, and Spada (2010) stated that when L1 grammatical rules are transferred into L2 during the sentence construction process, they sometimes become harmful because L1 and L2 are two different languages, and their rules are, of course, different. However, Lago et al. (2020) claim that certain L1 rules can be applied in L2 without causing any harmful effects. In contrast, others cannot be transferred into L2 because they cause errors. From my point of view, students who have been learning L2 for a long period should have recognised that there is a significant gap in structural variation between L1 and L2, as well as in their grammatical rules. It would be beneficial if students could rely more on L2 grammatical rules to construct L2 sentences without relying too heavily on their L1 aspects.

#### 2.2.2.4 Distinct cognitive abilities

Ramesh (2024) and Alfaki (2015) conducted their research studies to identify the causes of error in students' written sentences. The findings revealed that students' cognitive limitations, poor teaching methods used by L2 facilitators in teaching syntax, language contact (L1 and L2), and insufficient exposure to L2 are some of the contributing factors influencing students' errors in sentence construction. A study by Mustafa et al. (2019) shows that students with limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar are the ones who experience difficulties in constructing meaningful and grammatical sentences. It is because they focus more on passing the messages to the readers without prioritising the correct structure of their sentences, also paying attention to the application of the grammatical rules.

Students differ in nature; their cognitive abilities also vary, with differing Intelligence Quotient (IQ) levels, and their learning abilities differ (Heliyon, 2024). In other words, students learn differently, and the ways in which they use their minds to learn L2 are different from one another. A study conducted by Zhang (2023) shows that the students with limited cognitive abilities in L2 sentences often struggle to link different words to sentences that are logical and grammatical, while others have limited knowledge in the correct use of grammatical rules that they should use during the formation, particularly in compound and complex sentences. Therefore, both Heliyon (2024) and Zhang (2023) found that students' cognitive abilities differ, they possess

varying background knowledge, and their approaches to learning L2 are distinct. Their findings are understandable in the sense that some students find it easier to construct L2 sentences, while others find it difficult to do so. However, in academic writing, the students are required to construct sentences that are grammatical and express complete thoughts to the readers. The examiners do not consider the mental states of the students towards sentence composition; they need students' works that are in line with their memorandums. Therefore, students should study hard to master the composition of simple, compound, and complex sentences.

#### 2.2.2.5 Lack of practice

According to Wilson (2014), students commit errors in sentence construction because they do not give themselves enough time to study grammar books, which focus on how words are effectively organised to form meaningful sentences. According to Sarah (2019), reading books, journal articles, or slides written by other scholars may empower and improve students' knowledge, enabling them to link different words to form comprehensible sentences. However, this requires a significant amount of time and effort. I cannot firmly agree that knowledge can be acquired or accumulated only through reading grammar books, slides, or journal articles, because some students gain knowledge in sentence composition through television programs, communication, class lessons, or face-to-face consultations with their lecturers, as stated by Gobena (2022). Another point to consider is that the students have been learning L2 since primary school. They were supposed to have mastered the rules for sentence formation, but they are not taking their studies seriously.

The lack of practice in applying syntactic rules and different sentence structures, a negative perception of learning an L2, and a lack of familiarity with L2 contexts often lead students to commit errors when constructing sentences in their writing (Mohamad, 2023). Based on Mohamad's (2023) findings, the ability to practice grammatical rules and construct meaningful sentences correctly may depend on the time students have, the activities they engage in daily, and their understanding of syntactic lessons. Some students may not have enough time to focus on mastering grammar rules and sentence composition because they might have other stressful modules that require attention. Thus, time may significantly impact the progress of students in academic writing. Lastly, other students may have many activities to handle

within a limited period, such as cooking, washing, cleaning, attending entertainment events, and travelling, which can delay their studying and lead to poor performance.

#### 2.2.2.6 Low proficiency level

The study conducted by Erikson (2024) to investigate students' proficiency level in L2 based on word class conversion and sentence construction shows that most students lack the knowledge that a one-word class can sometimes be converted and used in different word classes, just like the word '*open*', which can be used as a verb, adjective, noun, and adverb. He also found that some students possess knowledge of certain words that can be used in different word classes, but the problem arises when they attempt to convert those words, leading to more errors in their sentences. For example, *I open discussed the issue of water scarcity with the Minister yesterday*. The student was supposed to add 'ly' to convert the word '*open*' from a verb form to an adverb. In this situation, I do not blame the students for their inability to convey one word class to another class, because if they are unfamiliar with different word classes, it may be difficult for them to transition from one word class to another.

Tati (2016), Kenanidis et al (2024), and Latief (2014) conducted research studies to explore how students organise different word classes in their writing to build different types of sentences. They found that the students know various words and the meanings attached to those words but still struggle to combine different words to form phrases, clauses, and sentences due to low proficiency level in sentence composition. Dang (2020) also conducted a study to investigate contributing factors in students' difficulties in sentence construction. He found that students have poor linguistic competency towards the target language.

Some students learned L2 as their first additional or foreign language at the secondary level, while learning their L1 as their home language, which they also acquired naturally. I think it might be one of the reasons influencing students' struggles to link different words to form grammatical sentences, because they commonly learn L2 at school while spending most of their time communicating using their L1. Thongtum (2023) found that the process of combining words to form sentences requires students who are knowledgeable in grammar, have mastered the rules required for formation, and have good proficiency in punctuation. Tran (2021) identifies that low-proficiency students commit errors because of their low proficiency level in grammar.

Cooley (2024) and Salehi et al. (2018) suggest that students commonly construct sentences without adhering to the structural formats of those sentences, resulting in unclear meanings expressed by those sentences. This is because the students have a low proficiency level in syntactic rules that they should follow during the formation process. Teaching first-year students the structures of simple, compound, and complex sentences is time-consuming because they are expected to have mastered this concept at their primary and secondary levels, making it easier for them to link different words to form meaningful grammatical sentences. Spafford (2023) stated that for students to obtain advanced understanding or in-depth knowledge in sentence structures, teachers or lecturers should take steps to identify, classify, and correct those errors. Unfortunately, lecturers cannot dwell more on teaching students sentence structures because there are many aspects, such as morphology, phonetics, novels, and poetry, etc.

#### 2.2.2.7 Plagiarism

Some of the primary roles of L2 facilitators include teaching students and administering tests, presentations, and assignments (Pharma, 2024). Daud (2018) and Sman (2018) conducted a study to investigate the factors that hinder students from accumulating in-depth knowledge in sentence formation. Based on their findings, it was identified that when students are given assignments to write, they use their smartphones, computers, and laptops to capture information related to their assignment questions that they find on the internet and write it as their own, which limits their development in constructing meaningful grammatical sentences.

It would be beneficial if students utilise the internet to access tips, tutors, information, and lessons on how to complete the assignments they are given, thereby gradually increasing their proficiency level in L2. However, it is not wrong for students to plagiarise because other students might find it difficult to treat different questions; perhaps the only way to write those assignments is through plagiarism. The possibility is that students who commit plagiarism may end up lacking the knowledge that can help them respond during an examination.

Every language has a set of structures and rules that guide the formation of sentences, ensuring they are clear, understandable, meaningful, and grammatically correct (Robins & Crystal, 2024). A study conducted by Cooley (2024) on exploring errors in

sentence formation by L2 first-year students demonstrated that some students have a limited understanding of structural variation between simple, compound, and complex sentences. As a result, students just construct sentences that are not logical, hence the ideas conveyed by those typical sentences are sometimes not clear and may be ambiguous to the readers. Also, other students have low proficiency in when and where to use passive or active voice in sentences. Students use verbs in the past tense form in sentences that are in the present form, which can be considered an error.

Sentence structures and verb tenses are aspects that students have learned from the primary level up to the secondary level, and they are supposed to have mastered them. It will be time-consuming if lecturers teach verb tenses and structural variation between simple, compound, and complex sentences, because there are many aspects to be taught in L2 apart from sentence construction. It would be understandable and fair enough for lecturers to teach students how to combine words to form phrases, phrases into clauses, and clauses into sentences, so that students may gain an in-depth understanding of how to construct different sentences and be able to apply the rules required for the formation.

#### 2.2.2.8 Different between L1 and L2

In a study conducted by Abir (2024), which focuses on how students learn and construct L2 sentences, he found that some students struggle to learn L2 due to the differences between their native language and English. The greater the gap between students' native language and L2, the less effectively they learn English. As a result, students transfer their mother-tongue elements that tend to violate L2 when constructing sentences, resulting in errors. However, not all students who engage in transferring L1 elements to L2 learning are aware of L1 elements that are transferable and those that cannot be transferred (Wei & Zhang, 2020).

#### 2.2.2.9 Complexity of syntactic rules

Patri et al. (2021) in their study found that L2 has complex (difficult to understand) syntactic rules, which are difficult to master by the students while learning. As a result, students tend to construct long sentences that are not correctly punctuated. Some students write expressions that lack subjects due to a limited understanding of L2

syntax rules. Elfa (2020) states that students commit errors in L2 when they learn new rules and lack knowledge of what they are learning.

In my understanding, the ability to construct grammatical sentences can be determined by seriousness, commitment, strong determination, or a high potential for studying grammar. In other words, if students learn the syntactic rules that appear to be new to them and study them extensively, they may gradually master how to effectively use those rules to link different words and form grammatical sentences. My viewpoint aligns with Fisher's (2024) statement, which posits that advanced Knowledge or high proficiency about a particular phenomenon can be obtained by reading books and articles, from facilitators' lessons, and other means that offer rich information about it. Furthermore, a study by Fauzan et al (2020) revealed that if students are not committed to reading syntactic rules, their knowledge in sentence composition might remain limited because they may hardly apply the correct rules during the formation process, leading to sentences that contain many errors, which is a challenge in academic writing. However, Pauzan (2024) and Zhu (2019) stated that errors occur naturally when students learn the target language because their knowledge may be limited, unlike when they learn their L1. Pauzan's (2024) statement is clear in the sense that students have unequal cognitive abilities in learning; others find syntactic rules understandable, while others struggle to master them, despite spending many years learning sentence composition during their primary and secondary education. However, it is essential to note that during tests and examinations, students are required to apply syntactic rules correctly to form sentences that are organised and grammatical. Therefore, it is advisable that the students should master the syntactic rules commonly used in sentence composition.

### **2.3 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was underpinned by Grounded theory (GT) and Error Analysis theory (EA), respectively, to investigate different types of errors committed by the selected students in sentence composition. The importance of using these two theories interchangeably is that they enabled me, as the researcher, to delve deeper into identifying different types of errors made by the students in their essay writing and categorise them according to their similarities, which simplifies data analysis and interpretation. By employing GT and EA, it was found that the most common errors

committed by the students included subject-verb agreement, omission of commas after introductory statements, sentence fragments, misuse of prepositions, conjunctions, and nouns, redundancy, run-on errors, and comma splices. Therefore, both GT and EA played crucial roles in the findings of this study.

### 2.3.1 Error Analysis theory

Error analysis theory was developed by Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues in the 1960s at the University of Edinburgh. These scholars discovered that most students consider English a foreign language and find it difficult to learn. Due to limited knowledge and a low proficiency level in L2, some students commit different types of errors during the process of learning the language. Despite the different types of errors that students commit when learning L2, Corder and his colleagues stated that errors are part of the learning process, indicating how far students have mastered the language and the areas where they face difficulties. They also suggested that students sometimes commit errors in L2, either due to limited knowledge, a low proficiency level, a lack of interest in learning L2, or other causes. In their studies, researchers found that when students learn new rules and structures of the target language or other languages, except for their mother tongue (L1), they sometimes unconsciously commit errors because they are not familiar with the language, while others lack in-depth knowledge of the target language.

Before the development of EA, Contrastive theory (CA) was one of the popular theories used from the 1950s until the early 1970s in the field of Linguistics and English to explore or investigate errors that the students commit when they learn L2. CA was first proposed by Fries in 1943, designed for pedagogical purposes (teaching and learning). CA was lately revised and improved by Lado in 1957 in his book entitled '*Linguistics Across Cultures*' to measure how students acquire and learn L2. It was also used to identify errors that the students commit in L2 due to the interference of their L1 by comparing the structural similarities and differences between the two languages. In other words, CA was commonly used to identify, categorise, and analyse errors in L2 committed by students due to transferring their L1 elements, such as grammar rules, language structure, and language usage, into L2 learning, leading to errors.

Since CA was only limited to identify errors in L2 that are caused by the interference of students' native languages (L1), many scholars such as Whitman (1970), Anwar (1972), Jackson (1972) Rustipa (2011), Rickaby (2023), and others criticised it because it does not fully analyse all errors committed by the students, which are not caused by the influences of their L1. They added that CA is impractical and unrealistic, which means that it does not offer a concise and understandable interpretation of errors in the target language because of its narrow analysis, which focuses on the comparison between students' L1 and L2. They also stated that CA sometimes lacks concrete evidence on whether errors committed by the students are indeed caused by their L1 interferences or other causes. Lastly, the presentation and analysis of the data can sometimes be unreliable when using CA, as it only accommodates errors in L2 that are caused by L1.

Zyl (1987) stated that one of the limitations of CA is that it is one-sided; it analyses interlingual errors committed by the students by comparing the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. In other words, Contrastive theory was only applicable in situations where studying errors committed by students in L2 involved comparing students' L1 and L2, while taking into consideration how L1 negatively affects the effective use of L2 in academic writing. Ali (2022) criticised it because of its inability to accommodate both intralingual and interlingual errors in L2. This means that Constructive theory was not up to the standard to be used by L2 philosophers, researchers, scholars, lecturers, teachers, etc., to identify different types of errors that are not caused by students' L1. That is the reason Corder, and his colleague developed EA to identify different types of errors caused by the influences of students' L1 and other factors such as limited knowledge, different IQ levels, unequal proficiency, lack of reading, etc.

Most students have knowledge of using their L1 in various settings, such as school, home, and church (Algazo, 2020). It is because they have mastered the effective use of language from a very early stage after birth. Therefore, Corder and his colleagues in 1960 observed that students had limited knowledge of L2 because they committed numerous errors during the language learning process. The main idea behind the creation of Error Analysis by Corder and his colleagues was to investigate and identify different types of errors that students commit in L2, not only at the sentence level, but also in L2 generally. The significance of EA lies in its ability to identify factors that

cause students to commit errors, such as L1 interferences, ignorance of language rules, lack of practice, and poor cognitive abilities, among others (Corder, 1957). The last important point to consider is that Corder and his colleague found EA to be very flexible, adaptable, and suitable for investigating both intralingual and interlingual errors. Therefore, I found EA helpful and useful in this study, as it enabled me to identify different types of errors committed by the students due to limited knowledge, lack of reading, the complexity of syntactic rules, and low proficiency levels in the use of punctuation marks, among other factors.

According to Angala (2024), error Analysis is a theory that involves identifying, categorising, and analysing errors that students commit in the process of learning and acquiring L2. Corner (2021) defines error analysis as an approach commonly used to analyse the learner's errors in L2, identifying the types of errors they commit, the factors causing those errors, and measuring the degree to which the errors affect their academic performance. I found error analysis very useful and appropriate in this study because the students whom I have selected learn English as a major module, and they unconsciously committed errors due to limited proficiency in L2, lack of exposure to it, difficulty of syntactic rules, etc., providing valuable insights into the challenges they face in the learning process. Therefore, error analysis has been extensively used to explore and identify various types of errors that students commit in sentence construction, including subject-verb agreement, redundancy, verb consistency, noun-pronoun agreement, punctuation, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments. If I did not use EA, the probability is that it would be difficult to identify these types of errors.

Ributsuriowati (2022) states that EA is a useful tool that can be used to measure students' grammatical errors, such as omission of subjects, addition of unnecessary verbs, and punctuation errors. Since grammar is a part of syntax, error analysis was essential in this study to investigate how students combine words to form ungrammatical sentences, as well as to consider the violation of syntactic rules in the process of composing sentences. EA enabled me to identify areas where the students need support. By using EA, I found that the students faced challenges in constructing compound and complex sentences as showed in Chapter 4. Findings revealed that the students were able to differentiate between independent and dependent clauses but were not to use the correct coordinating and subordinating clauses to join those clauses. Some fused independent clauses, leading to run-on errors while other use

commas to link independent clauses, which is regarded as comma splice errors. EA also helped me to identify that most of the selected students could not correctly use concord rule. Some corresponded plural subjects with singular verb, which is subject-verb agreement error. EA performed crucial roles during data analysis and interpretations in Chapter 4.

A study by Keshavarz (2015) illustrates that students' errors are an indication of the progressive and developmental stage of learning the target language by the students. This simply means that errors committed by students reflect how they learn the target language, and in the process of learning it. Students may sometimes commit errors because they are not yet fully used or accustomed to the language. Although EA enabled me to identify and categorise different errors in students' written productions (run-on, comma splices, subject-verb agreement errors, sentence fragment, etc), my concern is that Keshavarz (2015) stated that errors denote the progress of the students in L2, and they indicate that the students are at the developmental stage, which is not understandable. It is because at the tertiary level, the students are in the last lap of their journey (. They are supposed to have mastered the sentence formation process in their secondary level. In tertiary institutions, students are not in a developmental stage; rather, it is a continuation of what they learned in their secondary level, although certain aspects may change or become more advanced.

#### 2.3.1.1 Categories of EA

Error analysis can be classified into two categories: interlingual and intralingual (Deng, 2019; Richard, 2019). Interlingual errors occur when students transfer elements from their mother tongue into the second language (L2) they are learning, which often hinders the effective use of the L2. In other words, interlingual errors occur when students engage in the direct transfer of their L1 grammatical rules, word ordering system, sentence structures, and the use of punctuation marks into L2, which often causes harm in L2. Consequently, Intralingual errors stem from students' limited knowledge or low proficiency in L2, lack of knowledge of grammatical rules, inadequate language skills, and insufficient study materials (Kusmaaryani, 2023). In other words, intralingual errors are errors that the students commit in L2 because they lack basic knowledge in L2.

By using error analysis in this study, it was simple to identify errors committed by the students and categorise them as either interlingual or intralingual. I found that most errors fall under the intralingual category, as many students struggled with combining independent and dependent clauses to form complex sentences. Others had difficulty constructing compound sentences, often failing to merge independent clauses with coordinating conjunctions, which resulted in run-on errors. Others used commas to link independent clauses, which is regarded as a comma splice error. This is because the students have limited knowledge of when and where to use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, as well as punctuation marks. In this instance, I can therefore indicate that error analysis theory helped me gain in-depth insight into how students struggle to link words to form logical and grammatical sentences. It also helped interpret a variety of students' errors without facing any difficulty.

#### 2.3.1.2 The importance of EA in this study

According to Neupane (2023), error analysis can be used to identify any form of error in written or spoken production, their frequency, their causes, and categorise them according to their types. Rao (2018) and Thiri (2021) state that error analysis provides valuable insights into the differences in learners' cognitive abilities and mental representations that influence their errors in the target language. The challenge I encounter in using error analysis is that it is too difficult to measure students' cognitive abilities because it would not be possible to physically enter students' minds and assess whether their cognitive abilities influence their learning of L2. I only discovered that the students who committed more errors in their writing had limited knowledge of sentence composition.

Error analysis enabled me to identify that students have unequal proficiency levels in sentence composition; some reflected high proficiency levels, while others showed low proficiency levels. This suggests that students have varying intelligence quotient (IQ) levels. All these were identified by using error analysis. Therefore, error analysis is vital in studying the errors that students commit in L2, which can also help students improve their writing by reviewing the errors they have made and making corrections.

Error analysis in this study enabled me, as the researcher, to identify different types of errors, categorise them according to their types, and quantify their occurrence, revealing areas of difficulty in sentence construction by assessing students' written

essays. Error analysis was of great importance in this study, as it aimed to investigate how students struggle to link different words to construct grammatical sentences.

Punctuation plays a crucial role in sentence construction, serving as a guide for students to combine words into meaningful sentences. Safitri (2020) states that error analysis can be employed in investigating punctuation errors, particularly among students with limited knowledge or low proficiency. Since punctuation is part of syntax and plays a pivotal role in sentence composition, error analysis was also used to investigate punctuation errors that students commit due to low proficiency, limited knowledge of syntax, or other causes. I found that the students were lacking knowledge of when to use commas, semicolons, colons, hyphens, full stops, and other forms of punctuation. The students often join independent clauses using a comma, which is incorrect. Others use a full stop and coordinating conjunctions next to each other to link simple sentences to form compound sentences, which is considered a fragment error. Therefore, it was worthwhile to look for punctuation errors in sentence composition in the sense that any wrong utilisation of punctuation marks by the students can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the messages conveyed by their sentences. Incorrect use or violation of punctuation may hinder effective communication between the students and the lecturers. Error analysis enabled me to identify that, although the students have been learning L2 for a long time, they still find it difficult to use correct punctuation during sentence composition.

Al-Khresheh (2016) conducted a study to examine the importance of error analysis in learning the target language by tertiary students. The findings revealed that error analysis is a useful and appropriate approach for investigating, identifying, and describing the errors that students commit when learning the target language. Furthermore, Marlett (2024) posits that error analysis enables teachers, lecturers, researchers, and philosophers to gain an in-depth understanding of how students acquire and learn the target language by examining the errors that students commit.

In this study, error analysis enabled me to identify that some students found it challenging to align words cohesively and coherently to form different types of sentences, resulting in errors in subject-verb agreement, misuse of articles, fragment errors, run-on errors, and redundancy errors. Since the students committed different types of errors, error analysis allowed me to identify the most common errors that the

students made, categorise them according to their types, and determine their causes. I found error analysis very useful in this study because I was able to identify sentences that contained errors from students' essay writing, which could make it difficult to carry out the findings if I used other theories.

Most students learned L2 as a second additional language during their secondary education. At the university level, English is often learned as a target or foreign language, and students may commit errors because it is not their native language (Corner, 2021). Agung (2021) conducted a study to explore how error analysis can be employed to investigate and categorise different types of errors that the students commit in L2. The finding revealed that error analysis is usable and applicable in studying intralingual and interlingual errors that the students commit when learning L2, categorising them according to their types, and identifying their causes. In my understanding, a university is the highest institution of learning where students are supposed to have at least mastered how to arrange words to form different types of grammatical sentences. Unfortunately, the findings revealed that some students rarely follow the syntactic rules to form well-structured and grammatically correct sentences, resulting in sentences that contain numerous errors. All errors found in this study were identified using error analysis, which facilitated the analysis and interpretation of the collected data using the thematic analysis technique.

Error analysis enabled me to identify different types of errors in students' essays and during group discussions; however, the challenge was that some students appeared to have limited knowledge in linking clauses to compound and complex sentences. It is because they have not mastered the syntactic rules required for the formation, have low proficiency in the effective use of punctuation marks, and lack understanding of when and where to use subordinating and coordinating conjunctions. Despite the different errors identified by using EA, Maruti (2023) stated that errors are an integral part of the learning process. Simel and Chali (2025) suggested that when students commit errors in L2, after corrections, they may improve and are less likely to repeat the same errors tomorrow. However, in my view, the challenge with some students is that they may commit errors today, receive corrections from their teachers or lecturers, but never account for those corrections and still commit the same errors again. I think it requires commitment, seriousness, and devotion to study hard and master the syntactic rules necessary for formation.

Sometimes, students' native languages negatively influence how they acquire and learn L2 by transferring their L1 elements into L2, causing harm to the target language (Anefnaf, 2023). She identifies that EA is useful to study different types of errors that are either caused by L1 or other factors. Although error analysis enabled me to identify different types of errors that students committed, it was difficult for me to trace errors that the students committed due to their native languages, except for Tshivenda. It is because Tshivenda is my native language, and I was able to identify certain word order systems, sentence structures, and syntactic rules that were transferred from the Tshivenda language because I share the same language with the students who speak Tshivenda. It was too difficult to use EA to identify the influences that XiTsonga, Spedi, isiZulu, and other languages towards L2.

Error analysis facilitates a closer examination of both internal and external factors that contribute to students' errors in sentence construction (Zhu, 2019; Seddik, 2023). Given that most students have learned English as a second or foreign language from primary to secondary level, while they use their L1 since birth, and they mostly use it in many areas of their lives. In this situation, students' mother-tongue influence, limited L2 knowledge, or lack of resources may lead to syntactic errors.

### 2.3.2 Grounded theory (GT)

Grounded theory (GT) is a theory developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss from the United States of America in 1967. They have established that Grounded theory can be used in studies where the existing theory does not provide detailed explanations of the phenomenon under study, particularly when existing theories do not offer comprehensive information about what is being studied. They also stated that GT allows the systematic development of new theories grounded in the data collected from participants. Glaser and Strauss also stated that GT provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study by providing rich, concise, and detailed information from the participants. In addition, they emphasise that GT can be used to discover new concepts in academic research.

A review study by Cullen and Brennan (2021) on Grounded Theory shows that GT can be applied in both qualitative and quantitative studies to examine people's behaviours and how they interpret reality. In situations where phenomena are not fully explained or difficult to understand, GT allows researchers to develop new theories

grounded in data collected from participants (Thornberg and Dunne, 2019; Birks and Karen, 2019; Thornberg, 2019; Rajan, 2024). Suddaby (2006) states that GT aims to develop new theories rather than test existing ones. GT was employed in this study to analyse students' knowledge in sentence formation, as well as the challenges they faced in linking clauses to form compound and complex sentences.

The purpose of employing GT in this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how students connect words to form sentences that contain errors, rather than developing a new theory. The data I collected from students' written essays was sufficient to explain the errors committed by the students. GT also enables researchers to study intralingual and interlingual errors that students commit during the process of learning L2 (Saul, 2024). Thus, there is no need to develop a new theory in this study, as GT, along with EA, explains students' errors in more detail.

According to Mengye, Yu, and Smith (2021), GT is flexible in adopting various methods to collect data from participants, including open-ended questions, surveys, observation, document analysis, ethnography, focus groups, case studies, and others. These methods of data collection are like those used in qualitative research methodology. Since the focus of this study is on investigating students' errors in written sentences, GT enabled me to use document analysis, focus groups, and case studies as methods of data collection from the students. I chose document analysis, which is students' essay writing, because it would be easier to identify errors in written form, categorise them according to their types, and identify their causes.

By using group discussions as one of the data collection methods in this study, I found that most students know the differences between independent and dependent clauses, as well as compound and complex sentences, and they also managed to define the term '*phrase*'. However, they faced a challenge in combining clauses to form grammatical compounds and complex sentences. It is because they lack knowledge in the correct use of punctuation and when to use coordinating and subordinating clauses.

Case studies helped me compare the findings of my study with those of other researchers' research studies to identify similarities and differences. Most research studies have found that run-on errors, fragment errors, comma splice errors, and subject-verb agreement errors are the most common types of errors that students

commonly commit in sentence composition, particularly those with limited knowledge of grammar. Using GT and EA respectively, I found that the omission of commas after introductory statements, subject-verb agreement errors, fragment errors, run-on errors, and comma splices errors were the most common errors committed by the students. The findings of this research study align with those of other researchers, as noted in the literature review section. Therefore, GT and EA helped me obtain valid and reliable findings from the selected participants, which could have been difficult if I had used other theories.

Grounded theory can be used to study social issues, the relationship between people and their surroundings, and how they create meanings in communication (Priya and Chatty, 2020). Consequently, Morse (2016) claims that GT enables the researcher to describe the phenomenon under study in detail and its features, thereby obtaining an in-depth understanding of it. This study focuses on sentence composition, not the relationship between people or societal issues. I have used GT to study how students link words to form simple, compound, and complex sentences that contain errors, to identify the most difficult areas where they need additional support. This will empower them to gain in-depth knowledge in sentence formation for academic writing.

The analysis of GT data involves five steps, namely, a data collection and coding process where initial codes are developed, customised, divided into different categories, and themes are created, and then the data is analysed (Mackenzie, 2020). In this study, GT enabled me to collect data from students' written works, identify types of errors as outlined in Chapter 4, categorise them into codes, and group the codes into different categories. I then developed themes, utilising tables to record sentences that contained only errors.

### 2.3.3 Summary

Although I have employed error analysis and grounded theory in this study. However, I have extensively used error analysis more than grounded theory because this study focuses on exploring errors that the students commit in sentence construction. Error analysis enabled me to identify the general errors that students committed due to low proficiency and limited knowledge of sentence construction. It also allowed me to identify errors that the students committed due to the influence of their mother tongue. During the analysis of the data, I found that some errors occurred because students

transferred their L1 syntactic rules, sentence structure, and word ordering, which often harm their L2. Therefore, error analysis also helped me identify the errors committed by students because of the interference of their L1.

Both error analysis and grounded methods were useful in this study; they allowed us to identify different types of errors and classify them according to their types. However, EA dominated in this study because it allowed me to identify the causes hindering students from constructing grammatical sentences, such as a lack of time to practice and read, limited knowledge, low proficiency, the complexity of syntactic rules, and a lack of resources, among others. If I had used error analysis in this study alone, it would have explained all the errors that the students committed. I am not necessarily saying that grounded theory was inappropriate in this study; in fact, it helped me identify errors that the students made. However, it did cost me to struggle with identifying intra- and interlingual errors. When I used error analysis, it was simple to categorise errors into intra- and interlingual categories, which enabled me to manage my time effectively when collecting data from the students.

Another point that influenced my decision to rely more on EA is that it focuses on errors that students commit, rather than studying all sentences in general, which can be time-consuming. EA made me focus only on sentences that contain errors, rather than reading the entire text, which might have taken a long time to identify and analyse errors in Chapter 4. The problem I encountered when using GT in this study was that I had to spend more time reading students' essays and assessing how students group words to form sentences that are either grammatical or ungrammatical, which made it challenging for me, as the researcher, to identify the required target data.

Therefore, I found that GT can be used in an extensive explorative study where the researcher wants to gain in-depth knowledge on how students group words to form sentences, the rules they use, and the meanings carried by those sentences. At this instance, my target was to identify students' errors in sentence construction. After analysing the collected data in Chapter 4, I have seen that even without using grounded theory, I would have collected enough data by employing EA alone.

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained by different researchers as written in the literature review section, compound and complex sentences are difficult for most of the

students, especially the ones with limited knowledge in grammar. What I have noticed is that students have different cognitive abilities and learn in various ways. Those with strong cognitive abilities were identified as having high proficiency level in sentence composition because they know the rules that should be followed during the formation. In my understanding, some students struggle to construct grammatical compound and complex sentences because they have limited knowledge in joining independent and dependent clauses. Others do not know when and where to use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, which presents a challenge. Lack of resources, limited reading, complexity of grammar rules, and limited exposure to the L2 were identified as contributing factors hindering students from constructing grammatical sentences. However, it is essential to note that at the tertiary level, students should have mastered most of the syntactic rules required for sentence composition. The lecturers cannot teach all of them because it is time-consuming, as there are many aspects to be covered in L2 within a prescribed period. Grounded theory and error analysis played important roles in generating reliable findings in Chapter 4. They enabled me to concentrate and identify sentences that contain errors, group them according to the types of errors they contain and analyse them without facing any challenge. Therefore, these two theories are essential in studying errors in sentence composition. Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology employed during data collection, including the data collection methods, instruments, and other relevant details.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the importance and effective utilisation of a qualitative research methodology in investigating students' errors in sentence composition, using group discussions, document analysis, and case studies as data collection methods. This is an exploratory study, which used thematic analysis as a tool to measure the frequency and analyse different types of errors collected from students' essay writing, and during group discussions. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was employed to select a sample of 20 active, registered first-year English majors. The interpretivist paradigm, one of the qualitative research paradigms, was employed during the presentations and discussions of the major findings in Chapter 4. This chapter also outlines the ethical considerations that ensured the findings of this study were conducted fairly and honestly, without causing emotional or physical harm to the participants.

#### **3.2 Research design definitions**

Research design refers to the plan or strategies used by the researcher to conduct a research study, including the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing data to answer the research questions (Bhandari, 2023). Bets (2024) defines research design as the compilation of different components of the research, which allows the researcher(s) to employ different methods of data collection and data analysis techniques to answer the research questions.

According to Bhandari (2024), research design is a strategy for attempting to answer the research questions using empirical data. Krishantha (2023) states that research design encompasses the overall objectives of the study, data analysis techniques, data collection methods, sampling techniques, research approaches, and procedures to be followed during data collection and analysis. Singh (2023) stated that a research design should include an accurate statement, data collection methods, the technique(s) of analysing the obtained data, the objectives of the research study, and the setting and time of the research study. In short, Bhandari (2023), Bets (2024), Singh (2023) posed that research design refers to the data collection methods, the instruments, sampling methods, data analysis techniques, and many other aspects

employed by the researcher to obtain valid and reliable findings from the selected participants or any source of data.

### 3.2.1 Types of research designs

Jansen (2023) identified six types of research designs: descriptive, exploratory, longitudinal, cross-sectional, causal, and case study designs. However, Romanchuk (2022) identified four types of research designs: experimental, descriptive, diagnostic, and correlational designs. All the designs mentioned by the above two researchers exist; however, they are used in various academic disciplines, including sciences and technology, humanities, education, agriculture, business studies, and innovation (Khanday and Khanam, 2023)

Kelkar (2024) defines descriptive design as a research method that enables researchers to use words to describe the characteristics, form, and nature of the phenomenon being studied, providing readers with rich and comprehensible descriptions. According to Joe (2023), exploratory design is a research method used by the researchers to gain a deeper insight into the research problem or phenomenon under study. Furthermore Arihant (2022) stated that exploratory design is flexible, allowing the researcher to employ a combination of methods for data collection, such as interviews, document analysis, focus groups, and observation, to obtain in-depth and rich information about the phenomenon being studied.

Saka and Chinagozi (2023) stated exploratory design in a qualitative research study enables researchers to delve deeper into the subject matter, focusing more on questions such as 'how' and 'why' to gain an in-depth understanding and knowledge about it. A cross-sectional design involves collecting data from a selected group of participants at a single point in time (Cherry, 2024). Xueying (2025) added that a cross-sectional design is commonly used to study the relationship between two or more variables. Case study design involves an in-depth examination or investigation of a single case or a small number of cases (Hyden, 2022). Casual design is a research study that aims to identify the relationships between two research variables and how they interact with each other in the study (Frederick, 2023).

Although many studies had been conducted before as stated in Chapter 1 under the problem statement section, most were conducted in South African universities located in urban areas, and some were conducted in other countries. Therefore, there was still

a need to conduct an in-depth investigation to identify errors that the selected 20 first-year undergraduate English majors commit in sentence composition in their academic writing. Therefore, after the presentation, analysis, and interpretations of the collected data in Chapter 4, the findings are expected to enhance students' proficiency levels in sentence composition, which may help them construct logical and grammatical sentences to express their ideas effectively in academic writing. This study used an exploratory research design to delve deeper into how the students struggle to construct grammatical sentences, using students' written essays and group discussions as data collections methods.

### 3.2.2 The importance exploratory design in this study

According to the Oxford dictionary, the transitive verb '*explore*' refers to the act of carefully examining a particular phenomenon, aspect, or subject to obtain in-depth knowledge about it. Since this study aimed to investigate deeper into how the students struggle to link words, phrases, and clauses to form sentences that are logical and grammatical; therefore, it has adopted an exploratory design because the researcher wanted to gain an in-depth insight into how the students apply their knowledge and experiences to organise different words to form sentences that contained errors in their essays. Exploratory design allowed me as the researcher to identify the possible causes of errors, such as a lack of reading syntactic related topics, using the cram-pass and forget strategy, lack of resources, complexity of syntactic rules, using social media ignorance of grammar rules, poor cognitive ability, learning L2, L1 interference, lack of knowledge to differentiate between compound and complex sentences.

Despite the numerous studies conducted on sentence composition errors prior to this research, as noted in Chapter 2 under the literature review section, the data appeared to be limited, particularly in rural-based universities where students struggle to form comprehensible and grammatically correct sentences to express their ideas or thoughts in written form as stated by Parkinson and Singh (2011). Therefore, exploratory design enabled me to obtain rich, valid, and reliable data from students' essay writing, group discussions with three (3) open-ended questions, and case studies. The influence behind using exploratory design in this study is its flexibility as stated by Albert (2017), which allowed me to engage with the students by asking them

questions purposely to measure their knowledge and levels of understanding of sentence composition.

By employing case studies, focus groups, and document analysis as data collection methods, the exploratory design enabled me to investigate the ways in which students struggle to connect independent clauses with each other and with dependent clauses to form compound and complex sentences. It would have been difficult if I had used other designs except the exploratory design. According to Saha (2024), the importance of exploratory design lies in its ability to enable researchers to use words to describe and explain the research phenomenon, thereby answering the formulated research questions. Furthermore, a study by (Saka, Chinagozi, and Joe, 2023) exploratory research promotes the use of words rather than numbers to express the study's results, making it easier for readers to understand the phenomenon being studied. Since this study focused on how students link words to compose simple, compound, and complex sentences, it is therefore, important for results in Chapter 4 to be presented, analysed, and interpreted in a descriptive way using words rather than numbers. Hence, it was worthwhile to employ an exploratory design to investigate more deeply how students struggle to follow syntactic rules, sentence structures, and proper word arrangement to produce grammatical and meaningful sentences.

### 3.2.3 The research design of this study

This study was designed specifically to investigate students' errors in sentence composition as stated in Chapter 1 under the introduction section. An exploratory design was used to collect rich and reliable data from the selected students, focusing on how they link words to form simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatically incorrect. A qualitative research methodology was employed, utilising document analysis, focus groups, and case studies to collect the data. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was employed to select a sample of 20 first-year English students who had provided informed consent forms to participate. The thematic technique, a qualitative methodology for data analysis, was used to analyse the collected data in Chapter 4.

After obtaining Ethical Certificate from the university where the selected students have registered, ethical clearance measures were presented to the students in class in the presence of their L2 module facilitator. After the presentation of the ethical clearance

protocols, the who wanted to be part of the study were requested to enlist their name on a paper. The target of participants needed in this study were 20 participants. I managed to obtain more than 20 students but only considered the first 20 students on the list. The selected students were asked to write an essay of two pages or less on the following topic: *the roles of tutors in enhancing students' performance in English learning*. Descriptive analysis was employed to analyse and interpret the collected data in Chapter 4, and to present a summary of the findings in Chapter 5. Eunson (2012) stated that a complete essay is composed of paragraphs; hence, paragraphs are formed by a combination of simple, compound, and complex sentences. Therefore, through essay writing, I aimed to easily identify the types of errors that students committed, the most challenging types of sentences to construct, and, lastly, the syntactic rules that were difficult for students.

### 3.3 Research paradigms

Paradigms refer to people's points of view and their ideologies towards a particular object (Parera, 2018). He also defined Research paradigms as the set of beliefs, values, and agreements commonly shared by the researchers on how the research problems can be addressed and understood. According to Abbadia (2022), research paradigms refer to the methods that serve as a theoretical framework or approach guiding how the research is conducted.

Furthermore, research paradigms encompass a set of assumptions, values, and beliefs that determine how the research is conducted and interpreted. In short, Parera (2018) and Abbadia (2022) share similar views on research paradigms, as their explanations are comparable, which makes the term '*research paradigm*' clear and understandable. Turin, Raihan, and Chowdhury (2024) defined research paradigms as a compilation of assumptions, theories, and beliefs that are considered the foundation from which the research process stems. Lastly, Abbadia (2022) explained research paradigms as standard perspectives or a set of ideas that influence how people think about research phenomena.

#### (i) Types of research paradigms

According to Jennifer (2023), there are three major research paradigms such as positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) stated that researchers commonly employ five types of research paradigms in their academic

studies, namely positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, pragmatism, and critical paradigms. These paradigms are essential and are used in different contexts because they guide researchers and scholars on how to structure or shape their research papers and the methods they can use to collect data from participants. Furthermore, research paradigms allow multiple interpretations, which provide in-depth information and a broader scope of the findings, allowing the readers to obtain in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon under study (Yong, Husin, and Kamarudin, 2023)

In this study, I have employed the Interpretivism paradigm because it enabled me to use written words to analyse and interpret how students organise and link different words to form sentences that are ungrammatical, also considering the violation of syntactic rules. In addition, the interpretivist paradigm also allowed me to establish my point of view and critique during data interpretation and discussions based on the findings obtained from the selected students. The use of interpretivism made the findings of this study straightforward, concise, clear, and easy to understand for readers. Lastly, it also allowed the dominant utilisation of words over numbers or figures to explain the causes of errors and their degree of negative influences towards students' learning in the academic writing discipline.

### 3.3.1 Positivist paradigm

The positivist paradigm focuses on objective truth and emphasises the role of observation and experience in understanding the world. Additionally, it believes that there is only a single reality in the world that can be measured and understood (Park, 2020). Selvan (2017) defined the positivist paradigm as a method that can be employed in a research study to measure the existence of reality from the objective point of view of the researchers. This paradigm promotes the idea that reality is not shaped by people's views or imaginations towards a particular phenomenon. It is independent and exists naturally, separate from people's perceptions (Jannifer, 2023).

In addition, this paradigm enables researchers to believe that knowledge is extracted from direct observations and experiences, which can be achieved by using quantitative methods, such as testing hypotheses and investigating the cause-and-effect relationships related to the research problem. Since this study focuses on the challenge faced by the students in composing sentences that are grammatical in their academic writing, I found positivism paradigm irrelevant because the purpose of this

study is not based on the interpretation of reality in general, it focuses on the interpretations and analyses based on how the students find it difficult to link different words in a coherent and cohesive manners, also considering the violation syntactic rules required in sentence formation.

### 3.3.2 Interpretivism paradigm

This paradigm posits that the existence of reality is subjective and is shaped by people's social constructions, which are determined by their relationships, familiarity with the phenomenon under study, social connectedness, and experiences, as well as social interaction (Nickerson, 2024). Additionally, the interpretivist paradigm posits that people hold diverse views of the world, which renders their interpretations of reality distinct from one another. In other words, the interpretivism paradigm promotes the interpretation of one individual towards a particular phenomenon as different from what other people interpret it because they have different views and knowledge about it. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) stated that the interpretivist paradigm enables the researcher to access data through social interactions and people's experiences, using interviews or group discussions as data collection methods. In my understanding, interpretivism posits the existence of multiple realities rather than a single reality.

Since this study focuses on students' challenges in constructing grammatical sentences. An interpretivist paradigm was employed, utilising document analysis, group discussions, and case studies to collect data from the students, underpinned by Error analysis and grounded theory to identify and potentially interpret students' syntactic errors in sentence construction. The influence of using the interpretivism paradigm in this study is that it allowed me, as the researcher, to evaluate and interpret how the students construct sentences. The interpretations and analyses were based on their knowledge, proficiency levels, and experiences towards sentence composition without imposing any exaggeration, distortion, or bias.

After conducting group discussions with the students, I found that interpretivism enabled me to identify the students' diverse views, knowledge, understanding, and distinct cognitive abilities in learning L2, as well as their varying processing abilities in organising words to form grammatical sentences in their academic writing. Some students have demonstrated high proficiency, while others have shown limited knowledge, which presents a challenge because, at the tertiary level, students are

expected to possess knowledge of sentence construction, particularly in simple and compound sentences, as these are the common types of sentences used by students to express their ideas.

### 3.3.3 Constructivism paradigm

The constructivist paradigm posits that the existence of reality is constructed/driven by people's perceptions towards a particular phenomenon under study, and it is subjective (Beker, 2023). Therefore, the constructivist paradigm emphasises that the reality of a particular aspect or subject being studied depends on how people understand and interpret it, as well as the views and knowledge they share about it. Since this paradigm promotes people's social constructions, I found it to be ineffective and unreliable in some situations, particularly when studying ritual performance or any other cultural aspect. This is because some people may share the required information about a particular phenomenon with the researcher, only to discover that their information does not accurately represent the reality and nature of what is being studied, which may lead to distortions or biases.

According to Tashakkori et al. (2021), the constructivist paradigm posits that people's experiences or level of exposure to a particular phenomenon is regarded as a basic measure of the knowledge they have about it. In scientific research studies, the constructivist paradigm posits that the knowledge of what is being studied is determined by individuals' familiarity level, their background knowledge, social status, and perception of it (Tashakkori et al., 2021).

Thus, the constructivist paradigm advocates that people's perspectives on the same phenomenon differ from one another. Unfortunately, this paradigm could not be employed in this study because sentence composition is governed by a set of syntactic rules, not by how students assume to construct sentences without adhering to the assigned syntactic rules. In my view, this paradigm can be applied and useful in linguistics and media studies to investigate how people perceive or interpret different phenomena based on their experiences, background knowledge, and level of familiarity, without being restricted by any rule.

### 3.3.4 Critical paradigm

Paynton and Laura (2021) stated that the critical paradigm believes that the knowledge and ideas that describe the identity, form, and nature of the phenomenon being studied

are shaped or determined by social power dynamics. This paradigm suggests that individuals in positions of power within a social domain or those with high social status and recognition are more likely to dominate in assigning meanings to a particular phenomenon being studied. It also focuses on how people share their knowledge socially and exercise their power unequally (Asghar, 2013). In addition, this paradigm sometimes shifts away from the truth or the nature of reality by prioritising the knowledge and ideas of people who hold high social rank, which may lead to distortion or bias in the results of research studies.

I found the critical paradigm not applicable because the ability to construct sentences that are grammatical and meaningful can be influenced by students' knowledge of syntax, rather than their home backgrounds, social statuses, power, or recognition. I assumed that if I could only nominate students who have high social status, those in power, or who come from wealthy families, the findings would be distorted or biased. What matters most is the students' knowledge of sentence composition, not social recognition or the power they have within or outside the school's premises. In summary, one of the disadvantages of the critical paradigm, which influenced my decision not to use it, is that it focuses more on the inequality among people, thereby promoting the dominance of ideas, thoughts, and knowledge of those who are well-established or well-recognised in societies.

### 3.3.5 Pragmatism paradigm

The pragmatist paradigm emphasises the methods researchers use to conduct their studies, aiming to develop effective solutions to address or treat research problems by employing both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (Kaushik, 2019). Furthermore, Allemang (2022) stated that the pragmatist paradigm focuses more on the human experiences accumulated through interactions and the beliefs people commonly share in their societies. One of the advantages of pragmatism is that it relies more on people's actions and experiences than on theories and opinions regarding the research phenomenon (Weaver, 2018). Unfortunately, this study has nothing to do with students' experiences or social aspects related to sentence composition but rather focuses on students' knowledge and proficiency levels in sentence composition. Therefore, the pragmatist paradigm could not possibly be employed in this study.

## (ii) Research paradigms trinity

Research paradigms refer to the fundamental framework that represents the interconnectedness of components forming the foundation of a research study (Meem, 2020). There are three primary research paradigms: ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Pretorius, 2024). According to Khan (2019), the paradigm trinity expresses the nature of reality: the knowledge that people have about what is being studied, how they acquire that knowledge, and the methods they use to acquire knowledge about a particular subject under study. In other words, research on the trinity offers a rich description of the nature of the phenomenon being studied, the knowledge that people have about it, their experiences, and the methods they use to obtain in-depth knowledge about it.

### 3.3.5.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to the study of the nature of reality (Deborah & Katie, 2017). Pretorius (2024) states that ontology establishes that people have different views of reality. This simply entails that, although people share the same language, practices, beliefs, and religions, their understanding and views towards a particular subject differ. Ontology involves the assumptions about what exists and what people consider to be real or true (Crotty, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). The nature of reality is shaped by people using languages to share ideas, engage in social interaction, and express individual perspectives (Blakeley and Felgueroso, 2023).

According to Helal (2019), In L2 learning, students do not just construct sentences to express their ideas or share information; a set of syntactic rules must be considered during sentence composition, ensuring that the sentences constructed by students are logical and grammatical. Basically, L2 sentences are grammatically correct when the assigned syntactic rules are correctly used during formation. In Chapter 4, the findings revealed that most students struggle to construct grammatically correct sentences, particularly compound and complex sentences. It is because some of the syntactic rules appeared to be tricky and complex to them. They also lack knowledge of when to use coordinating or subordinating conjunctions.

### 3.3.5.2 Epistemology

Sol and Heng (2022) defines epistemology as the study of the nature of knowledge and how people acquire it (Sol and Heng, 2022). According to Sol and Heng (2022),

epistemology is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the nature of knowledge related to the research phenomenon being studied. Based on the findings of this study, epistemology helped me, as the researcher, to discover that students have different cognitive abilities in learning, unequal knowledge, and varying ways of acquiring or accumulating knowledge in sentence composition. Although L1 and L2 share certain grammar rules, there are certain rules that are only useful in L1 but tend to be harmful if they are transferred into L2.

The results showed that the students with low proficiency levels in grammar commonly engaged in the direct transfer. They captured their L1 elements (syntactic rules assigned in sentence formation, word order, sentence structures, and the use of punctuation) and used them when constructing L2 sentences, which caused harm to L2. Furthermore, during group discussions, some students indicated that they listen to their lecturers when they are teaching in class to acquire knowledge in sentence formation. However, they faced difficulties when linking the independent and dependent clauses to form complex and compound sentences. I also found that the students acquired knowledge through reading and watching online lessons. Other students posited that they have acquired the skills and knowledge in sentence composition through the drilling pedagogical technique at the primary level, and they are still able to recap them very well, which eases their learning and performance at the tertiary level.

#### 3.3.5.3 Axiology/methodology

Axiology refers to the methods that people employ to gain knowledge about a particular subject (Ajay, 2021). Jennifer (2024) identifies that class lessons, study guides, the internet, textbooks, and online journal articles and books are some of the sources of knowledge used by students. Based on the findings obtained through group discussions and essay writing, it was found that students commonly used the method of directly transferring their L1 elements into L2 learning, resulting in errors. Others used the CPF (cram-pass and forget) method in sentence composition. They cram what they expect will be on the tests a day before writing, then write the test the following day. After writing, they tend to forget what they crammed because the target was to achieve a minimum pass rate of 50%. After engaging in group discussions with the students, they revealed that the cram-pass-forget learning method helps them to balance different chapters within the L2 module by focusing on one aspect at a time.

### 3.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the students struggle to link words, phrases, and clauses to form sentences that are organised and grammatical using focus groups, document analysis, and case studies as data collection methods. Qualitative methodology refers to the research study mostly used by researchers or scholars to explore or gain an in-depth understanding of people within their natural setting (Asmawi and Alam, 2024; Lauren, 2024). Furthermore, it also enables the researcher to identify how people create meanings. In other words, qualitative research methodology can be used to study social life, including their knowledge and understanding of a particular research phenomenon, as well as the ideas and norms they share, which are shaped by their experiences and knowledge.

Bhandari (2020) stated that qualitative methodology focuses on the act of gathering data, analysing it, and interpreting it to understand the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, it also focuses on studying people's behaviours, experiences, and ways of life. In this study, qualitative research methodology study was employed because it enabled me to directly engage with the students about different between phrases, clauses, and sentences. Additionally, it also allowed me to use students' essay writing to identify the common errors (run-on, subject-verb agreement, comma splices, etc) they have committed. This enabled me to obtain in-depth understanding and knowledge of the students towards sentences composition. Through the use of qualitative research methodology, I found that the students were able to construct simple sentences; however, they faced difficulties in constructing compound and complex sentences, which is a challenge in academic writing.

#### 3.4.1 Types of Qualitative Research

Juma (2024) identifies five types of qualitative research methods namely are narrative design, ethnographic design, phenomenological design, case study design, and grounded theory.

##### 3.4.1.1 Ethnography

Sol and Heng (2022) defines ethnographic design as a qualitative research method that enables the researcher to immerse themselves in a setting where the data must be collected. It also enables the researcher to interact with the target participants,

obtaining a deeper insight into the phenomenon being studied. Kapofu (2019) stated that one advantage of ethnography is that it enables researchers to accumulate efficient, reliable, and in-depth information about the research phenomenon through direct interaction with participants. This study employed a case study, document analysis, and group discussions to collect data.

#### 3.4.1.2 Grounded theory (GT)

Grounded theory is a research study in which the researcher conducts an exploratory or investigative approach to collect and analyse data from participants, aiming to discover or develop a new theory grounded in the data collected from the students (Cullen, 2021; Tie, 2019). Furthermore, grounded theory can be used to add value (information) to the existing data (Hecker and Neringa, 2020). Grounded theory can be used to explain further or add explanations or information to existing data, as the available data is either limited or does not fully explain the current phenomenon being studied (Tie, 2019).

Additionally, GT enables an in-depth study of the phenomenon, providing deeper insight through the process of coding the data and employing themes to organise the collected data, thereby facilitating the data analysis and interpretation process (Henna et al., 2020). This study employed grounded theory as a theoretical framework, along with error analysis theory (EA), to further explore the challenges faced by students in constructing grammatical sentences. These two theories (EA and GT) are explained in detail in Chapter 2, specifically in the theoretical framework section.

#### 3.4.1.3 Case studies

Sharei (2016) poses that case studies are commonly used in qualitative research; however, some researchers also use them in quantitative research, depending on the nature of the research phenomenon. In other words, case studies can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research studies to collect data from the selected or target participants. Researchers who use mixed methodology can employ case studies, as they are flexible and can be used in both qualitative and quantitative studies Pari (2022). Case studies enable researchers to conduct a thorough investigation of the research problem, identifying factors that cause it and gathering concrete and in-depth information about it (Heale, 2018; Coombs, 2022).

This study has also employed case studies as a third research method for data collection. The first method was document analysis (students' essays), followed by focus groups. The data has been collected using document analysis and group discussions. Thus, employing case studies as a third method was to compare the findings of the research studies conducted previously, in order to link the findings of this study with those of other works and identify common errors that students commit, their contributing factors, and their impact on students' learning.

I have identified that case studies are very useful and helpful because I found run-on sentences, parallel sentences, comma splices, subject-verb agreements, omission and misuse of prepositions, conjunctions, redundancy, etc., are typical errors that students commit in the sentence composition process. Case studies contributed to the validity, reliability, and authenticity of the findings in this study by linking the results of the previous study with the findings of this study, which makes it easier for the reader have a broader understanding of common errors committed by first year students in sentence composition. The case study also helped me, as the researcher, to stay focused on sentence that contain errors rather than considering all sentences constructed by the students which could be time consuming. The case studies also helped me to be active and vigilant in reading articles, research papers, and books that focused solely on sentence formation.

#### 3.4.1.4 Narrative

Narrative is a qualitative study characterised by the dominance of words to analyse and interpret the collected data, and to present the research findings (Ntinda, 2020). It encompasses the act of collecting data from participants, analysing it, and reporting the outcome, much like telling a story to listeners. Narrative design can be applied in the social sciences, Education, Agriculture, Health, and other areas because it promotes the use of words to collect, analyse, and report findings (Dilley, 2021; McGrath, 2023).

In this study, the researcher relies on students' written sentences and their viewpoints in the sentence formation process. The interpretations of data have been based on students' experiences and knowledge of how they group words and the rules they use

to form L2 sentences. Therefore, I have chosen case studies and grounded theory because they enabled me to use students' written texts (essays) and focus groups, whereby words were used to analyse and interpret the collected data from the students. The purpose of using a case study and grounded theory approach is that this is an exploratory study, aimed at identifying how students use their experiences and apply their knowledge to organise words into sentences. Some of these sentences were found to be grammatically correct, while others were ungrammatical. Therefore, the narrative was not useful because this study does not focus on narrating how students commit errors, but rather on interpreting the way in which students use words to form ungrammatical sentences and their causes to improve them so that they may become proficient enough in sentence formation.

### 3.4.2 Characteristics of Qualitative Methodology

Bhasin (2023) states that qualitative research methodology is commonly characterised by being exploratory, descriptive, focusing on non-numerical data, content-dependent, and emphasising meaning construction and interpretation, as well as contextualisation. The purpose of employing qualitative research in this study is that I was interested in the fact that it promotes the dominance of words to present, analyse, and interpret the data obtained from the students, rather than using numbers. Qualitative methodology also enabled me to explore more deeply how the students struggle to link different words to form sentences that contain errors, using descriptive methods to interpret and report the findings.

Qualitative research is a non-numerical data collection methodology that aims to explore real-world problems and understand the concepts, opinions, or experiences of people regarding the phenomenon under study (Bhandari, 2020; Tenny & Brannan, 2022). This statement aligns with Bhasin's (2023) statement in the above paragraph because both scholars posit that one of the qualitative characteristics is that it focuses on the use of words to carry out the research study, rather than numbers, figures, percentages, or graphs. This study does not focus on numbers, but rather on the role that words play in a language to produce understandable meanings in the form of written sentences. Therefore, the importance of the qualitative methodology in this study was its appropriateness and usefulness in gathering data related to participants'

experiences, perceptions, and behaviours on how they organise different words to compose sentences that contain errors.

According to Killian and Boyd (2023), qualitative methodology seeks to answer questions such as '*how*' and '*why*' rather than '*how many*'. This statement aligns with Bhasin's (2023) and Bhandari's (2020) statements, as all the researchers posited that qualitative methodology promotes the dominant use of words in interpreting and analysing the data collected from participants, as well as in reporting the findings. I found this methodology very significant in this study because it enabled me to explore on how students struggle to link words to form ungrammatical sentences, also considering factors that were identified in influencing them to commit errors, such as lack of practice and reading-related books, limited knowledge and low proficiency in sentence formation, poor mastery of syntactic rules, lack of resources, etc.

#### 3.4.3 The importance of qualitative methodology

Qualitative research methodology enables the researcher to collect and analyse a wide range of data that may be challenging to analyse and interpret using a quantitative approach (Fazeli, Sabetti & Ferrari, 2023). For example: text, video, or audio. This methodology can be used to gather in-depth information about the research problem or to generate new ideas to address the problem under study (Pritha, 2023). Therefore, the qualitative research methodology enabled me to use students' essay writing to gain in-depth knowledge and experiences on how they use words to produce sentences that contain errors. According to Pyo et al. (2023), the qualitative research methodology provides the researcher with opportunities to engage in an in-depth examination of phenomena that may be difficult to capture using a quantitative approach, encompassing their intrinsic nature, diverse manifestations, contextual determinants, and subjective interpretations. Therefore, in this study, the qualitative research approach has been an indispensable tool for exploring and interpreting students' linguistic behaviours, including their utilisation of words, phrases, and clauses, as well as their application of grammatical rules to form sentences that are not grammatical.

In qualitative research methodology studies, researchers are permitted to employ various methods for data collection, including document analysis, observation, focus

groups, case studies, one-on-one interviews, and open-ended surveys (Corner et al., 2019; Houston, 2024). Since this study focuses on sentence composition, document analysis, which is a systematic review of students' works, was used as one of the data collection methods to identify errors from students' written essays, which were about two pages long. A case study was also used to investigate the relationship between the data collected from students' essay writing with the existing literature of other researchers who have previously conducted extensive studies focusing on syntactic errors in sentence formation. Lastly, group discussions were employed in this study.

The focus between me, as the researcher, and the students was on sentence formation, where open-ended questions were asked to understand their knowledge and experiences in combining different words to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. In addition, qualitative research methodology also enabled me to ask the students to differentiate between phrases and clauses. Also, students were also asked about how to combine clauses to form compound and complex sentences.

Students' cognitive abilities differ in nature; they learn in different ways, possess unequal knowledge, and are often influenced by various factors that negatively impact their language-learning processes. They also have different cognitive abilities, environmental exposure, and individual differences (Cogn, 2019). By employing a qualitative research methodology in this study, I was able to investigate the different levels of linguistic competence and proficiency among students and examine how these differences influence their abilities to construct grammatically incorrect sentences. Qualitative methodology helped me, as the researcher, to identify that students with low proficiency in L2 are those who most often construct compound and complex sentences that lack connectedness and logical structure. Students with high proficiency in sentence composition were able to distinguish between simple, compound, and complex sentences.

In fact, they were able to position words logically, following required syntactic rules such as subject-verb agreement, noun-pronoun agreement, and punctuation, to form sentences that are grammatical and logical. Although the data showed that high-proficiency students were proficient in sentence composition, others were still facing difficulties in merging independent clauses and dependent clauses to form complex sentences using subordinating conjunctions. Therefore, the qualitative research

methodology enabled me to identify that students have unequal proficiency in L2, which could be difficult to detect using a quantitative methodology.

Qualitative research involves studying cultural norms and practices to provide insight into how people create meanings and their perspectives on their belief systems (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2023). Unfortunately, this study has nothing to do with students' cultures or their belief systems, which shape their reality and influence their interpretations of the world. This study is limited to investigating the system or knowledge that students apply to combine different words to form sentences that are ungrammatical, which is considered a challenge in the academic discipline. In a syntax module, the students are required to construct sentences that are grammatical, logical, and meaningful.

Essentially, sentences that are well-organised and grammatically correct convey a clear flow of ideas, thoughts, and information, facilitating effective communication. If this study were focusing more on identifying factors contributing to students' inability to construct comprehensible grammatical sentences. Thus, I would have focused more on whether students' cultures positively influence them to construct L2 sentences that are grammatical, or whether it emerges as a limiting factor influencing them to struggle to construct sentences free from grammatical errors.

In this study, I used focus group and document analysis to collect the data from the students. The learners were requested to group themselves into two groups. Each group encompasses a total of 10 students. The purpose of using focus groups was to determine whether students could identify the differences between phrases, clauses, and sentences, and how they combine words into phrases, phrases into clauses, and clauses into sentences. Additionally, a group of 10 students is manageable than that of 20 students, it is controllable and allows each student to participate actively. Therefore, I found that qualitative research methodology is significant in studying how students use words to form sentences, as a means of facilitating communication, because it allowed me to directly engage with the students to obtain their in-depth understanding between phrases, clauses, and sentences, which makes the findings of this study valid and reliable to the reader. Qualitative methodology also enabled me to explore deeply how students connect words in their writing, also considering the rules they employ for the formation.

I found that some of the students imposed low proficiency in mastering the positions and functions of basic components of sentences (subject, verbs, and objects) and limited knowledge in using connectors or conjunctions or other form of connectors to join independent and dependent clauses to form compound and complex sentences which could be difficult if I have used quantitative methodology which focuses more on quantity. The omission of subjects and main verbs, as well as the construction of long sentences without proper punctuation, were some of the errors that the students made in this study. These findings were identified using a qualitative methodology. I have identified that qualitative methodology is essential and applicable in studying the connection between words and the rules that should be followed to construct comprehensible, meaningful sentences.

#### 3.4.4 Advantages of qualitative methodology

Qualitative research methodology is flexible because it allows researchers to use various data collection methods, including ethnography, case study, focus groups, group discussions, interviews, text analysis, and observations (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). These methods enable researchers to gather a reliable and comprehensive dataset from participants or other sources.

The quantity of participants in a qualitative study is countable and controllable, which eases data analysis and interpretation (Oranga &Matere, 2023). One of the important points to consider is that qualitative methodology allows the researcher to directly interact with the participants, collecting data from them, enabling the researcher to gather sufficient data from the participants (Korstjens, 2017). Although qualitative methodology promotes direct interactions between participants and researchers, as stated by Korstjens (2017). It is, therefore, essential to note that researchers must be vigilant and proactive in identifying and addressing deceptive and distorted information that may compromise the accuracy of their findings.

In this study, I engaged the students in group discussions to measure their proficiency levels in distinguishing among phrases, clauses, and sentences, as well as compound and complex sentences. Lastly, the variations between dependent and independent clauses. The results showed that constructing compound and complex sentences was very difficult for the students, particularly those with low proficiency in grammar. Some lack the knowledge of differentiating between independent and dependent clauses.

The students were comfortable and expressed themselves freely. Therefore, a qualitative study was necessary to obtain reliable data from the students, which could have been difficult to achieve if I had used a quantitative research methodology.

Cultural norms and traditional practices, such as rituals, circumcision, and sacrifices, are sensitive issues that should not be discussed in public (Li, 2022). According to Homer (2022), qualitative methodology is adoptable and usable in situations where studying sensitive issues is necessary, allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in the setting where the data is being collected (Homer, 2022). Qualitative research methodology can be used to test or confirm theories by employing grounded theory to interpret the data collected from participants (Barroga and Matanguihani, 2022). A study by the Korean (2017) showed that qualitative methodology allows the researcher and the participants to actively interact with each other, sharing information and discussing the phenomenon being studied to gain an in-depth understanding of it.

During data collection, grammatical qualitative research methodology enabled me, as the researcher, to gain a deeper insight into how students struggle to organise words in a cohesive and coherent manner to form grammatical sentences. It was found that most of the students found it difficult to link dependent and independent clauses using subordinating and coordinating conjunctions to form compound or complex sentences that are organised and grammatical. This simply means that qualitative research methodology is used to explore students' knowledge and experiences towards sentence composition.

Qualitative research methodology is flexible because it can be applied in various fields, including the social sciences, science and technology, business studies, law, education, history, and other professions. The findings are typically expressed in words (Rupert, 2024). By employing a qualitative methodology in this study to explore how students compose sentences, I have found that students possess different cognitive abilities and learning styles, and that their word grouping patterns for sentence formation also differ. Some students struggle to construct grammatical compound and complex sentences because they have limited knowledge of the syntactic rules that govern the formation process.

Additionally, they had low proficiency in punctuation, and some found it difficult to know when to use coordinating or subordinating conjunctions, ending up misusing them when combining clauses, which led to errors. Therefore, the qualitative research methodology helped me understand that students learn differently and have varying proficiency levels in the sentence composition process.

### 3.4.5 Limitations and challenges of qualitative methodology

#### 3.4.5.1 Time-consuming and distortion of data

Qualitative studies commonly use an exploratory and descriptive approach to collect, analyse, and interpret data from participants (Vaughana, 2021). It enables researchers to collect a wide range of data about the phenomena being studied, which will therefore require a significant amount of time. According to Saurabh and Pranteek (2022), when the researcher has gathered more information from the participants, they will likely spend more time analysing it and may encounter difficulties when drawing conclusions, which can sometimes cause researchers to divert from the study's focus.

Furthermore, Bhandari (2020) stated that in some instances, qualitative data may lead to biased interpretations of the findings because this methodology allows the researchers to apply their views to interpret what is being studied. As a result, the researcher may sometimes alter or omit certain information during data interpretation, which can lead to misleading findings. If researchers want to achieve specific agendas in their studies, they may be inclined to deviate from the data collected from participants. This is because most participants in academic research remain anonymous and are unlikely to be contacted to confirm the data provided to the researcher, which poses a challenge (Massoud, 2018).

Qualitative methodology enables the researchers to use their knowledge to interpret the collected data; they may modify or manipulate the interpretations to suit their agenda or create a certain effect, which may result in biased establishment of findings (Shah, 2019). This statement is in line with Bhandari's (2020) statement on the above paragraph. Basically, biased data interpretation may lead to the distorted (one-sided) reporting of findings, which can mislead readers and be considered unethical (Burkholder and Phillips, 2022).

According to Dawit (2020), the interpretation of data by researchers should depend solely on participants' experiences, knowledge, or views regarding the phenomena being studied. Furthermore, the responsibilities of the researchers include interpreting the data collected from the participants, analysing it, providing an evaluation, and adding comments based on the participants' experiences and knowledge regarding the research phenomenon. Therefore, in my understanding, researchers whose findings are used to manipulate readers are unethical because biased interpretations can alter or distort their findings, producing misleading information.

In this study, a total of 83 sentences containing errors were identified, categorised according to the types of errors they contained, and interpreted fairly and efficiently. I never faced any challenge regarding time constraints because the focus was on sentences which contain errors. Qualitative research methodology helped me obtain in-depth knowledge and understanding that the ability to construct compound and complex sentences requires students who possess knowledge of grammar, can differentiate between independent and dependent clauses, subordinating and coordinating conjunctions, and have a high proficiency level in the correct use of punctuation. Hence, to maintain the quality of the findings in this study, the analysis and interpretation of the data were based on the students' knowledge of sentence composition, as demonstrated through essay writing and group discussions.

#### 3.4.5.2 Insufficient and unreliable data

Qualitative research enables participants to freely express their thoughts, knowledge, and experiences about the topic being studied (Lin et al., 2024). However, sometimes, if participants notice that they are being studied, they may tend to behave unusually and sometimes provide unreliable information or choose not to participate to avoid providing data (Christiance, 2021). A study conducted by Mantula, Mpofu, Sebele, and Shava (2024) shows that the findings of a qualitative study depend on the available data provided by the participants. Additionally, they demonstrated that participants provided insufficient data to the researcher, which limits the researcher's ability to gather enough information to describe the phenomenon being studied.

Since qualitative research allows participants to express themselves openly, some researchers find it challenging to determine whether the information provided by participants is valid and reliable, or if it is biased or distorted (Stahl & King, 2020; Miles

and Huberman, 1994). These researchers stated that researchers should be more focused and able to determine whether the information provided by the participants is accurate or not. In my understanding, the researchers cannot enter participants' minds assessing if the data they provide is accurate or not. Therefore, it is important to indicate that admitting the data given by participants can sometimes lead to misleading findings, unlike in the quantitative methodology where the hypothesis or collected data can be tested or proven.

The findings of this study carry the quality of validity and reliability in the sense that the students were informed that they were being studied. When they were writing their essays, I was monitoring them to ensure they wouldn't cheat. This indicates that the data provided by the students reflected their knowledge or proficiency levels in sentence composition. However, during group discussions, I encountered challenges where some students were not expressing themselves fully due to shyness. Others were depending on others for answers. In other words, certain students were not productive; they copied other people's voices so that it would be seen that they were part of the study.

#### 3.4.5.3 Privacy limitation

Qualitative research methodology can be used to study cultural aspects; however, the challenges include that most participants do not want to disclose their cultural privacies, such as initiation practices, circumcisions, and rituals, which sometimes limit the researchers' access to the target data (Rigoni, 2016). Fortunately, this study focuses on investigating how students organise words to form sentences that contain only errors. Their cultural moralities and practices have nothing to do with this study. In fact, students' cultural aspects were not acknowledged because they do not have any influence on how students construct sentences. In short, this research study focuses on the difficulties students face in constructing grammatical sentences that do not disclose their cultural practices.

Nkengbeza (2019) states that one of the limitations of qualitative research is that it cannot be used to capture sensitive information. According to Tenny (2022), the qualitative research methodology can be used to study and gather participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviour. In my understanding, the challenge is that reading what is in a person's mind would be too difficult because sometimes their

behaviour does not accurately reflect their perceptions or knowledge of the phenomenon. This simply means that what is more important is the data that the participants provide to the researcher, without considering factors that are beyond their control.

### 3.5 Data analysis

#### 3.5.1 Setting

According to Marisha (2023), research setting encompasses the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which the study is conducted, including the location, timeframe, population, and environmental factors. Jason (2022) stated that research setting refers to the geographical area in which the research is conducted, including the time frame. Therefore, this study was conducted in one of the South African rural universities located in Limpopo province.

#### 3.5.2 Participants

Wilkins et al (2019) define research participants as individuals who participate in a study, either directly or indirectly, and have provided their informed consent. In other words, participants are the individuals or groups of individuals that researchers select or choose from the entire population to form a quantifiable sample for the study, used for data collection purposes. Caminero (2020) defines participants as individuals who volunteer to participate in the research study, and their primary assignment is to provide the data required by the researchers.

In this study, after presenting the ethical clearance measures before students and the module facilitator. All students had given their informed consents to be part of the study. A total of 20 English first-year major students were selected from the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education, specifically from the Department of English, Media Studies, and Linguistics. The reason for selecting 20 students was that I, as the researcher wanted to collect valid, sufficient, reliable, and manageable data from the students, also to measure different students' proficiency levels in sentence composition.

## 3.6 Sampling and procedures

### 3.6.1 Sampling method

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of the population for a research study (Dana, 2020). However, Ali (2025) states that sampling refers to the process by which the researcher selects the target participants to collect data from them in the research study. Sampling methods refer to the techniques, whether probability or non-probability, that researchers employ to select participants for data collection in scientific research studies (Renu, 2023). In this study, the researcher employed a convenience sampling method to select 20 active registered undergraduate first-year English major students who had given their informed consent forms to participate in the study.

Kassiani (2022) poses that convenience sampling is a non-probability method used to select participants from the available population. What motivated or influenced me as the researcher to employ convenience sampling is that this study delves more into how students organise words, also considering the syntactic rules they employ during the process to form sentences that contain errors. The selected students were determined by their gender, race, ethnicity, cultures, religions, social statuses, and backgrounds as these elements have no impact in sentence composition. Therefore, I have decided to use the convenience sampling method because it is worthwhile to select voluntary students, allowing them to participate willingly without being forced, which is one of the research ethical considerations that must be adhered to.

### 3.6.2 Procedures

Before collecting data from the selected students, I firstly presented the ethical consideration protocols to the students' cohort and the module facilitator given by the university research committee. Followed by requesting their consents for being part of the study. Fortunately, all the students in the class had given their consent forms to be part of the study. I, therefore, distributed a blank paper in which all students who wished to participate in my research study could list their names. The target participants needed to this study were 20 students. All the students provided their details on the paper, which was given to them to write their names and student numbers.

Due to target participants of 20 students, I only considered the first 20 students on the list, without considering their gender or race as indicated before. Some of the selected participants were 18 years old, while others were above 18 years old. Therefore, there was no need to enquire permission from their parents or caregivers. After sampling a total of 20 students as participants of the study, they were requested to write an essay based on the following topic: *the roles of tutors in empowering students' performance in English learning*. The participants were divided into 2 groups, purposely to obtain data direct from them in as a form of discussion. Each group was made up of 10 students. The influence behind diving students into two groups was to ensure that all the participants actively participate during discussions, so that it is easy for me to identify areas where students struggle. The following three (3) questions were asked to the participants during focus groups:

1. *What is a phrase?*
2. *What is the difference between an independent and a dependent phrase?*
3. *What is the difference between compound and complex sentences?*
4. What are the factors making you as students face difficulties in sentence composition?

### 3.7 Data collection instruments

Munir (2023) poses that data collection instruments are the set of tools and methods that researchers use to collect and record data from participants for evaluation or analysis purposes. According to Sharma (2022), data collection instruments refer to the devices or tools that researchers use in their studies to collect and store data from participants. In this study, I used a hardcopy handbook and a black pen to draft and record all errors that I found in students' essay writing and group discussions during data collection. I also used Microsoft Word to record the information that I had written down in the book for data security, analysis, and interpretation purposes. The importance of using hard-copy books and a laptop was to maintain the safety of the data; if one instrument were to get lost, the data would remain with the other. During the process of collecting and recording data, I have realised that if the laptop were to malfunction, become corrupted, or get stolen, the collected data would no longer be available for analysis and interpretation, which could delay the findings. I also used

my smartphone to store the collected data in the Microsoft Word app, ensuring the data remains secure and fully protected.

### 3.8 Data analysis technique of this study (thematic analysis)

Data analysis is a systematic technique used by researchers to analyse and interpret data collected from participants (Chilman, Whiting & Chapel, 2023). During the data analysis of Chapter 4 in this study, I have employed a thematic analysis approach to investigate students' errors in written simple, compound, and complex sentences. Thematic analysis is a methodological approach specifically designed for qualitative data analysis to identify, categorise, analyse, and report the repeated patterns about the research phenomenon (Miroslav, 2022). The importance of thematic analysis in this study is that it is flexible, which allowed me as the researcher to identify the same repeated errors in sentence composition committed by the students, grouping them into codes, and later transform them into themes as shown in Chapter 4. By using thematic data analysis technique, I found that run-on sentences, comma splices, sentence fragments, omission prepositions, misuse of articles, etc., were the most common errors committed by the students in sentence composition.

#### 3.8.1 Two approaches to thematic analysis

Thematic analysis has two approaches: inductive and deductive (Chen, 2024). The inductive approach involves analysing data with preconceived expectations or hypotheses (Dawadi, 2020). Alternatively, the deductive approach refers to the analysis of data without any prior assumptions or knowledge of the study's outcomes, allowing themes and patterns to determine the findings (Kevin et al., 2022). In this study, I have employed an inductive approach because on Chapter 2 under literature review section, many scholars and researchers on their studies found that comma splice errors, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, omission of articles, redundancy, wrong verb tense, etc. were typical errors that the students commit which influenced me to expect that the students whom I have selected might commit the same or related errors as found by other researchers before.

Based on the findings in Chapter 4, comma splices, omission of commas after introductory statements, noun-pronoun errors, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, incorrect verb tenses and forms, and tautology were some of the errors

identified during data analysis. Therefore, the inductive approach was appropriate and effective because it helped me, as the researcher mistakes, to focus more on identifying errors that are similar or related to those found by other scholars, which enabled me not to just pick any errors that might be committed by students in general. However, it is essential to note that using an inductive approach does not necessarily imply that there was no gap between this study and other research studies. There are numerous research studies that have been established before focusing on sentence composition, but students are still facing difficulties in organising words coherently and cohesively to form logical and grammatical sentences.

### 3.8.2 Six steps of thematic analysis

According to Stehanie (2022), the steps of thematic analysis are the procedures or patterns that the researcher should follow to analyse the data collected from the students effectively and fairly. A study by Caulfield (2019) posited that the steps of thematic analysis involve the initial stage of organising raw data collected from the students to the final stage of evaluation and interpretation of the data. Thematic data analysis steps provide a basic pattern, format, or structure that the researchers should follow to analyse and interpret the data collected from the sampled participants, rather than just analysing the data in general without any framework or structure needed to be followed (Stuart, 2024). Naeem and Ozuem (2023) identified six steps of thematic analysis used to analyse qualitative data using an inductive approach: (1) familiarisation to the data, (2) coding data, (3) grouping of the data into codes, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming the themes, (6) and finally analysing and interpreting the data. Below are the six steps of data analysis, along with their explanations.

#### 3.8.2.1 Familiarisation with the data

Familiarisation with the data is the initial stage of data organisation. At this stage, the researcher becomes more exposed to the target data by reading various documents, observing more closely, asking participants questions, and getting accustomed to them while organising the instruments to be used for data storage (Finlay, 2021). One of the most important points to consider at this stage is that the researcher remains neutral, meaning they have not yet begun collecting the target data. At this stage, the researcher should adapt to the environment, become accustomed to the participants,

and prepare for data storage. At this level, the researcher's role is to begin drafting the key target data, excluding any information that is not necessary for the study (Lamba et al., 2022). Once the researcher identifies that the target data of the study is available, this is where he/she starts to collect, organise, and record the data.

#### 3.8.2.2 Initial codes (open coding)

Coding is a second stage in which the researcher begins to categorise the data collected in the first stage into distinct codes (Saldana, 2021). Each code consists of data that is different from the others. In other words, the researcher groups the data according to their similarities so that it is easier to analyse, preventing confusion and saving time. According to Madelyan (2019), coding is the process of developing subtopics to accommodate the different datasets collected by the research. In summary, the importance of coding lies in its ability to make the analysis and interpretation of data more understandable and readable due to the effective organisation of findings into categories.

#### 3.8.2.3 Generate themes

Since the codes are already developed in the second step, in this stage, the researcher should group the codes according to the similarities in the information they carry, organising them into different themes. In other words, the researchers select codes that contain the same information and then group them together as a single theme (Dovetail, 2023). Suppose the researcher has developed 15 codes at stage 2 (open coding). The first 5 codes can be grouped to form Theme 1, only if the information carried by those codes is similar. The second group of 5 codes could be considered Theme 2, and the remaining 5 codes can be considered Theme 3. The compilation of codes into themes is very important during data analysis because the researcher finds it easier to analyse and interpret the data in themes rather than analysing each code separately, which might consume a significant amount of time to complete the data analysis process and interpretation.

#### 3.8.2.4 Review themes

Themes are broader than codes, and they are considered as final categories that the researcher uses to analyse and interpret the collected data (Dawadi, 2020). At this stage, the researcher develops various themes, ranging from Theme 1 to the final theme. Followed by subdividing the main codes that have been created in stage 2

into different themes that the researcher has created in stage 3 (generate themes). Each theme carries information that is different from the others (Ligga, 2021). In other words, codes are stored in different themes determined by the similarities in the information they carry, which facilitates data analysis and interpretation. The purpose of themes is that they encompass different data, allowing the researcher to analyse the variety and complexity of data because each theme will be analysed separately.

#### 3.8.2.5 Defining and Naming Themes

In this stage, the researcher starts by placing the themes separately, categorising, and naming them (Stephanie, 2022). Each theme has a unique name that the researcher uses as a reference during data analysis, interpretation, and discussion. Suppose the researcher wants to investigate the errors that students commit in L2. Theme 1 can be named '*types of errors*', theme 2: '*the causes of those errors*', theme 3: '*effect of errors in students' performance*', theme 4 can be named '*effect of pedagogy strategies in students learning*', and theme 5 might be about '*contributing factors in L2 learning*'. The act of naming the themes helps the researcher to analyse each theme separately, which often makes the reporting of the findings organised and understandable (Dennis & Sheryl, 2025). These researchers suggested that if themes cannot be identified, the possibility is that the researcher may jump from one theme to another without following a pattern, leading to a disorganised format of reporting the findings, which may confuse readers.

#### 3.8.2.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is a systematic process of inspecting, transforming, and organising the collected data to uncover valuable information, patterns, or trends (Islam, 2020). It involves a series of steps, including data collection, data refinement, analysis, and interpretation. According to Dawit (2020), data analysis refers to the process of preparing collected data, organising it logically, and examining it to answer the research questions. In other words, data analysis is the process by which the researcher begins to refine raw data collected from participants, categorise them into codes, and then transform them into themes, followed by analysis and interpretation. This study employed a thematic data analysis technique, a qualitative research approach that involves identifying, categorising, and interpreting data obtained from

participants or other sources. Data analysis is considered the final stage in thematic analysis, whereby the researcher begins to evaluate, analyse, and interpret the collected data, arranged from theme 1 to the last theme (Caulfield, 2023).

The findings were collected using qualitative data collection methods such as document analysis (students' written essays), and group discussions. During data collection, an average of 40 sentences containing errors were identified, resulting in a total of 81 errors. To maintain the highest level of participant anonymity during data presentation and interpretation, participants were labelled as **P1, P2, P3... P20**. The data collected from the written essays and group discussions were presented in a tabular form; hence, the analysis and interpretation were conducted in a written form.

Based on the data collected from essay writing, five (5) tables were used to present sentences that contained errors, and they were labelled as Table 1, Table 2...Table 5. All 5 tables were composed of three (3) columns; the first column presents the participants, ranging from P1 to P20; the second column establishes simple, compound, and complex sentences which only contained errors, and the third column establishes different types of errors contained within the sentences as highlighted in red in the third column. Table 1 only consists complex sentences, and it was labelled as theme 1; table 2 contains a mixture of complex and compound sentences, and it was labelled as theme 2; Table 3 also contains complex and compound sentences, just like table 1, and it was labelled as theme 3; table 4 contains complex sentences only and it is named theme 4; table 5 encompasses simple sentences only and it was labelled as theme 5. Theme 6 focuses on defining the concept '*phrase*' by the participants. Theme 7 focuses on the differences between the independent and dependent clauses. Theme 8 is about the differences between compound and complex sentences. Theme 8 focuses on the causes of errors as stated by the participants themselves during group discussions.

After collecting data from the selected participants, I found that most of the sentences contained different types of errors, as highlighted in red in Chapter 4. The challenge was that some of the sentences contained multiple errors, which made it difficult for me to group sentences according to the types of errors they contained. Therefore, I decided to name the subheadings on themes 1 to 5 based on the most dominant types of errors within those sentences to ease data analysis and interpretations in

Chapter 4. For example, the second sentence constructed by P2 contains different types of errors, such as Run-on sentences, conjunction redundancy, pronoun-verb agreement, and capitalisation errors. It was worthwhile to use a run-on sentence as the subheading during data analysis. The purpose of choosing run-on errors among other types of errors is that the sentence lacks proper punctuation; hence, the study also focuses on how the participants link clauses to form sentences that contain errors. Therefore, using 'run-on error' as a subheading maintains the focus of this study and helps me identify the proficiency levels of the participants in constructing compound and complex sentences.

### 3.9 RESEARCH ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### 3.9.1 Definitions of ethical considerations

George (2023) states that research ethics are a set of moral principles that aim to protect participants' rights in research studies, ensuring that researchers conduct their studies without harming participants or members of society, whether intentionally or unintentionally (George, 2023). According to Boss (2020), ethical considerations refer to the responsibilities and practices that researchers should uphold to ensure and protect participants' rights and interests, thereby ensuring that participants are not harmed, threatened, injured, damaged, or abused during the data collection process. Research ethics comprise a set of norms and values that primarily guide researchers in collecting data from participants without harming or exploiting them (Gedutis et al., 2022). Dera (2018) defined research ethics as the moral principles that researchers should adhere to when collecting data from participants, ensuring fairness and honesty, without considering factors such as gender, religion, age, cultural identity, sexuality, ethnicity, political beliefs, disability, or social status. In other words, research ethics are the moral principles that researchers should follow to conduct their research studies without causing harm or damage to the participants.

Bhandari (2021) stated that ethics are a set of rules and regulations that guide the research designs and procedures employed to collect data from participants fairly. He posited that participants are the basic ingredients of the research study because they provide the data required by the researchers. Participants' rights and dignity should be secured and protected by the researchers (Jennifer et al, 2022). The researcher

should maintain academic integrity by ensuring that the promises and agreements made by both the researcher and participants are fulfilled and sustained throughout their entire study. However, some of the researchers acknowledged and agreed with the participants that they would not be harmed or violated, but as the study proceeded, the participants tended to be victims, disgraced, and abused, which is immoral and misconduct (Misa, 2025). Resnik (2020) maintained that research ethics provide guidelines on how researchers conduct research responsibly and fairly, without causing harm to participants. He mentioned that the following are some of the research ethical consideration measures: honesty, informed consent form, no harming, integrity, carefulness, openness, confidentiality, non-discrimination, legality, and competence.

#### 3.9.1.1 Informed Consent form

An informed consent form is a document that researchers provide or disseminate to participants in their research study, specifically to request permission to conduct the study (Skidmore & Kowalczyk, 2023). Consent form encompasses the title of the study, the research aim (s), the objectives that the researcher wants or strives to achieve, the benefits that the participants or readers will obtain, and the methods and procedures that will be employed to collect data by the researcher (Shah, Thornton, Turrin, Nancy, Kopitnik and Hipskind, 2024). Furthermore, it also includes risk management, feedback on the findings, and moral measures that will be followed throughout the study. All these elements should be presented to the participants before the study is conducted. In instances where participants or some participants within the sample are under 18 years old, consent forms must be obtained from their parents or those responsible for them (Aghaee, 2015).

According to Salmons (2023), If the participants deny permission to be studied, it means that the researcher has no choice to proceed with his study because the participants will not provide the data required in the research study. Siegle (2023) posits that it is unethical to collect data from participants without their awareness and consent. Furthermore, if the researchers can collect the data from the participants forcefully, it may lead to a distortion of the findings, as the researcher will not be able to employ a triangulation approach, such as interviews, focus groups, case studies, experiments, or ethnography, to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

After I have presented my proposal in investigating the challenges faced by first year English majors in sentence composition. I got approval to conduct this study from The Department of English, Media studies and Linguistic. I, therefore, applied for ethical clearance certificate, which serves as a permission given by the University research Committee to collect data from the selected participants. I finally got the ethical clearance certificate after it has been approved by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences within the university where data has been collected from. Before collecting the data from the selected students, I first presented the ethical clearance certificate, which I had received from the university's research committee to the students and the module facilitator. Followed by distributing the consent forms to the students, having the aims of the study, the research objectives, the benefits of the study, risk management, data collection methods that will be used to collect data from the students (document analysis, focus discussions, and case studies), also the sampling technique that will be employed to sample the students. Fortunately, some of the students were 18 years old, and others were over 18 years old. All selected students had given their permission to be part of the study.

#### 3.9.1.2 Credibility and Honesty

The interpretation of data and reporting of results should always be fairly and honestly established by researchers to ensure that the study's findings are accurate and reliable (Claudio, 2023). The researcher should maintain the highest standard of honesty when disseminating the results and refrain from being biased or exaggerating, as untruthful findings can mislead readers (David & Resnik, 2020). The interpretations of findings are based on the participants' knowledge, experiences, backgrounds, and behaviour (Dawit, 2020). However, some researchers use their views and experiences to inform their understanding of the phenomenon being studied, which can lead to misleading findings (Robyn & Linda, 2022). Additionally, the researchers should employ existing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodology scientific methods of data collection.

In this study, the data were obtained from the students fairly and honestly without deceiving or harming them either emotionally or physically. I transparently interpreted the findings in relation to students' knowledge and experiences regarding sentence construction. I did not alter and did not distort any piece of data in this study. I maintained the highest standard of being truthful and honest towards the establishment of the

results of this study. All different types of errors that were identified from students' essays were reported as they were, without any exaggeration.

### 3.9.1.3 Anonymity

Kang & Hwang (2023) define Anonymity as the act of not disclosing the real names of participants to researchers. In other words, anonymity is when the researcher does not disclose the participants identities on the research study. The participants remain unknown to the readers. To support Kang and Hwang' (2023) stamen, (2021) stated that in most instances, researchers commonly employ codes, figures, or alphabetical digits to represent participants, rather than their real names. Dube (2014) stated that the purpose of not using participants' real names is to avoid attacks or fights in the sense that certain information is too cultural, while some is sensitive to the extent that if it can be brought to the public domain, the provider of such information might be killed, injured, attacked, harmed, or damaged. Hence, it is unethical to use people's names in a research study.

Green (2022) posited that researchers have different perspectives, beliefs, and knowledge regarding the use of people's names in research studies. Some believe that using people's real names will enhance the quality of their research papers in terms of reliability, credibility, and validity, whereas others perceive that using real names will serve as a reference for those who want to know more or gain a better understanding of the research phenomenon. Bouchrika (2024) revealed that most research studies being conducted in tertiary institutions are scientific; they embody the values of trustworthiness, validity, and reliability because the researchers adhere to the measures and protocols of academic research, and they do not disclose the real names of the participants, which is considered good conduct.

From my perspective, the act of using people's real names appears to be irrelevant and ineffective because research papers may still be worthy, meaningful, and reliable even if researchers use any strategy to represent participants apart from using their real names. Since the participants of this study are 20 active registered first year English majors, they were presented with bold capital letters '**P1, P2...P20**' during data presentation, analysis, and interpretation, rather than using their names. I did not want to expose them to the public domain. I thought that if I mentioned students' names, they might be prejudged, laughed at, or invite a lot of questions from readers.

#### 3.9.1.4 Confidentiality

Lee (2021) stated that confidentiality refers to the maintenance of data privacy collected from participants, ensuring that no third party or unauthorised individuals have access to it (Lee, 2021). In other words, confidentiality refers to the act of protecting and securing the data that the researcher collects from participants through various qualitative or quantitative data collection methods, such as observations, experiments, interviews, ethnography, questionnaires, and others. To maintain the quality of confidentiality in academic research, the researcher is expected to initially inform participants that no one will have access to the data except the university, supervisors, and the researcher (Bos, 2020). In doing so, the participants might have strong hope, feel secure, and have concrete confidence that the information they provide does not put their lives in danger.

Before collecting the data, I transparently informed the students that the information obtained from their essay writings and focus discussions would be protected and secure, ensuring that only my supervisors, the university, and external examiners would have access to it. I have assumed that if I could not notify the students about confidentiality measures, they would not feel free to express themselves, fearing disclosure in the public domain.

#### 3.9.1.5 Integrity and Fairness

Research integrity encompasses upholding the highest standards of ethics, including transparency and accountability, to ensure that research findings are trustworthy, reliable, and valid. The research process is guided by honesty, objectivity, and responsibility (Koepsell, 2017). Armond (2024) defined integrity as the principle that ensures research upholds the qualities of being truthful, accountable, and consistent. To maintain the integrity of the research, the researcher should collect data from participants fairly, without deceiving, threatening, or harming them (Armond, 2024).

The data analysis and interpretation should be conducted honestly; the researcher should avoid data manipulation or bias when interpreting the data, as it is unethical and may result in misleading readers (Tosin, 2023). Participants' privacy, rights, cultural aspects, and dignity must not be disclosed or published (Dibekulu, 2020). Distortion is the act of altering or twisting the truth of the findings to manipulate or create a certain effect on the readers (Gordon, 2024). On the other hand, the reporting

or publication of the findings should be transparent and follow the information provided by the participants about the phenomenon under study. When collecting data, the researcher should always ensure that participants are not involved in physical conflicts or other forms of violence (Xu et al., 2020). Additionally, the researchers should maintain peace and unity among the participants to ensure that data collection is conducted fairly and ethically.

In this study, I presented my findings accurately and objectively, avoiding any bias or misrepresentation. I also uphold the highest responsibility for my actions of data collection and reporting the findings, ensuring that my research is conducted and presented responsibly and ethically. Additionally, I also ensured proper data management and storage, maintaining the security and integrity of my data. If there were students who would want to withdraw from participating, I would have allowed them to do so without insulting or mocking them or imposing any form of harm. Fortunately, all the students whom I sampled did not withdraw from the study.

#### 3.9.1.6 No harm to the participants

The participants are the key components of the research study, as they provide the data required by the researchers (Barrow, 2022). The researcher should not commit any harm to the students, either physically, psychologically, spiritually, or mentally (Knight, 2022). During the data collection process for this study, I treated all students equally and fairly, without imposing any discrimination or harming them.

Before collecting data from the students, I informed them that no physical or psychological harm would be caused to them by me, the researcher, or by any other student within the sample. In addition, I acknowledged that if some of them are no longer interested in participating in this study or feel insecure and unprotected, they are allowed to withdraw without being insulted or mocked by me, the researcher. I also made it clear that there should not be any contradiction or uncontrollable debate between the students themselves that might lead to conflict. Throughout the entire data collection process, I never attempted to harm or harass any student in the sample, as it is their right to be treated fairly as human beings. All the students whom I have selected have freely expressed themselves in group discussions and managed to answer all the questions that I asked them.

### 3.10 CONCLUSION

In this study, the qualitative research methodology enabled me, as the researcher, to collect data of genuine quality, encompassing reliability, credibility, validity, and truthfulness, using document analysis, group discussions, and case studies as data collection methods. Since qualitative research can be used in social sciences to study people's behaviours, lifestyles, how they construct meanings, and others, the importance of qualitative research methodology is that it enabled me to be familiar with the students and use their essay scripts to identify errors in sentence construction without any limiting factor or delay. Also, the qualitative approach enabled me to discuss sentence structure with the students. If I had used a quantitative methodology, it would have been difficult to collect data from the students because it focuses more on numbers.

This study primarily focused on examining the relationship between words in sentences and how students arrange them to form ungrammatical sentences. The thematic analysis technique was effective and appropriate in this study, as it enabled me to categorise the data into distinct themes, simplifying the data analysis process and ensuring effective data management. The interpretivist paradigm in this study helped me gain an in-depth understanding of how students group words, the syntactic rules they fail to use to construct meaningful sentences, and how they combine phrases to form clauses and clauses into sentences. Even though certain scholars have identified limitations in qualitative research methodology, including the potential for gathering distorted and unreliable data from participants, I fortunately used students' written essays, which would prevent them from cheating or providing unreliable data. It means that the data collected from the students represents genuine students' knowledge towards sentence formation, which makes the findings of this study valid and reliable.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets the findings of 20 selected participants. The sample consisted of 13 female participants and seven male participants. All participants are from the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education, specifically from the Department of English, Media Studies, and Linguistics. Eight participants were studying Media Studies, seven were linguistics majors, and the remaining five were in the senior phase of Education. The participants study English as a major module. The thematic analysis technique was employed during data analysis to identify and categorise different types of errors made by the participants, grouping them according to their similarities to facilitate data analysis and interpretation.

This is a qualitative research study that employed an exploratory design to delve deeper into how participants find it difficult to link different words to form grammatical sentences, a challenge in academic writing. Document analysis (essay writing about two pages long), group discussions with three open-ended questions, and case studies where data collection methods used in this Chapter to collect data from the participants, underpinned by GT and EA. The presentation of the findings is in table form, while the analysis is in written form. Furthermore, bar graphs and percentages are used to present the total occurrences and quantities of errors that the participant committed in their essay writing.

#### 4.2 The purpose and scope of this chapter

Despite numerous investigations and research studies conducted by various scholars, researchers, and philosophers focusing on errors in sentence composition, most of these studies have been conducted in South African universities located in urban areas. Some were conducted in foreign countries, while a few were undertaken in South African rural-based universities. This has been identified as one of the contributing factors hindering students from achieving proficiency in sentence composition, as stated in Chapter 1 under the problem statement section. Therefore, there was still a need to escalate the difficulties faced by the participants in constructing simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatical and

logical. The goal is to identify the common types of errors that the participants commit in essay writing. Additionally, this chapter focuses on how participants struggle to effectively align subjects and verbs, which is also a challenge. Lastly, it seeks to determine whether the participants possess the knowledge to identify the structural differences between independent and dependent clauses, as well as between compound and complex sentences.

#### 4.3 Research setting, aims, and research questions

This study was conducted in one of the South African rural-based universities located in the province of Limpopo, as indicated in Chapter 1. It aims to investigate the challenges faced by first-year undergraduate English majors in constructing simple, compound, and complex sentences in the past and present tenses. In other words, this chapter provides an in-depth analysis and interpretation of how participants struggle to link different words to form sentences that are logical, grammatical, and meaningful as a means of communicating, expressing their intended messages, and sharing ideas in written form. The findings are expected to answer the following research questions:

- Why is it so essential to initiate the advancement of students' proficiency levels in subject-verb agreement form to compose complete sentences?
- What is the significance of establishing the structural variation between phrases, clauses, and sentences in students' written texts?
- What are the common syntactic rules that the students should master to compose comprehensible sentences that are grammatical?

The study also aimed to achieve the objectives linked to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

#### 4.4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents data in the form of simple, compound, and complex sentences that only contain errors. The presentation of the findings is presented in the form of tables, and the analysis and interpretation of the data are provided in written form. The participants are represented by the alphabet letter 'P', which stands for '*participant*'. Since the participants in this study numbered 20, they were assigned codes as follows: **P1, P2, P3...P20**. The findings are presented in five (5) tables, and each table is

composed of three (3) columns. The first column focuses on the identities of the participants represented by letters **P1** to **P20**. The purpose of using the bold letter '**P**' instead of participants' real names is to maintain the high quality of anonymity of the participants as one of the fundamental research ethical considerations. The second column encompasses sentences that only contain errors. The third column provides types of errors contained within the sentences in column 2. All errors in the second (2) column are highlighted in red for clarity purposes. In addition, three (3) signs were used within the sentence on the second column, namely, vertical bar (|), minus (-), and plus sign (+). The minus sign (-) shows the omission of commas (,) while the plus sign (+) indicates the joining point where two clauses or sentences were supposed to be combined by a punctuation mark or conjunction.

A vertical bar (|) conveys that the fused sentences or clauses should have been separated. During data presentation, the vertical bar is particularly used in complex sentences where participants combine independent clauses without using coordinating conjunctions or any form of punctuation, which is regarded as a run-on error. The errors in the third column are intentionally written in blue to facilitate quantification, distinguishing them from the sentences in the second column.

#### 4.5.1 ESSAY WRITING

The tables below contain simple, compound, and complex sentences collected from students' essay writing, which contain different types of errors as highlighted in red. All sentences were written exactly as they appeared on participants' scripts to ensure that the interpretation and analysis of the findings are valid and reliable. The data is first presented in tables, followed by an analysis in written form as stated in the above paragraph. There are specific types of errors, such as run-on errors, comma splice errors, sentence fragment errors, and subject-verb agreement errors, among others. Each sentence was analysed under the category to which it belongs, aiming to facilitate data analysis and identify common errors committed by the participants.

##### 4.5.1.1 TABLE 1

**Theme 1; Complex sentences**

<b>P1</b>		<b>Types of errors</b>
-----------	--	------------------------

➤	Tutors do much more than Just teach grammar- they guide, support, and empower students to communicate clearly and perform better in their academic life	<i>Capitalisation, run-on, and pronoun-noun agreement errors</i>
➤	By creating a non-judgmental environment- tutors encourage students to take risks, ask questions- and explore their creativity, This help to faster a love learning area and development of mindset.	<i>Omission of commas, comma splices, demonstrative pronoun-verb agreement, and capitalisation errors.</i>
<b>P2</b>		
➤	When you are at varsity as an English student- you realise that there is a lot changes from you use to learn	<i>Omission of comma, incorrect verb form (is), addition of indefinite article (a), and verb tense error (use)</i>
➤	Tutors encourage students to take risks and allow us to make mistakes, so we learn from them so as students progress and achieve goals; their confidence grows and they become More motivated to continue learning and the performance in english learning improves	<i>Run-on, conjunction redundancy (so), pronoun-verb agreement (their and grows), and capitalisation errors (english)</i>
<b>P3</b>		
➤	Many university courses require to give presentations and participate in discussions Tutors help students practice speaking clearly, using the right vocabulary, and expressing their ideas confidently.	<i>Run-on errors</i>
➤	It is important for me as a student to learn and understand the content but since English language is not our mother tongue-it may be difficult for student to understand the content. so that the tutors can identify the problem.	<i>Conjunction redundancy (but and since), omission of a comma, and sentence fragment</i>

#### 4.5.1.1.1 Run-on errors

Based on the findings obtained from the participants, it was found that some participants have a low proficiency level in the correct use of punctuation marks, such as commas, semicolons, full stops, and apostrophes, particularly in compound and complex sentences. Others have limited knowledge of how coordinating and subordinating conjunctions are used to link clauses to form grammatical and meaningful compound and complex sentences. Due to low proficiency level in using punctuation marks and conjunctions, some participants constructed long sentences that are not properly punctuated, which is considered a run-on error. This can be shown in the following sentence constructed by P1:

*/Tutors do much more than Just teach grammar they guide, support, and empower students to communicate clearly and perform better in their academic life /*

The above sentence, constructed by P1, conveys a concise and meaningful message that can be easily understood by the readers. However, in academic writing, there are sets of L2 syntactic rules primarily assigned to govern how words are connected cohesively and coherently to form simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences that are logical and grammatically. The above sentence contains different types of errors. The first error is the unnecessary capitalisation of the first letter of the adverb 'Just' in the middle of the sentence. The word 'Just' is an adverb that modifies the main verb 'teach'. Therefore, the first letter of the adverb 'Just' was supposed to be written in small letters because it is not a proper noun. Furthermore, it is not at the beginning of the sentence where every word, phrase, or clause must begin with a capital letter.

The second error is the omission of a comma immediately after the common noun 'grammar'. The statement '*tutors do much more than just teach grammar*' is an introductory statement that does not convey a complete thought. It introduces the multiple assignments and the responsibilities that tutors have towards helping students academically, except for teaching them grammar. Therefore, a comma (,) was supposed to be used to indicate that this statement is an introductory statement, followed by a dependent clause (*they guide, support, and empower students to communicate clearly and perform better in their academic life*), which establishes the additional responsibilities of tutors towards the students. The omission of a comma

between the common noun '*grammar*' and the third-person pronoun '*they*' makes the introductory statement fuse with the preceding clause, considered a run-on error.

The third type of error is the incorrect use of the singular common noun '*life*' at the end of the sentence. Based on the phrase '*...in their academic life*', the possessive pronoun '*their*' is in a plural form, meaning any noun or verb that comes after it should be in the plural form, unless it is an uncountable noun or does not have a plural form. The participant wrote '*life*' instead of '*lives*', which is a pronoun-noun agreement error. The common noun '*life*' was supposed to be in a plural form, so that it aligns with the plural possessive pronoun '*their*'. Therefore, the first sentence constructed by P1 can be improved as follows:

*(1) Tutors do not just teach grammar only, they also guide, support, and empower students to communicate clearly and perform better in their academic lives.*

OR

*(2) Tutors perform multiple assignments for the students, except teaching them grammar; they also guide, support, and empower students to communicate clearly and perform better in academic writing.*

The fourth sentence constructed by P2 is as follows:

*I Tutors encourage students to take risks and allow us to make mistakes so we learn from them so as students progress and achieve goals; their confidence grows and they become More motivated to continue learning and the performance in english learning improves I*

This is a complex sentence which contains run-on and capitalisation errors. The participant combined the independent and dependent clauses without using any conjunction or punctuation mark, which is ungrammatical. This indicates that the participant has limited knowledge of using punctuation marks and conjunctions to connect independent and dependent clauses, thereby constructing grammatically complex sentences. The expression '*Tutors encourage students to take risks and allow us to make mistakes*' is an independent clause because it can stand on its own and convey a complete thought. Consequently, the expression '*we learn from them so as students progress and achieve goals*' is a dependent clause because it cannot

stand on its own and express a complete thought to the readers. The two clauses in the above complex sentence were connected by the subordinating conjunction 'so', which is ungrammatical because the participant was supposed to have introduced a comma immediately after the plural noun 'mistakes', followed by the conjunction 'so', purposely to link the independent clause with the dependent clause to form a complex sentence, which is logical and grammatical. The subordinating conjunction 'so' was repeated within a single sentence, which is considered a tautology error. The alternative use of the first-person pronouns 'us' and 'we' also makes the sentence not properly structured.

At first, the participant was addressing the roles of tutors towards the students as if he/she were not part of the students whom he was referring to. As the sentence continues, the participant used the personal pronouns 'us' and 'we', which makes the sentence lack first-person consistency. Again, the dependent clause (*we learn from them*) appears to be ambiguous because it can sometimes lead to multiple interpretations by the readers. They may consider whether the students learn from the mistakes they make, or from what is taught to them by the tutors.

The expression: *'their confidence grows and they become More motivated to continue learning and the performance in english learning improves'*, contains two types of errors. The first error is the unnecessary capitalisation of the first letter of the adjective 'More' in the middle of the sentence. It is because an adjective is not a proper noun, which should begin with a capital letter. It would be grammatical if the adjective 'More' were at the beginning of the sentence. Lastly, the participant wrote 'english' whereby its first letter 'e' starts with a small letter, which in this situation can be considered as a mistake. The word 'english' is a proper noun just like Tshivenda, Sepedi, and other languages that begin with capital letters. Therefore, the letter 'e' should be written in a capital letter. Therefore, the above sentence can be revised as follows:

(1) *Tutors encourage students to take risks and allow them to make mistakes to initiate their progress, and in so doing, they will achieve their goals. Furthermore, their confidence grows, making them more motivated to continue learning English. Their performance improves.*

Or

(2) *Tutors encourage students to take risks, allowing them to make mistakes, which is a measure of their progress towards achieving their goals; as a result, their confidence grows, making them more motivated to continue learning English, which may increase their performance.*

Punctuation plays a pivotal role in maintaining connectedness within a sentence's components and initiating the logical flow of ideas by ensuring that words, phrases, or clauses are cohesively and coherently linked. However, the participants, particularly those with low proficiency in punctuation, faced difficulties in using commas, full stops, semi-colons, and other punctuation marks correctly in their sentences. Some combined two simple sentences without full stops, semicolons, commas, or coordinating conjunctions, which is considered an error. Basically, L2 has many aspects that should be taught within a limited period. Therefore, it is wise to indicate that it is important for participants to study grammar by themselves to enhance their understanding of the correct use of punctuation marks. Reading grammar books may help to obtain in-depth knowledge of using punctuation marks during sentence composition, particularly in compound and complex sentences when joining clauses.

#### 4.5.1.1.2 Comma-splice errors

Punctuation appears to be challenging for some participants, particularly those with low proficiency levels in L2. During group discussions, the participants indicated that syntactic rules, grammar, and punctuation are challenging. It is because they do not study grammar books as they indicated. Others revealed that L2 is difficult because it is not their L1. The following sentence, constructed by P1, shows a challenge in the correct use of punctuation:

*I By creating a non-judgmental environment tutors encourage students to take risks, ask questions and explore their creativity, This help to faster a love learning area and development of mindset I*

This is a complex sentence, which contains run-on and comma splice errors. The structure of this sentence is slightly similar to the first sentence by P1 because they both lack commas after introductory statements. At first, the expression '*By creating a non-judgmental environment*' is an introductory statement whereby a comma (,) was supposed to be used to link this statement with the remaining part of the sentence.

The participant fused the introductory statement with another part of the sentence, resulting in an ungrammatical structure. Therefore, a comma was supposed to be inserted between the singular common noun 'environment' and the plural common noun 'tutors'. Secondly, the participant also joined two simple sentences using a comma, which is considered a comma splice error. Basically, every sentence should end with a full stop (.), not a comma. This implies that the participant has low proficiency in the effective use of punctuation in academic writing. The participant was supposed to construct the first sentence as follows:

*By creating a non-judgmental environment, tutors encourage students to take risks, ask questions, and explore their creativity.*

Another issue to consider is that the phrase 'This help to foster a love learning area' is not clear as there is disagreement between the pronoun 'this' and the noun 'help'. The demonstrative pronoun 'this' is in a singular form, and the verb 'help' in this instance is in a plural form, hence it was supposed to be in a singular form 'helps'. To link the two sentences effectively, the participant can use any form of connector or conjunctive adverb, such as 'In doing so'. Therefore, the sentence can be revised as follows:

*By considering a non-judgmental environment, tutors encourage students to take risks, ask questions, and explore their creativity. In doing so, they make learning interesting. It also facilitates the development of students' mindsets.*

#### 4.5.1.1.3 Omission of a comma

The second sentence constructed by P2 is as follows: *When you are at varsity as an English student you realize that there is a lot changes from you use to learn.* This sentence contains a run-on error. The participant simply placed words next to each other without adhering to the correct structure of a simple sentence, considering the assigned syntactic rules. The phrase 'when you are at varsity as an English student' is an introductory statement. The student was supposed to have used a comma (,) immediately after the common noun 'student' to show that this statement is introducing the new experiences that the students commonly face at the unspecified university. This sentence also contains a subject-verb agreement error as in the following expression 'there is a lot changes'.

Basically, 'is' is a singular linking verb, whereas 'changes' is the plural main verb. Instead of using the linking verb 'is', the participant was supposed to convert 'is' to its

plural form 'are', so that the two verbs (*are* and *changes*) agree with each other. For example: *there are lot of changes*. Additionally, 'a' is an indefinite article used before the singular subject, object, or any word that begins with a consonant sound. The verb '*changes*' is in plural form, meaning 'a' was not supposed to be used because there is no alignment/ agreement between the verbs '*is*' and '*changes*'. This is because the indefinite article 'a' is commonly associated with a singular subject or object within a sentence. For example: '*There is a black pen on the table*'. Lastly, towards the end of the sentence, the verb '*use*' was supposed to be in the past tense form (used) because its intended purpose was to express the past lessons or topics learned either at the primary or secondary level. Therefore, to make the sentence logical and grammatical, it can be improved as follows:

*Being at university as an English student, you realise that there are many of changes compared to what you used to be learned at secondary level.*

#### 4.5.1.1.4 Fragment error

The following compound sentence was constructed by P3. The participant joined two sentences without using any form of punctuation mark or conjunction, which is considered a run-on error:

*I Many university courses require to give presentations and participate in discussions Tutors help students practice speaking clearly, using the right vocabulary, and expressing their ideas logically I*

The expression: '*Many university courses require to give presentations and participate in discussions*', is a sentence on its own, and it contains errors which will be discussed below. In contrast, '*Tutors help students practice speaking clearly, using their right vocabulary, and expressing their ideas logically*' is also another complete sentence.

The participant should have used the conjunctive adverb '*therefore*' between the two sentences to maintain the connectedness and logical flow of ideas. Basically, the participant was supposed to put a full stop immediately after the term '*discussions*' to pinpoint the ending point of the first sentence, followed by the conjunctive adverb '*therefore*'. Based on the above sentence and the first sentence constructed by P1, it is clear that the participants have limited knowledge of when to use a comma or a full stop. Joining two or more sentences using commas is an indication that punctuation is difficult for the participants. The participants have been doing L2 from their primary

level, and punctuation was on the syllabus. The participants were expected to have mastered punctuation before enrolling at the university level, so that they could construct grammatically and meaningfully structured sentences.

Therefore, the first sentence constructed by P3 can be revised as follows:

*Most university courses require students to engage in presentations and participation in discussions. Therefore, tutors help students to practice speaking clearly, gain high proficiency in vocabulary, and be able to express their ideas logically/.*

The second sentence constructed by P3 is as follows:

*/ It is important for me as a student to learn and understand the content but since English language is not our mother tongue it may be difficult for student to understand the content. So that the tutors can identify the problem /*

In the above sentence, P3 has placed the coordinating conjunction ‘*but*’ and the subordinating conjunction ‘*since*’ next to each other, which is considered a conjunction redundancy error. The omission of a comma (,) before the third person pronoun ‘*it*’, as in the following expression ‘*English language is not our mother tongue, it may be difficult for students to understand the content*’ also makes the sentence contain a comma omission error. The participant also used the plural possessive pronoun ‘*our*’ to refer to himself instead of using the singular possessive pronoun ‘*my*’, which is also considered an error. Lastly, the participant used a full stop after the subordinating conjunction ‘*so*’, *which is regarded as a fragment error*. Basically, the coordinating conjunction ‘*but*’ is commonly used to contrast ideas or statements. It should be preceded by a comma. However, based on the above sentence constructed by the participant, there is no comma before the conjunction, ‘*but*’, which is also considered a comma-omission error. Another point to consider is that the coordinating conjunction ‘*but*’ is commonly used to indicate the logical flow of ideas by connecting two independent clauses. Therefore, the sentence can be improved as follows:

*It is important for me, as a student, to learn and understand the content being taught. However, since English is not my mother tongue, it may be difficult for me to understand the content. In response to that, tutors can identify the most problematic content and help me to understand it.*

In my understanding, participants are familiar with aligning different words to form coherent sentences in their academic writing. However, punctuation is challenging for most participants, particularly those with limited knowledge of grammar. It is advisable that participants enhance their understanding of punctuation by reading grammar books or slides that focus on punctuation, or by watching videos on YouTube.

#### 4.5.1.2 TABLE 2

##### Theme 2: Compound and complex sentences

<b>P4</b>		<b>Types of errors</b>
➤	When you are attending tutorials-you can understand better even those topic you do n't understand in a class.	<i>Omission of a comma, pronoun-noun agreement, and contraction errors.</i>
➤	A tutor is not the same with a lecturer. because their sessions are considered privately and may not earn	<i>Sentence fragment error</i>
<b>P5</b>		
➤	Tutors assist students with English related homework and assignments-and they help students prepare for English language exams and assignments.	<i>Omission of a comma and redundancy (assist and help)</i>
➤	Tutors have an important job towards the students-They help us understand what we did n't in class.	<i>Omission of a comma, capitalisation, and contraction errors.</i>
<b>P6</b>		
➤	Academically-they help students in learning better than lecturer. because tutors teach students in every subject	<i>Omission of a comma and fragment errors</i>
➤	After finding them-they do follow-ups trying to find solutions to such + so the students' performance can improve	<i>Omission of comma and run-on error</i>
<b>P7</b>		

➤ Investment in good tutoring is not so much a study technique + it is the key to a lifetime communication skill and ability	<i>Run-on error</i>
➤ Most of the times tutors uses an effective method of techniques- which make it easier for us to learn because lecturers uses lecture method	<i>Subject-verb agreement, omission of a comma, and subject-verb agreement errors</i>

#### 4.5.1.2.1 Omission of comma and pronoun-noun agreement errors

Based on the data collected from participants' essay writing, it was found that the ability to construct sentences that consist of introductory statements requires participants with a high proficiency level in the use of punctuation. This can be shown in the following sentence constructed by P4:

*I When you are attending tutorials you can understand better even those topic you do n't understand in a class I*

This is a complete sentence, which contains two types of errors, namely, the omission of a comma after an introductory statement, and disagreement between the pronoun 'those' and the common noun 'topic'. The expression 'when you are attending tutorials' is an introductory statement with both the subject (*you*) and verb (*attending*). It is considered a subordinate/dependent clause because it does express a complete thought. In contrast, the expression 'you can understand better even those topic you don't understand in a class' is an independent clause because it can stand on its own and expresses a complete and meaningful message to the readers. Therefore, the two clauses cannot be linked without using a comma or any appropriate subordinating conjunction. The participant was supposed to use a comma immediately after the plural noun 'tutorials' before introducing the independent clause. Therefore, a comma can be used after the introductory statement as follows:

*When you are attending tutorials, you gain a better understanding of grammar.*

Another error is in the second clause, which is the disagreement of the demonstrative pronoun and the common noun 'topic'. The word 'these' is a demonstrative pronoun commonly used to present or denote two or more things that are closer to the speaker

or writer. However, in this instance, it is used as a determiner to specify topics that are difficult for the students. Basically, the determiner '*these*' is in a plural form, and it is aligned with a singular common noun '*topic*', which is ungrammatical because the two words do not agree with each other. The participant should have written '*topics*', which effectively corresponds with '*these*'.

It is important to indicate that it is not allowed to use an apostrophe to shorten words in academic writing. Towards the end of the sentence, the participant wrote a negative auxiliary verb phrase '*don't*' instead of writing it in fully as follows: *do not*. However, it is not considered an error to use apostrophes to shorten certain words because it is an informal way of writing in an academic discipline. Lastly, the use of the second-person pronoun '*you*' also sounds ambiguous because it does not specify the student (s) being referred to. It was supposed to be substituted by the singular common noun '*student*' to clarify the subject of the sentence. Considering the student whom the participant was referring to is a male. The sentence can be revised as follows:

(1) *When a student is attending tutorial lessons, he can understand the difficult lessons he did not understand in class.*

(2) *When a student is attending tutorials, he can gain a better understanding of the difficult lessons that he learnt in class.*

#### 4.5.1.2.2 Fragment error

The second sentence constructed by P4 is as follows:

*/A tutor is not the same with a lecturer. because their sessions are considered privately and may not earn /*

This is a complex sentence because it is composed of one independent clause and one dependent clause, joined by a full stop (.) and a subordinating conjunction '*because*'. By looking at the structure of this sentence, one might ask if it is grammatical to write a full stop immediately after an independent clause, followed by a subordinating clause. It is not grammatical because it is regarded as a grammatical error. The expression '*A tutor is not the same with a lecturer*' is an independent clause because it conveys a complete thought and can also stand alone. Alternatively, the expression '*their sessions are considered privately and may not earn*' is a dependent clause, which in this instance establishes the reason behind the difference between a

tutor and lecturer. It cannot stand expressing a meaningful and complete thought, meaning it qualifies to be a dependent clause in this situation. The participant firstly introduced a full stop (.) at the end of the independent clause, preceded by the subordinating conjunction 'because', which is ungrammatical, and it is considered a run-on error. Basically, the use of a full stop (.) after an independent clause marks the end of it. In contrast, if there is a comma or any subordinating conjunction immediately after an independent clause, it is a clear sign that the sentence is continuing. The participant was supposed to have used the coordinating conjunction '*because*' alone without a full stop, so that the sentence can be grammatical and has a logical structure.

The second error is the disagreement between a singular common noun '*tutor*' and a plural possessive pronoun '*their*' in the dependent clause. Since the gender of a tutor is not specified as the independent clause, the participant should have used a singular possessive pronoun '*his*' or '*her*' on the dependent clause so that there is an agreement between the common noun '*tutor*' and the pronoun that substitutes it to avoid redundancy error. The possessive pronoun '*their*' in this case makes the dependent clause ambiguous because it is not clear whether it represents tutor and lecturer, or it is just that the participant wanted to write '*tutors*' instead of '*tutor*'. During group discussions, I found that the participant had limited knowledge of the correct use of the pronouns, which is a challenge.

The plural pronoun '*their*' was used to substitute the singular common noun '*tutor*', which is incorrect because there is no agreement between the two terms. Another important issue to consider is the structure of the dependent clause (*their sessions are considered privately and may not earn*). This clause seemed to be incomplete because it ended with the verb '*earn*', which shows that something should be attained or accumulated. The participant should have written a specific object or thing that they would like to earn. Therefore, if the verb phrase '*may not earn*' can be removed, the sentence will remain meaningful. The sentence can, therefore, be improved as follows:

- (1) *A tutor is not the same as a lecturer because their lessons are considered private.*

However, if it is the case that the student wanted to write '*tutors*', the sentence can be rewritten as follows:

(2) *Tutors are not the same as lecturers because they offer lessons outside the classrooms.*

#### 4.5.1.2.3 Omission of commas

First-year participants have been learning sentence structures, grammar rules, punctuation marks, phonetics, and other fundamentals since their primary and secondary school levels. However, based on the data collected from the participants' essay writing, some of the participants are still struggling with the correct use of punctuation and conjunctions in sentence composition, especially compound and complex sentences, as shown in the following sentence constructed by P5:

*I Tutors have an important job towards the students They help us understand what we did n't in class I*

This is a complex sentence composed of independent and dependent clauses. It contains two types of errors, such as the omission of a comma and capitalisation. '*Tutors have an important job towards the students*' is an independent clause, whereas the expression '*They help us understand what we did n't in class*' is a dependent clause. The participant combined these two clauses without a subordinating conjunction or a comma, which is considered a comma omission error. The dependent clause begins with the third-person pronoun '*they*', where its first letter '*T*' is a capital letter, which is also ungrammatical. Another error is the omission of the verb '*do*' in the phrase '*we did n't in class*'. In academic writing, the phrase '*did n't*' should be written in full as follows: *we did not do in class*. Thus, the sentence can be revised as follows:

(1) *Tutors have an important job for the students; they help them understand what they did not do in class.*

If the participant is a part of the students who are being assisted by the tutors, the sentence can be constructed as follows:

(2) *Tutors play an important role in our academics; they help us understand topics that we did not cover in class.*

Complex sentences are composed of a combination of independent and dependent clauses. These clauses can either be joined by subordinating conjunctions such as because, although, since, after, while, whereas, if, commas, or relative pronouns (who,

which, or that). Based on the revised sentence above, a comma is used to link the independent clause with the dependent clause, ensuring the sentence has proper structure and a logical flow of ideas. The two clauses can also be merged using the subordinating conjunction ‘*because*’ as follows:

*Tutors have an important job towards the students because they help them understand what they did not do in class.*

Every word in L2 falls under one of nine word classes/parts of speech, namely, noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, article, conjunction, preposition, and interjection. Although these parts of speech have been taught from the primary level, some of the participants still struggle to use them correctly in their sentences, particularly in complex sentences, as in the following sentence constructed by P6:

*Academically they help students in learning better than lecturer. because tutors teach students in every subject.*

This is a complex sentence composed of one independent clause and one dependent clause. The expression ‘*Academically they help students in learning better than lecturer*’ is an independent clause because it expresses a complete thought, and it can also stand on its own. Alternatively, the expression ‘*tutors teach students in every subject*’ is a dependent clause because it relies on the first independent clause for it to express a clear and complete thought to the readers. The participant used a full stop, followed by the subordinating conjunction ‘*because*’ to join the independent and dependent clauses, which is regarded as a fragment error.

The third-person pronoun ‘*they*’ represents tutors. The use of a full stop after an independent clause gives the impression that the first clause is a sentence on its own, and the second clause is another sentence, yet that is not the ultimate purpose of a full stop in this situation. The independent clause begins with the adverb ‘*academically*’, which specifies academic professionalism. This adverb serves as an introductory term, meaning it was supposed to be followed by a comma (,) before the third-person pronoun ‘*they*’. The student omitted a comma after the adverb ‘*academically*’. Therefore, P6 should have started the above sentence as follows:

*Academically, they help students in learning better than lecturers.*

The second error is the use of a full stop, preceded by the subordinating conjunction 'because', to join the dependent clause with the independent clause. The participant should have used the subordinating clause 'because' alone to link the two clauses. From my perspective, after the adverb 'academically' on the independent clause, the participant was supposed to have used a common noun 'tutors' to specify the subject of a sentence rather than a pronoun 'they'. On the dependent clause, the common 'tutors' was supposed to be substituted by its pronoun 'they' to maintain the logical flow of ideas. Therefore, the sentence can be improved as follows:

*Academically, tutors help students to learn better more than what lecturer do because they teach students in every subject.*

#### 4.5.1.2.4 Run-on errors

Complex sentences appear to be challenging to some of the selected participants, particularly those with low proficiency in the use of commas after the introductory statements. The ability to combine different words to form well-organised complex sentences requires participants who have an in-depth understanding of when to use commas, semi-colons, and subordinating conjunctions. The reason behind this statement is that most participants often combine introductory statements and independent clauses without using commas, which is ungrammatical. This can be seen in the second sentence constructed by P6:

*After finding them they do follow-ups trying to find solutions to such so the students' performance can improve I*

This is a complex sentence composed of two clauses, the independent and dependent clauses, and the introductory statement. The participant started the above sentence with an introductory statement, but did not acknowledge it by using a comma, which is considered an omission of a comma error. The expression 'after finding them' is an introductory statement, which expresses the period after the identification of errors in learning L2 by tutors. The expression 'they do follow-ups' is an independent clause because it establishes what the tutors do after identifying errors committed by the students in L2 learning. Therefore, to make this sentence well-structured and convey a logical flow of ideas, a comma (,) was supposed to be used to indicate that the first expression is an introductory statement, followed by the independent clause. The participant fused the introductory statement with the independent clause, resulting in

an ungrammatical sentence. However, I like the fact that the participant used a correct subordinating conjunction 'so' to effectively link an independent clause with a dependent clause (*the students' performance can improve*), although he omitted the pronoun 'that' after the subordinating 'so'. Basically, the subordinating conjunction 'so' is combined with the pronoun 'that' to form a compound subordinating conjunction 'so that' to link the independent clause with a dependent clause in a coherent manner. Therefore, the sentence can be improved as follows:

(1) *After finding them, they do follow-ups, trying to find solutions so that the students' performance can improve.*

Or

(2) *After tutors identify errors, they do follow-ups to try to find the solutions so that the students' performance can improve.*

Compound sentences are commonly composed by the combination of two or more simple sentences or independent clauses. This process is governed by the correct application of coordinating conjunctions and semicolons. However, some of the selected participants have demonstrated limited knowledge of how to effectively use coordinating conjunctions to form logical and grammatical compound sentences. They combined two or more clauses without linking them by coordinating conjunctions or semicolons to form compound sentences, which is considered a run-on error. This can be shown in the first sentence constructed by P7:

*Investment in good tutoring is not so much a study technique it is the key to a lifetime communication skill and ability /*

This is a compound sentence, which contains a run-on error. The expression '*Investment in good tutoring is not so much a study technique*' is an independent clause because it can stand on its own, but its semantic value seems to be incomplete. Therefore, this clause functions as an independent clause, serving as an introductory statement. Alternatively, the expression '*it is the key to a lifetime communication skill and ability*' is also an independent clause because it makes sense on its own, but its semantic value relies on the first clause. This simply entails that the second clause is a continuation of the first clause. Therefore, these clauses are related to one another,

meaning the participant was supposed to have used a semi-colon (;) to join these two clauses to form a compound sentence. This type of error is called a run-on error. A run-on error occurs when two or more simple sentences or independent clauses are combined without the use of coordinating conjunctions such as for, and, but, nor, or, yet, so, or semi-colons. Since the first clause functions as an introductory statement, it was worthwhile to use a semicolon to link the two independent clauses. The expression '*tutoring is not so much a study technique*' may not be clear to readers due to the participant's poor diction. The first clause can be improved as follows: *Investment in effective tutoring is not just a study technique.*

Therefore, this sentence can be reconstructed as follows:

*(1) Investment in effective tutoring is not just a study technique; it is the key to a lifetime communication skill and ability.*

The structure of compound sentences has been on the L2 syllabus since the secondary level. This simply means that the participants were expected to have mastered the ability to combine independent clauses to form meaningful compound sentences. Furthermore, the participants were also expected to know the correct use of coordinating conjunctions to link independent clauses, as many journal articles, dictionaries, and grammar books focus on the proper use of conjunctions. In my view, if students are still struggling to effectively link independent clauses to form compound sentences at the university level, it suggests that they may not have been well-equipped in their secondary education, or it may be due to a lack of knowledge in compound sentence composition.

#### 4.5.1.2.5 Subject-verb agreement errors

The process of combining independent and dependent clauses to form complex grammatical sentences requires students who are knowledgeable or well-equipped in the correct use of subordinating conjunctions. The reason is that the participants appear to have low proficiency on how to effectively connect clauses that are contrasting with each other to form compound sentences. Some of the participants omit commas after the introductory statements, which makes sentences fuse structures or run-on errors, as in the following sentence constructed by P7:

*/ Most of the times tutors uses an effective method of techniques which make it easier for us to learn because lecturers uses lecture method /*

This is a complex sentence because it is composed of a combination of an independent (*Most of the times tutors uses an effective method of techniques which make it easier for us to learn*) and dependent (*lecturers uses lecture method*) clauses. This sentence contains several errors.

The first error is the omission of a comma after an idiomatic expression '*most of the times*', which in this case acts as an introductory statement. This idiomatic expression is, however, written incorrectly, meaning it was supposed to be '*most of the time*', not '*most of the times*'. The second error is the disagreement between the common noun '*tutors*' and the present tense verb '*uses*'. '*Tutors*' in this case is a plural common noun, whereas the verb '*uses*' is in the singular form. The two components do not agree with each other in this sentence, which is regarded as subject-verb agreement error. The third error is in the dependent clauses, towards the end of the sentence. The participant also corresponded with the common noun '*lecturers*', which is in plural form, with the singular verb '*uses*', which is a subject-verb error. The verb '*uses*' was supposed to be in its plural form '*use*' so that it can effectively correspond with the common noun '*lecturers*'.

The expression '*tutors use an effective method of techniques*' is not clear. The terms '*method*' and '*techniques*' refer to all the pedagogical strategies that tutors use to impart lessons to students. I suggest that '*techniques*' is the most appropriate term that can be used in this sentence, as it is a broad term expressing unspecified two or more ways that the tutors use to teach students. In contrast, the term '*method*' is limited only to one channel of imparting lessons to the students by tutors, which can therefore, highly impossible for all L2 tutors to use only one common method or technique to teach students because it happens that every tutor has his/her preferred method to teach the students. Lastly, the dependent clause is in contrast with the independent clause, which means that the participant was supposed to have used contrastive conjunctions such as *whereas*, *unlike*, *while*, etc. Therefore, this sentence can be revised in three ways:

- (1) *Most of the time, tutors use effective techniques which make it easier for us to learn, whereas lecturers use the lecture method.*

OR

(2) *Tutors often use effective techniques, which make learning easier, whereas lecturers tend to use the lecture method.*

OR

(3) *Most of the time, tutors use effective techniques that make it easier for us to learn, unlike lecturers who rely on the lecture method.*

#### 4.5.1.3 TABLE 3

**Theme 3;** Complex and compound sentences

<b>P8</b>		<b>Types of errors</b>
➤	Social interaction and Communication Skill. language practice. collaborative learning encourages students to engage in conveying discussions.	<i>Capitalisaton, fragments, and subject-verb agreement errors.</i>
➤	Tutors must switch off such phobias by creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere. positive reinforcement, like praise for their improvements and setting achievable targets.	<i>Fragment error</i>
<b>P9</b>		
➤	Tutors provides honest, + constructive feedback that allows student to learn how to edit and improve writing and speaking.	<i>Subject-verb agreement and omission of coordinating conjunction (and)</i>
➤	As learning changed, tutors still remains critical in helping students acquire linguistic skills and achieve their potential.	<i>Subject-verb agreement errors</i>
<b>P10</b>		
➤	English learning is a complex process that requires dedication, practice-and guidance- and it can be hard mastering it	<i>Omission of commas</i>

	especially when faced with challenges such as grammar, vocabulary-and pronunciation.	
➤	Content module. they should examine and come with the solution on how they are going solve the problem. as a students-for me to be empower   it is when I get enough assistance and extra time of studying so that it can also improve my performance through my academics.	<i>Fragment, capitalisation, misuse of indefinite article, and omission of commas</i>
<b>P11</b>		
➤	Tutors help students break down difficult topics into manageable parts, develop and refine gaps through practice and feedback-and they encourage and motivate student to reach their full potential	<i>Omission of comma</i>
➤	through the content module-student should have tutors that may assist their problem, they should take control to help them. they should empower and willing to assist their content module in order give good performance	<i>Capitalisation, fragment, and omission of comma errors</i>
<b>P12</b>		
➤	With all the attention every student gets from their tutors-helps them to sharpen their understanding of the language quicker and more accurately.	<i>Omission of comma</i>

#### 4.5.1.3.1 Fragment error

The effective use of punctuation marks in sentence composition allows participants to express their ideas logically. Furthermore, punctuation also plays a vital role in connecting independent clauses with dependent clauses to form grammatically complex sentences. However, some of the participants sometimes get confused about whether to use commas, semi-colons, or full stops to join clauses, particularly in compound and complex sentences. This can be seen in the first sentence constructed by P8:

*I Social interaction and Communication Skill. language practice. collaborative learning encourages students to engage in conveying discussions I*

This is a complex sentence composed of two noun phrases and one independent clause joined by full stops instead of commas, which is considered a fragment error. The expression '*Social interaction and communication skill*' is a phrase because it does not have a subject and a verb. '*Language practice*' is another phrase that was supposed to be combined with the first phrase using a comma. Lastly, the expression '*collaborative learning encourages students to engage in conveying discussions*' is an independent clause because it contains both the subject (collaborative learning) and the verb (encourages), and it can stand alone to express a complete thought.

The use of full stops to link the two phrases is regarded as a fragment error because these phrases do not express complete thoughts. Therefore, commas were supposed to be used, not full stops. Towards the end of the sentence, the verb phrase '*to engage in conveying discussions*' appears to be unclear, meaning the diction used by the participant is poor. At the tertiary level, the participant should be able to effectively link different words to form grammatical and comprehensible sentences. In my understanding, if the verb '*conveying*' can be removed, it will not affect the semantic value of this sentence. Therefore, the sentence can be improved as follows:

*Social interaction and communication skills, language practice, and collaborative learning encourage students to engage in discussions.*

Based on the data obtained from participants' essay writing and during group discussions. It is recognised that the ability to connect independent and dependent clauses to form grammatical complex sentences requires participants who can differentiate between independent and dependent clauses. Furthermore, it requires an in-depth understanding on the correct use of punctuation and subordinating conjunctions. This can be evidenced by the second sentence constructed by P8:

*I Tutors must switch off such phobias by creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere. positive reinforcement, like praise for their improvements and setting achievable targets I*

This is a complex sentence composed of one independent clause and two dependent clauses. To illustrate the areas where the participant made errors, this sentence can be broken down as follows: '*Tutors must switch off phobias*' is an independent clause because the semantic value depends on it, and it can stand alone and express a meaningful message to the readers. Alternatively, the expression '*creating a friendly*

*and supportive atmosphere*' is a dependent clause because if it is not linked with the independent clause, it remains meaningless and cannot stand alone. Its primary purpose is to clearly express measures that the tutors should take to overcome phobias (fears). Additionally, the expression '*Positive reinforcement, like praise for improvement and setting achievable targets*' is also a dependent clause, just like the second dependent clause. The participant made an error because of merging the two independent clauses using a full stop, instead of a comma and a subordinating conjunction '*and*' to make the sentence correct.

Essentially, a full stop is used to indicate the end of a sentence. At the beginning of the sentence, the participant linked the independent clause (*Tutors must switch off such phobias*) with the first dependent clause (*creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere*) using a subordinating conjunction '*by*', which is grammatical. Therefore, the participant was supposed to have used a comma and a subordinate conjunction '*and*' to link the second dependent clause with the first independent clause to maintain the correct structure of a complex sentence and ensure the logical flow of ideas conveyed by the sentence. Although no rule binds how phrases should be written in L2 in academic writing, the phrase '*must switch off*' is a strong claim. It can be suitable in non-academic contexts. I suggest that the suitable terminologies that the participant could have used are '*alleviate*' or '*overcome*'. The sentence can be revised as follows:

(1) *Tutors can alleviate students' phobias by creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere, and positive reinforcement such as praising their improvements and achievable targets.*

OR

(2) *Tutors can help students overcome their phobias by creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere that foster positive reinforcement such as praising their improvements and setting achievable targets.*

Focusing on the second sentence constructed by P10:

*I Content module. they should examine and come with the solution on how they are going solve the problem. as a students for me to be empower it is when I get enough assistance and extra time of studying so that it can also improve my performance through my academics I*

During the group discussion, it was identified that some participants find it difficult to differentiate between the structural variations of complex and compound sentences. A complex sentence is commonly composed of at least one independent clause and one dependent clause joined by subordinating conjunctions such as while, until, since, when, because, although, though, etc. In some instances, complex sentences can be composed of one independent clause and two or more dependent clauses determined by the content. In contrast, a compound sentence is a product of the combination of two or more independent clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction. The sentence constructed by P10 above illustrates that the participant has limited knowledge in linking independent and dependent clauses to form grammatically complex sentences.

The participant constructed the above expression as a complete sentence, whereas it contains more than six types of errors. At first, the participant committed a fragment error. The expression '*content module*' is a phrase that does not express a complete thought or any meaningful message to the reader. The student placed a full stop (.) immediately after a common noun '*module*', which symbolises or entails the ending spot of the sentence, which is a fragment error. A complete sentence should at least contain a subject and a verb. Others contain both the subjects, verbs, and objects. This suggests that the participant has limited understanding of what constitutes a complete sentence. The expression '*they should examine and come with the solution on how they are going solve the problem*' is a complex sentence which is meaningful and grammatical. This expression is linked with the phrase that is at the beginning of the sentence. The participant thought that the phrase serves as an introductory statement but failed to write it correctly by using a comma (,) instead of a full stop (.). Therefore, to rectify the fragment error, this sentence can be improved as follows:

*By using content module strategy, tutors should examine the problem and come up with the solution how they are going to solve it.*

P10 also lacks understanding of how to correctly link the dependent clause with the independent clause. Focusing on the following expression '*as a students for me to be empower it is when I get enough assistance and extra time of studying so that it can also improve my performance through my academics*'. The participant made an error by starting a sentence with a small letter 'a', which is not allowed. Essentially, every sentence should begin with a capital letter and conclude with a full stop (period). The

participant also corresponded with an indefinite article 'a' with a plural common noun 'students', which is an error because an indefinite article 'a' is often used with a singular subject that begins with a consonant sound. Since the participant was addressing 'students', the indefinite article 'a' was supposed to be omitted because there is no agreement between the indefinite article 'a' and the plural common noun 'students.' If the subject was in a singular form (student), that is where an indefinite 'a' article can be used. This type of error is like the subject-verb agreement error, wherein the students, particularly the low proficiency ones, correspond to the plural subjects with the singular verbs.

The errors in the above paragraph can be easily corrected by participants who are more familiar with grammar and have the potential to master the relationship between subjects, verbs, and objects. The participant also committed an error by fusing two dependent clauses with an independent clause without any conjunction or punctuation mark in between, which is a run-on error. The expression '*as a students for me to be empower*' is a dependent clause, while the expression '*it is when I get enough assistance and extra time of studying so that it can also improve my performance through my academics*' is an independent clause. The two clauses were joined without a conjunction, which is ungrammatical. A complex sentence is the product of the combination of independent and dependent clauses, linked by subordinating conjunctions or commas.

Again, the expression '*as students for me to be impower*' does not make sense because the participant first addressed the 'students' and then immediately shifted to talk about him in one clause without a comma. Although it seems that the student was addressing himself, he was supposed to stick to his identity as the subject of the sentence rather than mixing the common noun 'students' and himself as the subject, because one can find it confusing to identify the main subject of this sentence. Therefore, this sentence can be revised as follows:

*As a student, receiving adequate support and additional study time would empower me to enhance my academic performance.*

#### 4.5.1.3.2 Subject-verb agreement error

The subject-verb agreement is a syntactic rule that ensures that a singular subject corresponds with the singular verb. Alternatively, the plural subject also takes a plural

verb form. This rule appears to be simple and understandable. However, some of the participants corresponded with the plural subjects with the singular verbs, which is considered a subject-verb error. Others consider that the addition of the suffix 's' to the main verbs changes them from singular to plural forms, resulting in the linking of verbs that end with 's' with plural subjects, which can lead to errors. This can be shown in the following complex sentences constructed by P9:

- |  |
|--|
| 1. Tutors provides honest, constructive feedback that allows student to learn how to edit and improve writing and speaking.      |
| 2. As learning changed, tutors still remains critical in helping students acquire linguistic skills and achieve their potential. |

In the first sentence, the word '*tutors*' is a plural common noun. The main verb of a sentence is '*provides*', which is in a singular form. This verb (*provides*) is aligned with the plural subject '*tutors*', which is ungrammatical because the two components do not agree in number. Therefore, to convert the singular verb '*provides*' into plural form, the participant should have eliminated the suffix 's' from the verb '*provides*', so that it agrees with the plural subject '*tutors*'. Therefore, this is a clear reflection that the participant has limited knowledge of the subject-verb agreement rule. In my view, if the participant is struggling to apply this rule at the tertiary level, it may be challenging to construct compound and complex sentences, as these types of sentences require advanced knowledge or a high proficiency level in the correct use of punctuation and conjunctions to link clauses.

During group discussions, I asked the participants why they sometimes consider the verbs that end with 's' as plural forms. They indicated that most verbs that end with 's' are in plural forms because they normally do the same when converting a regular singular noun to a plural form. Some of them stated that they often forget the subject-verb rule when writing an essay. L2 has many syntactic rules that must be followed when constructing sentences. If the participants do not master them, the possibility is that they might always commit errors. At the university level, participants are expected to have mastered the subject-verb agreement rule, as lecturers cannot dwell extensively on teaching grammar rules due to the numerous aspects to cover in L2. Therefore, the first sentence can be revised as follows:

*Tutors provide honest and constructive feedback that allows students to learn how to edit and improve their writing and speaking.*

The error in the second sentence is the same as in the first sentence, as I indicated. Both sentences contain subject-verb agreement errors due to the alignment of the plural subjects with the singular verbs, which is ungrammatical. Based on the second sentence constructed by P9 on the above table, the word ‘*tutors*’ is a plural common noun, whereas ‘*remains*’ is the main verb of a sentence, and it is in the singular form. Basically, plural subjects should correspond with plural verbs, and singular subjects with singular verbs. This means that the second sentence contains a subject-verb agreement error because the subject does not agree with the main verb. Therefore, the sentence can be reconstructed as follows:

*As learning changed, tutors remain critical in helping students to acquire linguistic skills and achieve their potential.*

Although the above sentence has been revised, the introductory statement remains unclear and can sometimes confuse readers because the participant used poor diction. ‘*Learning*’ is a system where students are required to obtain knowledge about certain aspects within the syllabus through class lessons, discussions, or by reading prescribed books, journal articles, or other sources they can use to generate knowledge. It does not make sense when the participant wrote ‘*as learning changed*’ because this phrase gives the impression to the readers that the learning system changed immediately at the time of talking, whereas that is not the participant’s ultimate intention. The change of the learning system takes a long period, just like when the Department of Education changes the curriculum. This means that it would be good if the participant used the past perfect tense of the verb ‘*change*’, which is ‘*has changed*’, to indicate that for decades or a few years ago up until the contemporary period, the learning system keeps changing. This specifies that the learning system from 2000 to 2010 is different to the one used today. Therefore, the second sentence on the table can be improved as follows:

(1) *As the learning system has changed, tutors remain committed in helping students acquire linguistic skills and achieve their potential.*

OR

(1) *Due to changes in the learning system, tutors remain strongly committed in helping students acquire linguistic skills and achieve their potential.*

#### **4.5.1.3.3 Omission of commas**

Complex and compound sentences were challenging for some participants, particularly those with limited knowledge of grammar. In some instances, the participants excel by joining words into phrases, which in turn become well-organised, meaningful, and grammatically correct independent clauses. Problems arise when combining two or three independent clauses using coordinating conjunctions to form compound sentences. As a result, some participants used coordinating conjunctions without commas to link independent clauses, forming compound sentences that are considered run-on errors. This type of error can be shown in the following sentence constructed by P10:

*I English learning is a complex process that requires dedication, practice and guidance and it can be hard mastering it especially when faced with challenges such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation I*

In the above sentence, there are two types of errors that the participant committed; the first one is the omission of a comma before the coordinating conjunction 'and' to effectively link the two independent clauses. The second error lies in the omission of commas to link the last aspect in both clauses. The expression '*English learning is a complex process that requires dedication, practice and guidance*' is an independent clause because the message is centred on it and can stand alone as a complete sentence. However, the participant omitted a comma when introducing the last quality (guidance) that is required during the process of learning L2. The participant only used a coordinating conjunction, 'and', to link 'practice' and 'guidance', as if the two aspects were the same, whereas they are different. Therefore, this clause can be reconstructed as follows:

*Learning English is a complex process that requires dedication, practice, and guidance.*

Now that the above independent clause has been revised, the errors persist at the point of the two clauses, as I indicated earlier. The expression '*it can be hard mastering it especially when faced with challenges such as grammar, vocabulary and*

*pronunciation*' is also an independent clause because it can also stand alone and express a complete thought, although its semantic value depends on the first clause.

The omission of a comma when joining the two clauses makes them read as one clause, which is regarded run-on error. A run-on error is a type of error that occurs because of constructing a long sentence without correct punctuation. Another error that the participant committed towards the end of the second independent clause is fusing '*vocabulary*' and '*pronunciation*' as if the two aspects are the same or considered to be one, whereas they are different. The participant was supposed to first employ a comma followed by a coordinate conjunction '*and*' after '*vocabulary*' to link the two aspects correctly, so that it would be clear that the two aspects are different. Therefore, this compound sentence can be improved as follows:

*Learning English is a complex process that requires dedication, practice, and guidance, and it can be hard to master, especially when faced with challenges such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.*

#### 4.5.1.4 TABLE 4

**Theme 4;** compound and complex sentences

<b>P13</b>		<b>Types of errors</b>
➤	Most students find speaking English in universities doing first year and public spaces because they are not used to speaking English since they are coming from high schools  many students may feel anxious about speaking and writing.	<i>Run-on error</i>
➤	Regular tutoring lessons encourage student to stay focused with their studies and instill a sense of responsibility towards their education   as we are in an increasing interconnection world- we have to know the English language	<i>Run-on error and omission of comma errors</i>
<b>P14</b>		
➤	Tutors can encourage students to think critically in English- and they can tailor their coaching methods to suit	<i>Omission of a comma,</i>

	student needs individually so, focus on specific areas where a students may struggle.	<i>omission apostrophe, misuse of indefinite article, and comma splice errors</i>
➤	Tutors provide accountability and motivation helping students to stay on tracks with their learning goals.by setting achievable targets and tracking progress.	<i>Sentence fragment</i>
<b>P15</b>		
➤	Tutors explain grammar, words that are new and also how to write good sentences.	<i>Conjunction redundancy</i>
➤	Tutors enhance communication skills by engaging students in a conversation and help them practice listening and speaking   which are essential for fluency	<i>Verb form and omission of a comma errors</i>
<b>P16</b>		
➤	Both teacher and tutors aim to facilitate, encourage-and aid learning however there are some clear differences in their role and responsibilities	<i>The omission of a comma, run- on, and pronoun-noun agreement error</i>
➤	Tutors give feedback and encouragement to the students, By doing so, tutors make a big difference in students' learning experiences	<i>Comma splice, Capitalisation, and redundancy errors</i>
<b>P17</b>		
➤	Tutoring can be more of a dialog where a tutor and a learner can have a one-to-one conversation wherein the students raises an individual concept-which could be challenging	<i>Subject-verb agreement and comma omission errors.</i>
➤	There are several roles of a tutor tutoring students in English learning, a tutor empowers student by providing	<i>Comma splices error</i>

	guidance, target instruction and confidence building, this can be through check listing the English subject matters.	

#### 4.5.1.4.1 Run-on errors

Most participants are familiar with the distinction between independent and dependent clauses. However, the challenge is that some of them have a low proficiency level on how to combine them to form compound and complex sentences. As a result, they end up constructing long sentences composed of independent and dependent clauses that are not correctly punctuated or linked by conjunctions, leading to run-on errors. It can be seen in the following sentence constructed by P13, which contains a run-on error:

*I Most students find speaking English in universities doing first year and public spaces because they are not used to speaking English since they are coming from high schools |many students may feel anxious about speaking and writing I*

This sentence is composed of complex and simple sentences, which are not logically linked. During the discussions, the participant stated that the sentence above is a complex sentence, which is not correct. To simplify the analysis of this sentence, it can be broken as follows: ‘*Most students find speaking English in universities doing first year and public spaces because they are not used to speaking English since they are coming from high schools*’ is a complex sentence composed one independent clause and two dependent clauses. The expression ‘*many students may feel anxious about speaking and writing*’ is a simple present sentence explaining the challenges encountered by the participants, as they are not used to speaking English in public spaces. This simple sentence is directly connected with the complex sentence linked to it because its semantic value is the continuation of what was being said in the complex sentence.

Basically, these two sentences should have been separated by a full stop (.) instead. The participant was supposed to place a full stop immediately after the common noun ‘*schools*’ to indicate the ending point of the first sentence. The complex sentence is grammatically correct, but the diction used is subpar. Therefore, the complex sentence can be improved as follows:

*Many students commonly speak English in public spaces and at university during their first year because they were not used to speaking English in high school, where they commonly used their mother-tongue to communicate.*

The above sentence has been improved and can be easily understood by readers. Although certain words were changed, the semantic value carried remains the same. The second sentence is simple, as I mentioned earlier, and it is grammatically correct. However, it appears to be incomplete because the participant acknowledged that students may feel anxious when speaking and writing but did not specify the language that the students have learned. In this case, the participant is referring to English. The simple sentence can be improved as follows: *Many students may feel anxious about speaking and writing in English.* I have previously indicated that the complex sentence is related to this simple sentence. Thus, the two sentences can be linked as follows:

*Many students begin to speak in English in universities during their first year. This is because they were not used to speaking English at high school, where they commonly used their mother tongue to communicate. As a result, many students may feel anxious about speaking and writing in English.*

According to Karen (2024) and Pornthanachotan (2020), the ability to combine clauses to form complex sentences requires students with high proficiency or those who have mastered the correct usage of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, as well as punctuation marks. In their studies, the two researchers found that students with low proficiency in syntax often unconsciously merge two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction, which is considered a run-on error. Others join the independent clauses using a coordinating conjunction without being preceded by commas (a comma omission error). The participants showed that they have limited knowledge of grammar as they did not receive adequate instruction in high school.

The second sentence constructed by P13 is as follows:

*I Regular tutoring lessons encourage students to stay focused with their studies and instill a sense of responsibility towards their education as we are in an increasing interconnection world we have to know the English language I*

This is a complex sentence which contains a run-on error. The expression '*regular tutoring lessons encourage students to stay focused with their studies*' is a

main/independent clause because it can stand on its own and express a complete thought. The expression '*instil a sense of responsibility towards their Education*' is a coordinating clause that is directly linked with the main clause. The two clauses were joined by a coordinating conjunction, '*and*', which is grammatical. One would ask why the coordinating conjunction '*and*' has not been used with a comma. The answer is, in this situation, the subject of the sentence is one (regular tutoring lessons), and it is performing two actions (encourage and instil) at the very same time. Therefore, this means that the two clauses are the same.

The expression '*as we are in an increasing interconnection world*' is a dependent clause which has been linked with the coordinating conjunction (instil a sense of responsibility towards their education) without a suitable subordinating conjunction '*because*', leading to a run-on error. The participants made a mistake of writing '*interconnection*' instead of '*interconnected*'. Another issue to consider is that the expression '*we have to know the English language*' is an independent clause; hence, it is combined with the dependent clause (*as we are in an increasing interconnection world*) without a subordinate conjunction or any form of punctuation, which is ungrammatical.

English is governed by a set of syntactic rules which ensure that the language is used correctly. This means that the violation of any syntactic rule by the participants cannot be ignored, as these rules guide the effective construction of sentences. The omission of subordinating conjunctions to join the two clauses makes the above sentence not have organised structure, leading to run-on errors. Therefore, the sentence can be improved as follows:

*Regular tutoring encourages students to stay focused with their studies and instils a sense of responsibility towards their education because we are in an increasingly interconnected world, where proficiency in English is essential.*

Based on the collected data, it is found that most participants have limited knowledge of how to correctly use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions to compose compound and complex sentences. Furthermore, some are also struggling with how to use the adverbial conjunctions, such as *however, moreover, furthermore, therefore, consequently, meanwhile, etc.*, to join two or more simple sentences to form compound sentences. This is shown in the following sentence constructed by P16:

*/Both teachers and tutors aim to facilitate, encourage and aid learning however there are some clear differences in their role and responsibilities /*

This is a compound sentence, composed of two independent clauses joined by the adverbial conjunction '*however*'. It contains three types of errors, namely, omission of a comma, subject-verb agreement, and run-on errors. Basically, when an adverbial conjunction is used to join two or more independent clauses, or simple sentences, it should be preceded by a semi-colon (;). In this sentence, the adverbial clause '*however*' shows a contrast between two sentences without being preceded by a semicolon, which is a run-on error. At the end of the first sentence, the participant should have introduced a semi-colon, followed by the adverbial clause '*however*', and then linked the second sentence just as follows:

*/ ...aid learning; however, there are some.../*

Another error is the omission of a comma after the verb '*encourage*'. Normally, a comma is used to separate the items on the list, and it can be used with a coordinating conjunction to form compound sentences. Additionally, it can also be used after an introductory statement. In this sentence, a comma was used to separate different purposes/assignments of tutors and teachers towards the students. Their assignments are different, which means that they should have been separated by commas. The verbs '*encourage*' and '*aid learning*' are fused by the coordinating conjunction '*and*' without a comma, which is ungrammatical because they are not one. The participant should have introduced a comma immediately after '*encourage*', followed by a coordinating conjunction, '*and*' as follows:

*Both teachers and tutors aim to facilitate, encourage, and aid learning.*

The last error is the disagreement between the pronoun and noun (their and role). In the last sentence, *there are some clear differences in their role and responsibilities*. The third person possessive pronoun '*their*' is in a plural form while it corresponds with a singular noun '*role*', which is ungrammatical because the two components do not agree in number. Therefore, the participant should have added a suffix '*s*' to the noun '*role*' to be in a plural form (roles) so that the plural pronoun '*their*' and noun '*roles*' are equal in number, which is grammatical. Therefore, this compound sentence can be improved as follows:

(1) *Both teachers and tutors aim to facilitate lessons, encourage the students, and foster learning; however, their roles and responsibilities towards the students are different*

This compound sentence can be broken into two sentences as follows:

(2) *Both teachers and tutors aim to facilitate lessons, encourage students, and foster learning. However, their roles and responsibilities are different.*

#### 4.5.1.4.2 Comma splice errors

The second sentence constructed by P13 is as follows:

*I Tutors can encourage students to think critically in English and they can tailor their coaching methods to suit student needs individually so, focus on specific areas where a students may struggle I*

This is a complex sentence composed of two independent clauses and one dependent clause. The expression '*tutors can encourage students to think critically in English*' is an independent clause because it can stand on its own and express a complete thought. Additionally, the expression '*they can tailor their coaching methods to suit student needs individually*' is the second independent clause within the same sentence. The independent clauses are commonly combined by commas followed by coordinating conjunctions to form a complex sentence. However, if two independent clauses are closely related or express ideas that are connected, a semicolon (;) can be used to link the two independent clauses to form a compound sentence.

As the sentence continues, the participant combined the two independent clauses using a coordinating conjunction '*and*' alone, which is considered a run-on error because the two independent clauses appeared as one clause. The participant was supposed to first use a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction '*and*' after the first independent clause, so that the two clauses would have been connected effectively. Another error is the omission of an apostrophe (') on the common noun '*student*' in the second independent clause. The phrase '*students needs*' can be interpreted as what the students require to think critically. In contrast, the phrase '*students' needs*' can be understood as what is needed to empower the students to

think critically. The omission of an apostrophe on the plural noun 'students' is not only considered as an error but also alters the intended message. Therefore, the two independent clauses can be combined as follows:

*Tutors can encourage students to think critically in English, and they can also tailor their coaching methods to suit each student's needs.*

The third error is the incorrect use of a comma and the conjunction 'so', which acts as a coordinating conjunction to link the second independent clause with the dependent clause. Subordinating conjunctions such as *because, since, although, if, by, and though* are used without commas to join the independent clauses with dependent clauses to form complex sentences. In this situation, the participant was supposed to use the subordinating conjunction 'by' to link the second independent clause with a dependent clause. The fourth error is the disagreement of the article 'a' and the plural noun 'students'. Under normal circumstances, the indefinite article 'a' is commonly used with the singular nouns or subjects that start with consonant sounds. The participant should have used a singular common noun 'student', not 'students', so that the indefinite article 'a' and the singular common noun 'student'

agree in number. Therefore, this complex sentence can be improved as follows:

*Tutors can encourage students to think critically in English, and they can also tailor their coaching methods to suit each student's needs by focusing on specific areas where a student faces difficulty.*

The process of forming compound and complex sentences requires participants who can differentiate between independent and dependent clauses. In addition, they should also be able to distinguish between coordinating and subordinating clauses and when to use them. Based on findings obtained during group discussions, some participants are aware that compound sentences are formed by combining two or more simple sentences or independent clauses, connected by commas (,) and coordinating conjunctions, or semi-colons (;), which is correct. However, conjunctive phrases such as *by doing so, as a result of, on the other hand, in fact, in addition, in doing so, etc.*, also play an essential role in combining independent clauses to form compound sentences. The participants appear to have limited knowledge of how to use these phrases to connect two or more independent clauses and produce grammatically

correct compound sentences. The sentence below was constructed by P16, and it contains run-on and noun-redundancy errors.

*I Tutors give feedback and encouragement to the students, By doing so, tutors make a big difference in students' learning experiences I*

This is a compound sentence composed of two independent clauses. The expression '*tutors give feedback and encouragement to the students*' is an independent clause because it can stand on its own and express a complete thought. '*Tutors make a big difference in students' learning experience*', is also another independent clause because it expresses a complete thought. Both clauses make sense on their own and are joined by a comma (,) and a conjunctive phrase '*By doing so*', which is ungrammatical. Basically, when a conjunctive phrase is used to link two or more independent clauses or simple sentences, a semicolon should be used to link them to show that the two clauses are connected or express one central idea. Unfortunately, the participant used a comma (,) instead of a semicolon (;), which is a comma splice error. The participant should have introduced a semicolon (;), followed by the conjunctive phrase '*by doing so*' at the end of the first clause, then linked the second clause to form a grammatical compound sentence.

Another error is the capitalisation of the first letter of the conjunctive phrase (*By doing so*) in the middle of the sentence. The first letter '*B*' should begin in small letters because it is in the middle of a sentence, and it is not a proper noun. The third error is the repetition of the subject '*tutors*' in the second clause, which is considered a redundancy error. Basically, if the subject of a sentence is a noun and is mentioned at the beginning of the sentence, when it is mentioned for the second time, it is replaced by its pronoun to avoid tautology error. This means that in the second independent clause, the noun '*tutors*' should have been replaced by the plural third-person pronoun '*they*'. Therefore, this compound sentence can be improved as follows:

*(1) Tutors provide feedback and encouragement to the students; by doing so, they greatly advance students' learning experiences.*

OR

*(2) Tutors provide feedback and encouragement to the students. By doing so, they greatly advance students' learning experiences.*

#### 4.5.1.4.3 Fragment errors

Based on the collected data, participants with limited proficiency in L2 struggle with determining when and where to use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions to link independent and dependent clauses and form complex sentences. As a result, after the independent clause, the participants wrote a full stop (.) followed by subordinating conjunctions, which is considered a fragment error. This statement is based on the following sentence constructed by P14 and P15:

<b>P14.</b> Tutors provide accountability and motivation helping students to stay on tracks with their learning goals.by setting achievable targets and tracking progress
---

<b>P15.</b> Tutors explain grammar, words that are new and also how to write good sentence
--

Although the participants had spent many years learning L2 grammar rules from primary to secondary school, some of them still found it challenging to correctly link independent and dependent clauses to form grammatically complex sentences. They sometimes merge independent and dependent clauses without conjunctions or punctuation marks, which is a run-on error. Others joined independent and dependent clauses using a full stop, which is regarded as a fragment error. Lastly, others use full stops (.) together with subordinating conjunctions to link independent and dependent clauses, which is ungrammatical. The following sentence was constructed by P14:

*I Tutors provide accountability and motivation helping students to stay on tracks with their learning goals.by setting achievable targets and tracking progress I.*

This is a complex sentence that contains two types of errors: run-on and sentence fragment errors. The expression '*Tutors provide accountability and motivation helping students to stay on track with their learning goals*' is a complete sentence, which expresses a meaningful and complete thought. The above sentence, constructed by P14, is composed of one independent and participial clause. The expression '*Tutors provide accountability and motivation*' is a main/independent clause, while '*helping students to stay on tracks with their learning goals*' is a participial clause because it begins with the verb form ending in '*-ing*'. The two clauses establish different roles that tutors should perform towards students, such as providing accountability and

motivation, as well as helping them stay focused. The omission of a comma between the two clauses leads to a run-on error.

In my view, the phrase '*on track with their learning goals*' is not clear enough or understandable because the common noun '*goals*' refers to what the participants want to achieve or accomplish in the future. Therefore, '*goals*' cannot be learned, but rather be achieved or accomplished. I am kindly suggesting that the phrase '*stay on tracks with their learning goals*' can be substituted by the verb phrase '*to stay focused on achieving their goals*'. The participant should have written this sentence as follows:

(1) *Tutors provide accountability and motivation to the students, helping them to stay focused on pursuing their goals.*

OR

(2) *Tutors provide accountability and motivation to help students stay focused on achieving their goals.*

The participant also used a full stop (.) after the participial clause (*helping students to stay on tracks with their learning goals*), immediately followed by the preposition '*by*', which is a sentence fragment error. Basically, a full stop indicates the end of the sentence. The participant was supposed to use the preposition '*by*' without a full stop. Therefore, the sentence can be revised as follows:

*Tutors provide accountability and motivation to the students, helping them to stay focused on pursuing their goals by setting achievable targets and monitoring progress.*

From my perspective, P14 has not yet mastered the grammar rules and effective use of punctuation marks because he does not know when to use a comma and a full stop when combining clauses, which is a common challenge in academic writing. At the university level, the participant is expected to have a broader or advanced knowledge of how to organise different words cohesively and coherently to form sentences that are meaningful and grammatically correct while adhering to the assigned syntactic rules. The participant should have mastered the correct usage of punctuation marks and conjunctions at the secondary level.

#### 4.5.1.4.4 Omission of commas

P15

Tutors enhance communication skills by engaging students in a conversation and help them practice listening and speaking | which are essential for fluency

Verbs are essential components in sentence composition because they show actions done by the subjects, link ideas, describe the state of being, show tenses, and indicate the time of events. This simply means that the incorrect usage of verb forms or tenses may sometimes alter the semantic values of the sentences. The same applies to punctuation, which ensures that sentence components are connected effectively to express logical and meaningful messages. The above sentence is a complex sentence, which contains two types of errors, namely, parallel error (verb inconsistency) and omission of a comma before the relative clause. '*Tutors enhance communication skill*' is the central focus of the sentence, and a preposition '*by*' is used to indicate how communication skills can be enhanced.

The participant used two verbs that do not match in tenses, which are '*engaging*' and '*help*'. The verb '*engaging*' is in the present participle tense, and it is used as a gerund because it ends in '*-ing*'. The verb '*help*' is in the simple present tense form. The verb '*help*' was supposed to be in the present participle tense, just like the verb '*engaging*'. The participant failed to be consistent in verb tenses, resulting in a parallelism error. The second error is the omission of a comma before the relative clause '*which are essential fluency*'. Therefore, this complex sentence can be improved in two ways:

(1) *Tutors enhance communication skills by engaging students in a conversation and helping them to practice listening and speaking, which are essential measures to increase proficiency in English.*

#### 4.5.1.4.7 Subject-verb agreement errors

The subject-verb agreement rule can be challenging for some participants, especially those with limited proficiency in grammar. This is because most sentences constructed by the participants contained subject-verb agreement errors. It is a clear indication that the participants find it difficult to apply the subject-verb agreement rule when composing sentences. They correspond to the plural subjects with singular verbs,

which is ungrammatical. The following sentence was constructed by P17, and it contains a subject-verb agreement error:

*ITutoring can be more of a dialog where a tutor and a learner can have a one-to-one conversation wherein the students raises an individual concept which could be challenging!*

In this sentence, the common noun ‘students’ is in a plural form while ‘raises’ is a singular verb. These two components were corresponding together by the participant, which is considered a subject-verb agreement error. The subject-verb agreement rule ensures that a plural subject goes with the plural verb, while a singular subject is aligned with the singular verb. The expression ‘which could be challenging’ is a non-restrictive clause, which provides additional information to the main idea carried by the sentence. This clause was supposed to be preceded by a comma (,) to show that it is adding value or additional support to the central idea within the sentence. Therefore, this sentence can be improved as follows:

*Tutoring can be in the form of a dialogue where a tutor and learner engage in a face-to-face conversation, wherein the student can raise concepts that could be challenging to him/her.*

#### 4.5.1.5 TABLE 5

##### Theme 5; Simple sentences

P18		Types of errors
➤	Tutors helps students with their assignments.	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>
➤	Tutors helps students to boost their marks.	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>
P19		
➤	Most of significant problem is when a student spend time on studying.	<i>Determiner-noun agreement error</i>
➤	Benefits of tutoring is that it can be customised.	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>
P20		

➤	Tutors allow their student to express their feelings without judging.	<i>Pronoun-noun agreement error</i>
➤	Tutors strengths students' social emotional learning and feelings of belonging.	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>
➤	Tutors introduces one concept at a time, ensuring students	<i>Subject-verb agreement and fragment errors</i>

#### 4.5.1.5.1 Subject-verb agreement errors

Subject-verb agreement rule ensures that the subject of the sentence agrees with the verb in number. In other words, the singular subject goes with the singular verb, while the plural subject corresponds with the plural verb. This rule seems easy to understand; however, since participants have different knowledge and proficiency levels in grammar, some of them, particularly those with limited competence and proficiency in grammar, struggle to align plural subjects with plural verbs. In essay writing, participants often corresponded to plural subjects with verbs in singular form, which constitutes a subject-verb agreement error. This can be shown in the following sentence constructed by P18:

*I Tutors helps students with their assignments I*

This is a simple present sentence, which contains a subject-verb agreement error. The word '*tutors*' is a plural common noun, whereas the verb '*helps*' is in a singular form, and it is the main verb of this sentence. There is no agreement between the subject '*tutors*' and the verb '*helps*'. The participant did not follow the subject-verb agreement rule. The plural form of the verb '*helps*' is '*help*', meaning that the participant was supposed to use the plural verb form '*help*', instead of '*helps*', so that the subject '*tutors*' agrees with the main verb '*help*', which is grammatical. The participant also made the same error in the second sentence, as shown in the table above. This indicates that the participant has limited knowledge of the correct application of the subject-verb agreement rule. Therefore, the first sentence can be improved as follows:

(1) *Tutors help students with their assignments.*

OR

(2) *Tutors help students with their assignments to boost their semester marks.*

During the group discussions, participants suggested that, based on their knowledge and experiences, the suffix 's' is commonly added to singular nouns to form their plural forms. For example: *goat-goats, car-cars, pillar-pillars, school-schools, table-tables, etc.* The participants were correct; however, irregular singular nouns only change vowels to form the plural. For example: *man-men, tooth-teeth, foot-feet, goose-geese, foot-feet, etc.* The participants revealed that the same way of adding the prefix 's' to *singular nouns can also be applied to* irregular singular verbs to change them into plural forms, which is incorrect. This shows that the participants overgeneralised the way in which regular singular nouns are changed to plural form, thinking that the same rule can be applied in the verb category, hence there are exceptions. In my understanding, the subject-verb agreement rule is one of the easiest rules in sentence composition because it only requires participants to align singular subjects with singular verbs and plural subjects with plural verbs.

Although most of the selected participants faced challenges in applying the subject-verb agreement rule correctly, some were able to use it correctly throughout their essays. It is an indication that the participants have different levels of understanding towards the subject-verb agreement rule. Most of the subject-verb agreement errors were found in compound and complex sentences. It is because the participants constructed long sentences without effectively aligning the subjects and the main verbs. Others used many words to compose their sentences, but were unable to link them coherently, resulting in sentences that lacked proper structure.

Due to a lack of knowledge in syntactic rules, the participants ended up corresponding plural subjects with singular verbs, which is considered a subject-verb agreement error. When constructing simple sentences, it is easy to align the subjects and verbs because most simple sentences commonly contain a single subject and a single main verb. Therefore, participants are only required to know how to identify whether subjects are in plural or singular form, so that they can use the correct verbs that align with the subjects of the sentences. However, some of the participants still find it difficult to align the subjects and verbs in simple sentences, as in the following sentence constructed by P19:

/ Benefits of tutoring is that it can be customised /

The noun phrase '*benefits of tutoring*' acts as the subject of this sentence, hence it is in the plural form. The phrase '*benefits of tutoring*' expresses two or more positive outcomes/results that are produced through tutoring. The participant corresponded this phrase with the singular auxiliary verb '*is*', which is a subject-verb agreement error. Initially, the participant used the phrase '*benefits of tutoring*', implying that two or more benefits should have been stated. The participant was supposed to correspond the phrase '*benefit*' with the auxiliary verb '*is*'. The act of corresponding '*benefits*' with '*is*' makes this sentence contain a subject-verb agreement error. The participant should have aligned the phrase '*the benefits of tutoring*' with the plural auxiliary verb '*are*' and mentioned at least two positive outcomes that are obtained by students because of being tutored. Therefore, this sentence can be revised as follows:

- (1) *The benefits of tutoring are guidance and support, enabling the students to grasp difficult concepts, improve their understanding, and achieve academic success.*

Suppose that the participant wanted to address one benefit, a singular noun phrase '*benefit of tutoring*' can correspond with the singular auxiliary verb '*is*' as in the following sentence:

- (2) *The benefit of tutoring is that it expands students' knowledge in the sentence composition process.*

Based on the collected data, subject-verb agreement errors are particularly challenging for participants with low proficiency. This is because some of them indicated that they are not familiar with grammar books or journal articles, and they do not allocate enough time to study the syntactic rules that govern sentence composition. A subject-verb agreement rule may seem simple and straightforward, but most participants find it challenging to apply when constructing sentences. They commonly correspond to plural subjects with singular verbs, which is ungrammatical. Based on the data collected from the group discussions and essay writing, some of the participants, particularly those with limited knowledge in grammar, considered that most of the verbs that end with the suffix '*s*' are in plural forms. Due to this perception, some of them certainly tend to correspond plural subjects with verbs that are in the singular form, leading to subject-verb agreement errors. This can be seen in the following sentence constructed by P20:

*Tutors strengths students' social emotional learning and feelings of belonging*

The subject of this sentence is a common noun 'tutors' and it corresponds with the singular verb 'strengths', which is considered a subject-verb error. The noun 'tutors' is in a plural form, whereas 'strengths' is in the singular form. The two components do not agree with each. The participant should have omitted the suffix 's' on the main verb 'strengths', and then added the suffix '-en' to be 'strengthen', so that it aligns with the plural subject 'tutors'. The word 'strengthen' is a dynamic verb which expresses the act of making something stronger or effective. This type of verb can be aligned with both singular and plural subjects. Therefore, this sentence can be revised as follows:

*The roles of tutors are to strengthen students' social-emotional learning and feelings of belonging.*

In my view, P20 has a low proficiency level in grammar because the subject-verb agreement rule is not fully understood, particularly when it is applied to simple sentences, as I mentioned earlier. This participant revealed that she does not have enough time to study grammar books or journal articles because he has many modules to study, except L2. Additionally, she noted that L2 grammar rules are challenging to comprehend. At the tertiary level, participants are expected to have mastered the subject-verb agreement rule, enabling them to produce grammatical sentences. It is essential to note that L2 lecturers have multiple tasks to teach within a prescribed period, and they cannot devote excessive time to teaching grammar due to its time-consuming nature. Therefore, participants should study grammar books independently to enhance their understanding of sentence formation.

A complete sentence contains at least the subject and verb and expresses complete thought. Others contain both the subjects, verbs, and objects. A sentence that contains the subject and verb but does not clearly express a complete thought contains a fragment error, meaning it is incomplete. This statement can be shown in the following sentence constructed by P20, which contains two types of errors, namely, subject-verb agreement and fragment errors:

*I Tutors introduces one concept at a time, ensuring students. I*

I have mentioned multiple times that 'tutors' is a plural common noun and should be aligned with verbs that are in plural form. In this sentence, 'tutors' is corresponded with

the singular verb '*introduces*', which is considered a subject-verb agreement error because the two components do not agree in number. The participant should have omitted the suffix 's' from the verb '*introduces*' to change it from a singular state to a plural form '*introduce*', so that there is an effective alignment between these two components. The second error is referred to as a fragment. The above sentence ended with the participle phrase '*ensuring students*', which shows that the sentence was continuing. Based on my evaluation, the participant should have placed a full stop after the common noun '*time*', so that the sentence can have the structure of a complete simple present sentence. Thus, this sentence can be improved as follows:

(1) *Tutors introduce one concept at a time.*

OR

(2) *Tutors introduce one concept at a time, ensuring that the students understand it before moving to the next one.*

#### 4.5.1.5.2 Adjective-noun agreement error

The following sentence was constructed by P19:

*/ Most of significant problem is when a student spend time on studying /*

This is a simple sentence which contains an error of agreement form, just like the two sentences in the above paragraphs constructed by P20, which contain subject-verb errors. In contrast, this one contains an adjective-noun agreement error. The word '*most*' acts as an adjective in this sentence, and it is in a plural form because it expresses two or more problems. The word '*problem*' is a singular common noun, and it aligns with the plural adjective '*most*', which is ungrammatical. The adjective '*most*' and the common noun '*problem*' do not agree in number, which is called an adjective-noun agreement error. The participant should have written '*problems*' instead of '*problem*'. The suffix 's' was supposed to be added to the singular common noun '*problem*', for it to be in a plural form (*problems*), so that it agrees with the plural adjective '*most*'. As the participant only raised one problem, '*spending time on reading*', the sentence can begin with an adjective '*one*' as just as follows: *One of the problems.*

The use of '*significant problem*' appears to be an irrelevant phrase because '*problem*' is something that delays the achievement of something. Therefore, '*problem*' cannot be considered an important aspect in learning, as it can downgrade the performance

of participants and sometimes cause students to fail. The student who has a problem might not concentrate in class, sometimes may not even study, ending up failing because he/she lack knowledge on what was being taught in class. I suggest that the appropriate word to substitute for '*significant*' is the superlative adjective '*biggest*'. However, the important point to consider is that '*most*' and '*biggest*' are all superlatives that express the degree of comparison between two or more things, and they cannot be placed next to each other in one sentence because it is considered a tautology error. The participant can either use '*most*' or '*biggest*'.

In my understanding, the adjective '*biggest*' is suitable because it highlights the most significant limiting factor among other unstated factors that contribute to students' failure in L2. The structure of this sentence is well-organised; it has a subject, 'student', and a main verb, '*studying*'. However, this sentence appears to be incomplete because it is unclear how a student can fail when they spend most of their time studying. It would be understandable if the participant stated that the student fails because they spend most of their time studying topics that they do not understand. This simply means that this sentence also contains a fragment error because it is incomplete. Therefore, the sentence can be improved as follows:

*One of the biggest problems that the students face is spending most of his/her time on studying topics that he/she does not understand.*

#### 4.5.1.5.3 Pronoun-noun agreement error

Syntax refers to the overall set of rules and patterns that govern how words, phrases, and clauses are arranged to form grammatical sentences. One of the syntactic rules is the pronoun-noun agreement rule, which ensures that plural nouns correspond with plural pronouns and singular nouns with singular pronouns. Based on the findings, it was discovered that some participants lacked knowledge of how to align nouns and pronouns in sentence composition. The participants corresponded the singular nouns with plural pronouns, which is ungrammatical. This can be shown in the following sentence constructed by P20:

*Tutors allow their student to express their feelings and frustrations without judging*

Based on the underlined phrase in the above sentence, there is disagreement between the common noun '*student*' and the third person pronoun '*their*', which is a pronoun-noun agreement error. The common noun '*student*' is in a singular form, and

it corresponds with the plural third-person pronoun '*their*', which is ungrammatical. The participant was supposed to add the suffix 's' to the common noun '*student*' to convert it to the plural form '*students*' so that the two components agree in number. Another issue is that the above sentence ended with a present participle verb '*judging*', which shows an ongoing action. This is not an error; however, it makes the sentence sound incomplete. The participant should have ended this sentence with a third-person pronoun '*them*'. Therefore, this sentence can be improved as follows:

*Tutors allow their students to express ideas freely without judging them.*

The participants indicated that L2 grammar rules are difficult to the extent that they struggle to use them correctly when constructing sentences. Some revealed that they commonly made errors because they did not have sufficient exposure to studying grammar, whereas others argued that L2 is not their mother tongue, and some of its grammar rules differ from those of their L1. In other words, the differences between L1 and L2 make it difficult for some participants to construct L2 sentences that are grammatical, particularly the compound and complex sentences. Based on the analysis of the findings, I found that although most participants indicated that grammar rules are difficult for them, some of the selected participants were able to apply most of the grammar rules when composing sentences. In my view, the participants differ in nature, possess varying knowledge of sentence composition, exhibit distinct cognitive abilities, and have varying levels of understanding in sentence composition.

Despite the complexity of grammar rules, participants should strive to master them, sentence structures, and the effective use of clauses, so that they can construct grammatical sentences during the examination. The lecturers or examiners will not consider that grammar rules are difficult for the participants; therefore, any misuse or violation of grammar rules will be considered as an error, and no mark will be provided. Participants should devote their time to studying various grammar books, slides, or journal articles to enhance their understanding of sentence composition.

#### 4.5.1.5.4 Summary of the findings

Based on the data presented from tables 1 to 4, most of the sentences that contain errors are compound and complex sentences. Table 5 encompasses simple sentences; most of them contain subject-verb-agreement errors. The findings revealed that the total errors committed by the selected participants is 83, categorised into 15

types of errors, which are as follows: The average percentages of each type of error are as follows: omissions of commas errors 19 (22.89%), capitalisation 8 (9,64%), run-on 8 (9,64%), sentence fragment 9 (10,84%), subject-verb agreement 11 (13,25%), redundancy errors 5 (6,02%), pronoun-noun agreement 4 (4,82%), Coma-splice errors 5 (6,02%), pronoun-verb agreement errors 2 (2,41%), misuse article 3 (3,61%), contraction 2 (2, 41%), omission of apostrophe 1(1,20%), determiner-noun disagreement errors 1 (1,20%), adjective-noun disagreement errors 1 (1,20%), and omission of conjunction errors 1 (1,20%).

The participants are familiar with the structural differences between a phrase, a clause, and a sentence. During group discussions, most participants successfully defined the term 'phrase' and differentiated between independent and dependent clauses, as well as compound and complex sentences. However, the challenge was in linking clauses to form compound and complex sentences. The participants have limited knowledge of the effective use of punctuation marks, as well as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. As a result, some combined independent clauses using commas, which is regarded as a comma splice error, while others used full stops to link clauses, which is a fragment error. Under normal circumstances, independent clauses are linked by commas, followed by coordinating conjunctions to produce compound sentences that are logical and grammatical. I found that some participants lack knowledge of the differences between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. That is why they certainly use full stops and subordinating conjunctions to link independent and dependent clauses, which is ungrammatical. Basically, subordinating conjunctions such as while, because, since, although, etc., are not used with commas or full stops when combining independent and dependent clauses. They are used alone. For example, *Justice and Martin failed because they did not study*. The highest type of error is the omission of commas (22,89%).

The participants have limited knowledge of what the introductory statements mean. In other words, they are unfamiliar with the introductory statements. Due to limited knowledge in introductory statements, the participants merged the introductory statement with other parts of the sentences, which is ungrammatical. Others used coordinating conjunctions without commas when joining independent clauses, which is also ungrammatical. The participants have a low proficiency level in the correct use of the punctuation marks. The second type of error is the subject-verb agreement.

Since most of the singular regular nouns require the addition of the suffix 's' to be in plural form, the participants overgeneralised this rule and applied it in the verb class, yet there are exceptions. The participants consider that the same rule can be used in the verb class; they understand that most of the verbs that end with the suffix 's' are in plural form while they are in the singular state. That is the reason most of the participants corresponded the plural common nouns with verbs in the singular form.

The third type of error committed by the participants is fragment errors, at 10.48%. The participants joined independent clauses using full stops, which is considered as a fragment error. Others used full stops to link phrases, which is also regarded as a fragment error. I found that the participants have limited knowledge of the correct use of punctuation marks, particularly commas and full stops, which is a challenge in academic writing. The school's library has many L2 grammar books and dictionaries that participants can use to acquire knowledge of punctuation. The participants do not give themselves enough time to study punctuation. Their smartphones have full access to the school's Wi-Fi, and they can visit different internet websites that focus on the effective use of punctuation and conjunctions. However, I found that the participants spend most of their time using their smartphones for entertainment purposes and always use social media platforms than studying. It is not wrong to use social media for entertainment, but the participants should be accountable for their studies, so that they can pass at the end of the semester. The purpose of participants being at the university is to study, thereby acquiring skills and knowledge about specific aspects that will help them secure jobs.

Run-on and capitalisation errors are the fourth type of errors committed by the participants, with 9, 64%. During group discussions, I found that most of the participants were able to identify the differences between independent and dependent clauses; however, they faced challenges in combining independent clauses to form compound sentences. As a result, they commonly joined two independent clauses without using coordinating conjunctions or semicolons. The participants often struggle to differentiate between coordinating and subordinating clauses. Therefore, when composing compound and complex sentences, they sometimes get confused about whether to use coordinating or subordinating conjunctions. At the end, they link clauses without using either of the two types of conjunctions, leading to run-on errors. Other participants wrote some common nouns where their first letters begin in capital

letters. Some participant started their sentences with small letters, which is ungrammatical. The participants need to be diligent and serious with their studies, as unnecessary capitalisation suggests that they do not take their studies seriously. At the tertiary level, participants must understand that every sentence should start with a capital letter, and common nouns are written in lowercase letters. Limited knowledge in using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions is also a sign that the participants are not familiar with grammar books.

The fifth type of errors are redundancy and comma splice errors with 6,02% each. Although punctuation may seem simple to understand, some participants, particularly those with low proficiency in grammar, joined independent clauses using commas, which is ungrammatical. Others kept repeating the common noun *'tutors'* multiple times, which is a redundancy error. The participants revealed that the syntactic rules are difficult for them. Some stated that they rarely study sentence composition, while others stated that there are not enough resources available for them to study. However, my concern is that the university has a library with many grammar books and computers that can be used by the participants to gather knowledge in sentence composition. They have access to smartphones and laptops, which they can use to view online slides, notes, journal articles, grammar books, and lessons that focus on the use of punctuation and other aspects necessary for sentence composition.

In my opinion, participants tend to focus more on entertainment than on studying, which may result in poor academic performance. Pronoun-noun agreement error (4,82%) is the sixth type of error omitted by the participants, followed by misuse of article (3,61%), and contraction errors (2,41%). Omission of apostrophe 1 (1,20%), determiner-noun disagreement errors 1 (1,20%), adjective-noun disagreement errors 1 (1,20%), and omission of conjunction errors 1 (1,20%) are the least common types of errors committed by the participants.

Although the participants acknowledged that the syntactic rules are difficult to master, they should strive to learn them in order to construct logical and grammatically correct sentences. Based on the data presented and analysed from Themes 1 to 5, the participants struggled to combine clauses to form compound and complex sentences. It is because they have low proficiency in punctuation, and some have limited knowledge in using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. In my view, if the

participants can read grammar books or use other sources that focus on sentence composition, they can construct sentences that are well-organised and meaningful in academic writing. However, during group discussions, I found that the participants lack exposure to L2. In other words, the participants do not allocate sufficient time for studying. Although one would wish the participant to be competent and proficient in sentence composition, if they do not study or focus on their studies, it might be difficult for them to compose grammatical sentences. The following section will focus on the data collected from the participants using group discussions. The importance of using group discussions in this study was to determine whether the participants understood the term phrase, the distinction between independent and dependent clauses, and compound and complex sentences.

#### 4.5.2 GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This section provides the findings obtained from the selected participants using group discussions. It also identifies the contributing factors that hinder participants from constructing complete and grammatical sentences. The participants were divided into two (2) groups. Each group encompasses 10 participants. The reason for dividing them into two groups was to ensure that each participant expressed themselves fully, with the aim of obtaining valid and reliable data. The second reason was to ensure that the participants are controllable and cooperating, so that the discussions would not be delayed or interrupted. The following were three (3) questions asked of the participants during group discussions:

4. *What is a phrase?*
5. *What is the difference between an independent and a dependent phrase?*
6. *What is the difference between compound and complex sentences?*

### FIGURE 1A

#### Theme 6

Definition of a phrase

<b>P1- P10</b>	<b><i>Definitions of a phrase</i></b>
<b>P1</b>	Is like sentence, but it is short and does not have a clear meaning

<b>P2</b>	Phrases are incomplete sentences
<b>P3</b>	Group of words that work together to form a sentence
<b>P4</b>	Group of words that act as single part of speech without a subject and verb
<b>P5</b>	Words that express thought or idea but do not form a complete sentence
<b>P6</b>	Group of words without finite verb and conveys a single idea
<b>P7</b>	Words that express a thought or idea
<b>P8</b>	Small group of words that stand together to form a sentence
<b>P9</b>	-
<b>P10</b>	-

## FIGURE 1B

Definition of a phrase

<b>P11- P20</b>	<b><i>Definitions of a phrase</i></b>
<b>P11</b>	Small group of words without a subject and verb, and it forms a part of sentence
<b>P12</b>	Group of words that function together in a sentence but do not have subject and verb
<b>P13</b>	Group of words without both the verb and subject
<b>P14</b>	Compilation of words that work together as a unit, but do not have the subject and verb, and it does express a complete though
<b>P15</b>	Group of words related words that does not contains both the subject and verb
<b>P16</b>	Refers to the group of words that function as a unit, but lacks the subject or verb
<b>P17</b>	Group of words that work together as a unit, but without the subject and verb
<b>P18</b>	Group of words that are related that function as single units in a sentence
<b>P19</b>	-
<b>P20</b>	-

Based on the data presented in the above two tables (Figure 1A and 2B), 16 students managed to define the term 'phrase', while four (4) failed to define it as they indicated that they did not know what a 'phrase' meant. Although most of the participants defined the term '*phrase*', it seems that some of them do not know what exactly the '*phrase*' is. P1 poses that the phrase is like a sentence, and it does not express a clear meaning. This is not correct because a phrase is a group of words that lacks a subject or a verb, and it does not convey a complete thought. Basically, a phrase forms part of a sentence but cannot stand on its own as a complete sentence. P2 also seems to have a limited knowledge of what a phrase is because she stated that a '*phrase*' is an incomplete sentence, which is incorrect.

An incomplete sentence has at least a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. P7 stated that a '*phrase*' is words that express a thought, which is also not correct because a '*phrase*' is a combination of two or more words that lack the subject and verb and do not carry a clear and meaningful message. A '*Phrase*' forms part of a sentence but cannot stand on its own and express a complete thought. For example: *Red Mercedes-Benz*. This phrase is meaningless, but it can take on meaning and express a complete thought when combined with other words to form a sentence. For example, *Moses bought a red Mercedes-Benz yesterday*.

P12, P13, and P14 stated that a phrase does not have both a subject and a verb, which is correct. For example: (1) *The blue car (noun phrase)*, and (2) *Eating at night (verb phrase)*. I appreciate that P16 and 17 stated that a phrase is a group of words that functions as a unit but lacks both a subject and a verb. This is what the term 'phrase' means. These two participants understand that a '*phrase*' is composed by combining two or more words that lack the subject and verb, which form part of a sentence. This simply means that phrases are the basic segments of the sentences. Without phrases, it is highly impossible to have sentences.

According to P4 and 18, a phrase refers to a group of related words of the same word classes that lack the subject and verb. These two participants understand that a '*phrase*' does not have both the subject and verb; however, they lack the knowledge that sometimes a '*phrase*' may be composed of words that belong to different parts of speech. For example: *Up to the moon*. '*Up*' is a preposition, '*the*' is the determiner,

while 'moon' is the noun. Therefore, this means that it is not always that 'phrases' are composed by the same word classes. Although some of the participants had limited knowledge of the basic structure of a 'phrase', most of the participants managed to define it correctly. A total of 4 students, such as P9 and P10 in Figure 1A, and P19 and P20 in Figure 1B, did not attempt to define it, which means they do not understand what it means by a 'phrase'. Based on the data presented above, most of the participants do not fully understand what a phrase is. At this level, they should have mastered how words are combined to form phrases, clauses, and finally, how clauses are used to form compound and complex sentences.

## FIGURE 2A

### Theme 7

The difference between independent and dependent clauses

<b>P1- P10</b>	<b><i>Independent clause</i></b>	<b><i>Dependent clause</i></b>
<b>P1</b>	Contain subject and verbs, and can stand alone as a complete sentence	Group of words that contain the subject and verb, but cannot stand alone
<b>P2</b>	Group of words that contains the subject and verb and expresses a complete thought	Also known subordinating clause contain subject and verb but does not express a complete thought
<b>P3</b>	Can stand alone as a complete sentence	Cannot stand alone, it needs more additional information
<b>P4</b>	Group of words that express a complete thought and can stand alone	Cannot stand on its own as a complete sentence
<b>P5</b>	Refers to the group of words that express a complete thought and can also stand alone	Cannot stand on its own, it relies on independent clause to be meaningful
<b>P6</b>	Independent clause is the main idea of the sentence. It is able to stand alone	Always contain verbs, but cannot stand alone

<b>P7</b>	Are combination of words that consist of the subject and verb, and can stand alone	It does not express a clear idea and cannot stand alone
<b>P8</b>	Group of words that contain subject and verb	Does not have a subject or verb, and do not express a complete thought
<b>P9</b>	Can stand alone	Cannot stand on its own
<b>P10</b>	The group of words that contain the verb and subject which shows the main ideas	Contain the subject and verb, but it is incomplete

## FIGURE 2B

Different between independent and dependent clauses

<b>P11-20</b>	<b><i>Independent clause</i></b>	<b><i>Dependent clause</i></b>
<b>P11</b>	Group of different words that can stand its own and express a clear and complete meaning	Cannot stand alone because it should be linked with the dependent clause
<b>P12</b>	Words that contain the subject and verb, and show a complete thought	Group of words that contain the subject and verb but cannot stand alone
<b>P13</b>	-	-
<b>P14</b>	Independent clause is a complete sentence	Is an incomplete sentence
<b>P15</b>	Refers to the group of words that can stand alone as a complete sentence	Group of words that contain both subject and verb but cannot stand alone without an independent clause
<b>P16</b>	-	-
<b>P17</b>	Words that can stand alone and expression action	Cannot stand on its own
<b>P18</b>	Group of words that contain both the subject and verb, and can	Group of words that have both the subject and verb but cannot express complete thought

	stand alone to express a complete idea	
<b>P19</b>	Combination of words that contain the subject or a verb, and express a central idea of the text	Does not have the subject and verb and cannot stand alone
<b>P20</b>	Contain the subject and verb, and act as a sentence	It does not stand alone without being attached to the independent clause

The compound and complex sentences are both composed of a combination of independent and dependent clauses. This process is governed by a set of syntactic rules that ensure compound sentences are formed by two or more independent clauses joined by commas, together with coordinating conjunctions such as 'for', 'and', 'nor', 'but', 'yet', 'so', or semi-colons. On the other hand, complex sentences are made by at least one independent clause and one dependent clause joined by subordinate conjunctions such as *since, because, although, whereas, even though, so that, etc.*

According to the data presented in the above two tables (Figures 1B and 2B), P1, P2, P7, P10, P18, and P20 define an independent clause as a group of words that consists of a subject and a verb, which expresses a complete thought. They also stated that an independent clause can stand alone as a complete sentence. Alternatively, these participants defined dependent clauses as a group of words that consist of the subject and verb but cannot stand alone to convey a complete thought to the reader. A dependent clause should be combined with an independent clause for it to express a complete thought. These participants provided concise and understandable explanations of the differences between independent and dependent clauses. This is a clear indication that these participants have high proficiency on how to combine clauses to form compound and complex sentences because they have mastered the structures of these two clauses and how they are combined, including the conjunctions that are required for the formation.

P9, P11, and P17 defined the independent clause as words that can stand on their own and express meaning, while dependent clauses are words that cannot stand on their own. These explanations are not clear and satisfying because the participants did not mention the '*subject*' and '*verb*', which are essential components of the

sentences. The group of words without the subject and verb are considered a phrase because it cannot stand firm on its own and express a complete thought. The participants should have stated that an independent clause is a group of words that contains both the subject and verb and expresses a complete thought, while a dependent clause is formed by combining words that consist of a subject and verb but cannot stand alone and express a complete thought. In other words, dependent clauses should be combined with independent clauses to convey a complete thought to the readers.

Based on the explanation offered by P14, an independent clause is a complete sentence, while a dependent clause is an incomplete sentence. This explanation is correct and understandable. Basically, an independent clause is equivalent to a simple sentence because it contains the subject and verb and expresses a complete message, and it can stand on its own. This means that this participant understands that independent clauses are equivalent to simple sentences because they both contain subjects and verbs, can stand alone and express complete thoughts. The participant also suggested that a dependent clause is an incomplete sentence because it cannot stand alone. This gives the impression that the participant is aware of the structural differences between independent and dependent clauses.

In conclusion, most participants were able to differentiate between independent and dependent clauses, although their explanations varied. Only P13 and P16 honestly stated that they do not know the structural variation between the independent and dependent clauses, which is understandable given that participants have different proficiency levels in L2. Some have high proficiency while others have low proficiency.

### FIGURE 3A

#### Theme 8

Different between compound and complex sentences

P1- P10	<i>Compound</i>	<i>Complex</i>
P1	Composed by two independent clauses joined by conjunction	Is made by the combination of one independent and one dependent clause

<b>P2</b>	Consists of two independents clauses combined by words such as and, or, and but	It consists at least one independent and one dependent clause
<b>P3</b>	Is made up of two independent clauses of equal value	Is made by dependent and independent clauses
<b>P4</b>	Is made by the combination of two independent clauses linked by the conjunction	This sentence is made by combining one independent cause and one dependent clause
<b>P5</b>	Compound is composed by combining independent and dependent using coordinating conjunction	Independent + dependent clauses joined subordinating conjunction
<b>P6</b>	-	-
<b>P7</b>	Is made by joining two independent clauses using but, and, and because. For example: <i>I like tea</i>	Is made by combining one independent and dependent clause using conjunctions
<b>P8</b>	Combining two or more independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunction	Is made by mixing independent and dependent clauses
<b>P9</b>	-	-
<b>P10</b>	Compound sentence is made by combining two independent clauses of equal vales. Each clause can stand on its own	The combination of independent and dependent clauses.

**FIGURE 3B**

Different between the compound and complex sentences

<b>P11- P20</b>	<b>Compound</b>	<b>Complex</b>
<b>P11</b>	Consist of two or more independent clauses and each	Consist of one dependent clause which cannot stand alone

	clause can stand on its own and meaningful	
<b>P12</b>	Is formed by the combination of two independent clauses joined by the conjunction	One independent clause + dependent clause joined by subordinating conjunction
<b>P13</b>	-	-
<b>P14</b>	This sentence is made by joining two simple sentences or independent clauses using coordinating conjunction or semi-colon	To form complex sentence, independent and dependent clauses are combined using subordinating conjunction
<b>P15</b>	Contains two or more independent clauses brought together by conjunction	It is formed by at list one independent clause and two or more dependent clauses joined by conjunction
<b>P16</b>	-	-
<b>P17</b>	Combination of independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunction	The dependent clause is combined with and independent clause using subordinating conjunction
<b>P18</b>	Refers to the combination of two different independent clauses	Refers to the combination of the independent clause with the dependent clause
<b>P19</b>	-	-
<b>P20</b>	-	-

The two tables above (Figures 3A and 3B) present the definitions provided by the participants based on the variations between compound and complex sentences. The ideal is to measure participants' proficiency levels in combining clauses to form complex and compound sentences, as well as the rules they employ during this process. According to P5, P8, P14, and P17, a compound sentence is a product of the combination of two or more independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions. On the other hand, a complex sentence is composed of at least one independent clause and one dependent clause. Their explanations are all correct, but they forgot to indicate that to construct a meaningful and grammatical compound sentence, the

coordinating conjunctions are preceded by commas when joining independent clauses. It is because the independent clauses are equal in value, and each expresses a complete, meaningful message.

According to P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P12, P15, and P18, a compound sentence is made by combining two or more independent clauses joined by conjunctions. Alternatively, a complex sentence consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Their explanations are understandable but lack clarity because they indicate that a compound sentence is made up of two independent clauses joined by an unspecified conjunction. It is not clear whether they are referring to coordinating or subordinating conjunctions. This is a clear reflection that the participants lack adequate knowledge of when to use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions to join clauses to form compound and complex sentences. These participants are likely to join two independent clauses using a subordinating conjunction, which is ungrammatical. I asked them to differentiate between the coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. None of them was able to distinguish them.

P11 stated that a complex sentence is made up of one dependent clause. This is not correct because a complex sentence is a product of one independent and one dependent clause joined by subordinating conjunctions. This indicates that the participant does not understand what a complex sentence is. P7 stated that a compound sentence is made by combining independent clauses using *because*, *and*, and *but*. The following is an example, which is claimed to be a compound sentence by P7: *I like tea*. This is a simple present sentence, not a compound sentence. This suggests that the participant is unsure of the distinction between simple and compound sentences. P6, P9, P13, P16, P19, and P20 indicated that it is difficult for them to distinguish complex sentences from compound sentences because they do not know how independent and dependent clauses are combined.

#### 4.6 Contributing factors in sentence composition

During group discussions, each participant was requested to answer the following open-ended question: *What makes you find it difficult to construct sentences that are grammatical in academic writing?* It is an undeniable truth that participants differ in nature, possess varying knowledge of sentence formation, have unequal IQ (Intelligence Quotient) levels, and exhibit distinct cognitive abilities in learning L2.

Therefore, the importance of asking the participants the above question was to identify different factors that negatively influence their ability to construct sentences that contain errors. The table below presents the responses provided by participants in response to the open-ended question above.

<b>P1-P10</b>	<b>Contributing factors</b>	<b>P11-P20</b>	<b>Contributing factors</b>
P1	-Limited understanding grammar rules -lack of studying	P11	-Lack of reading
P2	-Inadequate feedback and guidance -Weak cognitive ability in learning L2	P12	-Spending more time on social media
P3	-Poor understanding of sentence structure -Using CPF strategy -Extensive use of social media platforms	P13	-Inadequate feedback and guidance -Difficult grammar rules
P4	-Lack of reading and practice -Still learning grammar	P14	-Lack of resources
P5	-Interference of L1 -Not studying	P15	-Over generalisation of L2 rules
P6	-Lack of using L2 both in speaking and writing -lack of reading grammar books	P16	-Low proficiency in punctuation -Limited exposure in L2
P7	-Social Media English	P17	-Weak grammar foundation
P8	-Low proficiency in using grammar rules -Difficult in the use of punctuation	P18	-Developmental stage of grammar
P9	-Translation of L1 aspects into L2 -Complexity of grammar rules	P19	-Limited knowledge on sentence structures
P10	-Poor exposure in L2 -Using CPF (cram-pass-forget) strategy	P20	-Lack of resources -Poor cognitive ability in learning

	-Inadequate lessons on secondary level		

#### 4.6.1 Lack of reading and practice

P1, P4, P5, P6, and P11 stated that reading grammar books, journal articles, and slides helps them obtain an in-depth understanding of how words are linked in a coherent and cohesive manner to form grammatical sentences. However, they indicated that the problem is that they do not give themselves enough time to learn grammar. They spend most of their time playing games on their smartphones, going on vacations, and gambling, rather than studying. There is nothing wrong with travelling, gambling, and playing games, but it is wise to note that participants should also make time for their studies to gain in-depth knowledge in sentence composition. The participants further revealed that reading not only empowers them to acquire advanced knowledge in sentence composition, but it also enables them to gain a broader knowledge and understanding in other modules, except L2.

#### 4.6.2 Inference of L1

According to P5 and P9, L1 plays an important role in their daily lives. They use it to share their ideas and experiences with friends, family members, and others. These two participants indicated that L1 grammar rules are easy to understand. In contrast, they consider L2 as a foreign language, which has different sentence structures and grammar rules from those of their L1. This makes them sometimes find it difficult to master L2 grammar rules and sentence construction because they do not always use it in the same way as their L1. The participants revealed that they take the grammar rules of their L1 and transfer them into L2, which violates L2 syntactic rules. The participants also indicated that they use their L1 sentence structures in L2, which causes L2 sentences to contain parallel, run-on, and comma splice errors. These errors occur because L1 and L2 are two different languages that have different sentence structures.

#### 4.6.3 Lack of resources

P14 and P20 stated that the scarcity of study resources, such as books, dictionaries, laptops, and journal articles, limits their proficiency in sentence composition. These

participants indicated that grammar books, dictionaries, and laptops can help them gain an in-depth understanding of how to link words to form grammatical sentences that adhere to the assigned syntactic rules. However, in this contemporary period, most South African universities have libraries stocked with various grammar books, journal articles, and computers with full internet access. Additionally, participants have access to smartphones with the university's free Wi-Fi, allowing them to download various grammar books or slides online. Lastly, the accommodations for accredited students offer free Wi-Fi, which participants can use to access online lessons and study guides that focus on sentence composition. In my view, some participants do not prioritise their studies because they have access to resources that can be used to generate knowledge, but they do not allocate enough time to utilise them. In group discussions, I found that some of the participants do not study grammar. Others stated that they sometimes read grammar books but rarely master the sentence composition process due to the differences between their L1 and L2.

#### 4.6.4 Poor exposure in L2

P10 and P16 indicated that they were born and grew up in families where they used their L1 to facilitate communication in both written and spoken forms. Although the participants are at the tertiary level, they still communicate with each other using their L1. They certainly use L2 in classrooms when writing assignments and making presentations. As participants commonly use L1 in most instances, they find it difficult to compose compound and complex sentences because these types of sentences require a high proficiency level in grammar and the effective combination of clauses. The participants also noted that using their L1 to facilitate communication among themselves limits their ability to construct grammatical sentences, as they sometimes get confused about the correct syntactic rules to form compound or complex sentences, leading to errors.

#### 4.6.5 Limited understanding of sentence structures

English has four types of sentences, namely simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. P3 and P19 indicated that, although they have been learning L2 for many years from the primary level, they are still struggling to differentiate between the structural variations of compound and complex. In their writing, they to errors in parallelism. P11 explained that L2 has various genres, including novels, drama, poetry, and grammar, among others. The participant

indicated that he cannot only study grammar without considering other genres. He should balance all genres when studying, as they will likely appear on examination question papers. In my view, despite L2 having different genres, participants should strive to master them so that they can pass tests and examinations. It is essential to note that the primary responsibilities of lecturers include imparting lessons to participants and evaluating their scripts. If participants struggle with studying grammar, they are the ones who will likely sit for the examination and may probably fail.

#### 4.6.6 Weak grammar foundation

P3 and P10 revealed that during primary and secondary studies, they commonly used the CPF strategy (Cram-Pass-forget). This is the strategy where the participants cram or memorise what they were taught in class or read a day before the test or examination, then forget it after writing. This strategy hindered the participants from gaining an in-depth understanding of how to organise words to form grammatical sentences. P10 also stated that his secondary L2 teachers did not provide them with adequate lessons that focused on sentence composition. That is one of the reasons that makes them face difficulties in sentence composition.

P10 and P16 stated that during secondary school, they had attitudes that L2 is a foreign language to them and getting an average of 50% was considered an achievement. It is said that these attitudes turned their L2 focus into a state of inactivity, meaning it was not worthwhile to study grammar, as their primary goal was to achieve a minimum pass rate. Others, such as P2 and P20, indicated that they study very hard to be proficient in L2, but the problem is their poor cognitive abilities in learning. They study and later forget what they have studied, which is a challenge for them. Although many participants struggle to form grammatical sentences, some have a high proficiency level in linking different words to form simple, compound, and complex sentences, having mastered the syntactic rules from their primary level. This is a clear indication that the cognitive abilities of the participants are different. Others managed to recall what they were taught previously, while others had forgotten.

#### 4.7.7 insufficient knowledge in punctuation

Punctuation plays a crucial role in connecting words to form sentences that convey meaningful messages to readers. However, P8 and P16 stated that they have knowledge that commas, full stops, and semicolons are punctuation, but find it difficult

to effectively use them in sentence composition, particularly in compound and complex sentences. They sometimes get confused about whether to use commas, semi-colons, or full stops to join independent clauses with each other, or with dependent clauses to form compound and complex sentences. As a result, they joined two independent clauses using commas, which is a comma-splice error. Other participants, such as P4 and P6, use full stops and subordinating conjunctions to join independent and dependent clauses, which is regarded as a fragment error. It is advisable that participants download online journal articles or sections that focus on the correct usage of punctuation marks in sentences. In doing so, their proficiency levels in using punctuation may increase.

#### 4.6.8 Developmental stage in grammar

Based on the statement by P4 and P18, it is difficult to combine different words to form sentences that are grammatical because they are still in a developmental stage. In the process of learning L2, they believe that they will certainly make errors because their knowledge of sentence composition is limited. Additionally, they also posited that making errors is a clear sign that they are still learning L2, which is the reason for being students. In my opinion, at the tertiary level, participants are expected to have mastered constructing simple, compound, and complex sentences during their secondary education.

#### 4.6.9 Spending more time on social media

P3, P7, and P12 reported that they spend most of their time on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, for entertainment purposes. They indicated that they do not follow any rules when speaking or writing on those platforms. They just write whatever comes to their minds if they understand each other. It therefore becomes a challenge when constructing L2 sentences because they lack the knowledge of the grammar rules that should be employed. In essay writing, certain constructed short incomplete sentences are used, while others separate two complete sentences using commas, which is regarded as a comma splice error. Some use apostrophes to shorten certain words, such as *don't-do not*, *can't-cannot*, *etc.*, which is not allowed in academic writing. Despite the influences of social media, some participants spend most of their time on social media and still manage to perform well in L2. This reflects that the participants have different levels of proficiency in L2.

#### 4.6.10 Difficulty of grammar rules

P1, P8, and P13 indicated that L2 grammar rules are particularly challenging, specifically in areas such as tense consistency, parallel structure, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation. This is because of their differences between L1 and L2 grammar rules. They stated that they have mastered their L1 grammar rules and can apply them correctly when constructing L1 sentences. It is because L1 is their native language, and they have been using it since birth. P9 indicates that if the grammar rules of L2 are like our L1 grammar rules, we would prefer to transfer them into L2 learning to ease the learning process. This statement was made by some of the selected participants. A limited knowledge of grammar causes participants to apply incorrect rules in their sentences, resulting in errors. In my opinion, participants should study grammar books and master the grammar rules required for sentence composition. It is because they are the ones who will sit for the final examinations. During group discussions, most participants demonstrated that they understood the meaning of key phrases and the differences between independent and dependent clauses, as well as compound and complex sentences. However, the challenge was that some of them had limited knowledge on how to link phrases to form clauses, and clauses to compound and complex sentences.

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the participants' essay writing and group discussions, it was found that the participants are aware of the differences between phrases, clauses, and sentences. The data also revealed that most participants have knowledge of constructing simple sentences. However, they faced difficulties in constructing compound and complex sentences. This is because they have a low proficiency level on how to link independent clauses to form compound sentences, while others have limited knowledge in linking independent and dependent clauses to form complex sentences. The findings further revealed that most participants had knowledge of the differences between dependent and independent clauses, but they struggled to link those clauses cohesively and coherently using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Focusing on the data presented on themes 1,2, 3,4, and 5, the most frequent types of errors found were run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement, comma splices, sentence fragments, and omission of commas after the introductory statements.

Subject-verb agreement rule was identified as the most difficult rule for the participants, particularly for those with low proficiency levels in grammar. This statement can be supported by the findings, where a total of 11 participants corresponded with plural subjects with singular nouns in their essay writing. Although the subject-verb agreement rule and the correct use of punctuation marks were challenging for most participants, others were able to apply them correctly during sentence composition. This entails that the participants have unequal proficiency levels towards sentence composition; some have a high proficiency level, while others have a low proficiency level. Despite the different types of errors committed by the participants, it is wise to note that at the tertiary level, participants are expected to produce sentences that are logical and grammatical. Therefore, participants need to master the most common syntactic rules required in sentence composition.

The participants mentioned several causes of errors, such as a lack of resources, insufficient study of grammar, the complexity of grammar rules, L1 influences, excessive time spent on social media platforms, and limited cognitive ability. Most participants have smartphones and laptops that they can use to download online lessons focusing on grammar, or they can watch videos on YouTube. They also have free access to the library, where they can study any grammar book of their choice. This means that the participants have resources, but they are not committed to using them to obtain advanced knowledge in grammar. They spend most of their time on social media and entertainment over the weekends, instead of studying. The participants are familiar with the structural differences between a phrase, a clause, and a sentence. However, they struggle to link clauses to form compound and complex sentences. The common syntactic rules needed in sentence composition identified in this study are subject-verb agreement, verb consistency, pronoun-noun agreement, punctuation, the use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, etc.

Chapter 5 will focus on discussing the major findings of types of errors collected from participants' essay writing, such as run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, omission of commas, comma splices, etc. It will also provide recommendations which are expected to help the participants obtain in-depth knowledge to construct grammatical sentences.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the discussions of the major findings obtained in Chapter 4, whereby document analysis (essay writing) and group discussions were used as data collection methods. It also drew on some of the sentences analysed in Chapter 4 to simplify the discussions of the major findings. In this chapter, the data collected in Chapter 4 is, therefore, linked with some of the findings obtained by other researchers in Chapter 2, under the literature review section, to compare their similarities and differences. The data presentation and analyses in Chapter 4 revealed that the participants have a high proficiency level in linking different words to form simple grammatical sentences that convey clear semantic values to the readers. However, the compound and complex sentences were difficult for some of them, particularly to the ones with low proficiency in grammar.

During group discussions, several causes of errors in sentence composition were identified, such as limited understanding in grammar, lack of reading and practicing, poor understanding of sentence structures, direct translation of L1 sentence structures into L2, lack of resources, low proficiency in punctuation, limited exposure in L2, using social media English, L1 interferences, inadequate feedback and guidance, weak grammar foundation, complexity of grammar rules, and always using L1. This chapter also presents recommendations that are expected to advance participants' knowledge in linking different words to form grammatical sentences, thereby expressing their ideas or thoughts effectively in academic writing.

In Chapter 1, it has been stated that this study aims to investigate the challenges faced by participants in constructing simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatically correct. Based on the data presented on themes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, the participants faced challenges in combining the independent and dependent clauses to form complex sentences. Alternatively, some participants joined two or more independent clauses using commas to form compound sentences, which is regarded as a comma-splice error. Others merged independent clauses without coordinating conjunctions or any form of punctuation, leading to run-on errors. This is a reflection

that compound and complex sentences are challenging for most participants due to their limited knowledge of syntactic rules and other factors, which will be discussed in the paragraphs below. After the interpretations and discussions of the major findings presented and analysed in Chapter 4, this study is, therefore, expected to achieve the following research objectives:

- (1) To advance students' proficiency in aligning the subjects and verbs to form comprehensible, meaningful, and grammatical sentences that express complete thoughts.
- (2) To establish the basic structural variations between phrases, clauses, and sentences by considering how words are organised to form phrases, clauses, and sentences in academic writing.
- (3) To provide the common syntactic rules that the students should use to construct grammatical sentences.

## 5.2 Summary of the major findings

GT and EA theories played significant roles in analysing the data in Chapter 4. Despite that, I have extensively used EA over GT; both these theories allowed me, as the researcher, to identify different types of errors in the participants' essay writing, which was approximately two pages long, and group them according to their types. The total errors were 83, which were classified into 16 types, namely, run-on, sentence fragments, comma splices, redundancy, subject-verb disagreement, verb consistency, omission of commas, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-noun disagreement errors, pronoun-verb agreement errors, capitalisation, misuse of articles, contraction errors, omission of apostrophe, determiner-noun agreement errors, and adjective-noun disagreement errors.

The average percentages of each type of error are as follows: omissions of commas errors 19 (22.89%), capitalisation 8 (9,64%), run-on 8 (9,64%), sentence fragment 9 (10,84%), subject-verb agreement 11 (13,25%), redundancy errors 5 (6,02%), pronoun-noun agreement 4 (4,82%), Coma-splice errors 5 (6,02%), pronoun-verb agreement errors 2 (2,41%), misuse article 3 (3,61%), contraction 2 (2,41%), omission of apostrophe 1(1,20%), determiner-noun disagreement errors 1 (1,20%), adjective-noun disagreement errors 1 (1,20%), and omission of conjunction errors 1 (1,20%).

Based on the data presented in the paragraph above, most participants faced difficulties with the correct use of commas after introductory statements and with joining independent clauses. Another challenge is the use of the subject-verb agreement rule. A total of 11 participants corresponded the plural subjects with the singular verbs, which is considered a subject-verb agreement rule. It is because some participants have overgeneralised that most of the nouns that end in the suffix 's' are in plural form, which is correct. However, this rule is only applied to the noun category, not to the verb class. The participants applied this rule to the verb category and considered that all verbs that end in the suffix 's' are in plural, which is incorrect.

Most participants have knowledge of connecting independent clauses with dependent clauses using subordinating conjunctions, but the challenge lies in linking the independent clauses cohesively. Some joined two or more independent clauses without using any punctuation mark, while others used coordinating conjunctions without commas, which is considered a run-on error. Other participants used commas to join independent clauses, which is a comma splice error as in the following sentence constructed by P1 *By creating a non-judgmental environment- tutors encourage students to take risks, ask questions- and explore their creativity, This help to faster a love learning area and development of mindset.* The participants also lack knowledge of how to effectively align nouns and pronouns. They keep repeating the common noun 'tutors' multiple times within their sentences, which is a redundancy error. In complex sentences, if the common noun 'tutors' or other nouns are used in the independent clauses, they are often substituted by their pronouns in dependent clauses that come after the independent clauses. For example, Martin wants to become a pilot because he excels in mathematics and Physics.

Although the participants committed many errors in their essay writing and demonstrated limited knowledge in the differences between independent and dependent clauses, it does not necessarily mean that they are not serious about their studies. Most of them hardly understand the syntactic rules needed to be used, particularly in compound and complex sentences. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that the participants differ in nature and have varying learning capacities, as supported by Ramesh (2024) and Alfaki (2015) in the literature review section. In other words, the participants have different understanding, knowledge, and proficiency levels in sentence composition. Some found simple sentences easy to construct, while

others faced difficulties with compound sentences, and some struggled to form complex sentences that are grammatically correct. Therefore, this is a practical reflection that learning is a process in which one obtains knowledge about certain aspects within the syllabus, and errors may occur because the person is still in the state of learning or mastering something that is either difficult for them or is being learned for the first time. Patri et al. (2021) suggested that students sometimes commit errors in sentence composition because some syntactic rules are difficult for them, particularly subject-verb agreement rules, punctuation, and the effective use of subordinating and coordinating conjunctions. Elfa (2020) stated that in some instances, when students learn new rules of the target language, they rarely master all of them simultaneously, and they may end up misusing or violating them during the learning process.

Patri et al.'s (2021) statement is clear in the sense that the participants consider L2 as a foreign language, and some of its syntactic rules might be difficult for them. However, despite the complexity of the syntactic rules, participants must master them because, during the examination, they will be required to produce logical and grammatically correct sentences. The memoranda will guide the examiners, and they will not consider the syntactic rules to be difficult. Elfa's (2020) statement also makes sense because learning new rules of the target language might be difficult for some participants, as they are not used to the language, as other participants stated during group discussions. However, most of the syntactic rules, such as subject-verb agreement, the use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, punctuation, noun-pronoun agreement, verb consistency, etc., have been learned by the participants since the primary level. The same rules are used at the university level to build different types of sentences. Therefore, in my view, the participants are either not committed to mastering those rules, or it is just that these rules are difficult for them.

Some of the participants stated that they do not give themselves enough time to study sentence composition, while others revealed that the syntactic rules are difficult for them. If participants do not allocate sufficient time to study grammar books, it may be challenging for them to construct grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. I am not saying that grammar books are the only source of knowledge; there are many other sources, such as slides, journal articles, Quillbot, Grammarly, and online lessons, among others. Grammar books typically encompass different chapters that

focus on sentence composition, which can help participants gain in-depth knowledge of sentence formation. In my view, the complexity of the syntactic rules is largely due to a lack of study, as revealed by some participants during group discussions. Others indicated that they sometimes study syntactic rules but still find it difficult to apply them during sentence composition because they are unsure of when and where to use them. I can, therefore, state that the participants have different proficiency levels in sentence composition; some have a high proficiency level, while others have a low proficiency level. Unfortunately, there are no machines or devices that can be installed in the participants' brains to assist them in constructing grammatical sentences.

Although most participants faced challenges in applying the subject-verb agreement rule correctly, as indicated in Chapter 4 under the section on summary of findings, some participants were able to use this rule effectively in their written texts. Others faced challenges in using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Therefore, the different types of errors committed by the participants in Chapter 4 indicate that the participants have unequal knowledge of syntactic rules. Some found the syntactic rules easy to master, while others struggled to use them.

In this contemporary period, most of the tertiary students have smartphones and laptops that they can use to access online lessons, slides, notes, research papers, and grammar books to obtain an in-depth understanding of sentence composition. The data in Chapter 4 showed that the selected participants own smartphones and computers, but they primarily use these devices to entertain themselves by playing games, streaming music online, and watching movies and series. It is not wrong for participants to spend some of their time on entertainment; however, they should balance all aspects. They can play games on their laptops or smartphones, but they should also use the same devices to study, so that they can improve their sentence composition skills. At the tertiary level, participants are expected to produce sentences that are both logical and grammatically correct. In my view, having an encounter or situation in which participants struggle to construct at least simple grammatical sentences is disappointing. One would assume that the participants did not attend L2 lessons at the secondary level because the same rules used in L2 at tertiary level have been learned at secondary schools.

One important point to consider is that participants must achieve a minimum of 50% of their semester marks in L2 to be eligible to sit for the examination. If participants can focus more on entertaining themselves than studying, they might struggle to achieve a 50% pass rate to be admitted writing an examination, which is a significant challenge. If participants achieve 49% or below in their semester marks, they are not allowed to write the examination, as it is considered that they have not qualified. Even if the participants can qualify by 50%, they should also get 50% or above on their examination papers to meet the minimum pass rate in L2. If they can qualify by 50% and get 49% or below on the examination, the outcome of the results will show that they have failed.

Therefore, both the semester and examination marks should be 50% or above for the participants to pass the module. It is within the participants that they either want to pass the module or not. If they want to pass, they should study hard on how words are connected to form grammatical sentences. They should also study other aspects within the syllabus, as they will be required to answer certain questions related to those aspects, and those questions will be answered in the form of sentences. Therefore, well-organised sentences are crucial in academic writing, and participants need to be able to build sentences that are grammatical, organised, and meaningful to facilitate effective communication in written form.

In the above two (2) paragraphs, I have mentioned that the participants can use their smartphones or computers to obtain in-depth knowledge in sentence composition by studying grammar books, slides, etc. However, based on the data presented in Chapter 4, I found that the participants learn in different ways. Some use the CPF (Cram, Pass, Forget) strategy. CPF is a strategy of cramming what has been taught in class or what the participants think might be on the test or examination papers before approaching a day of writing. After writing, they tend to forget what they crammed and focus on what they are going to write.

Others revealed that they get knowledge by attending class lessons, while some stated that they prefer their tutors and mentors as the sources of their knowledge. Some indicated that they gain knowledge by reading grammar books in the library, and others prefer online slides, research studies, and books that focus on sentence composition. It simply means that participants learn in different ways, and their

proficiency level in L2 is not uniform; some have a high proficiency level, while others have a low proficiency level. Since participants learn in different ways, it is advisable that they can use any method of their choice to acquire knowledge in L2, so that they can effectively link different words to form grammatical sentences.

The data revealed that participants faced difficulties in constructing compound and complex sentences due to low proficiency level in the correct use of punctuation and conjunctions. Therefore, the Curriculum planners may provide advanced, supportive study resources to help participants obtain an in-depth understanding of how independent and dependent clauses are linked while adhering to the assigned syntactic rules. The Department of English, Media Studies, and Linguistics will, therefore, also be able to identify how the syllabus can be improved to ensure that the participants receive adequate lessons, so that they can be competent and proficient in sentence composition.

The results will also help English tutors and mentors develop useful pedagogical strategies to address the common errors that students make in sentence composition. It is essential to note that the participants are the ones who will sit for examinations; therefore, they should have sufficient time to study syntactic rules and sentence structure, so that they may obtain in-depth knowledge in combining different words to form well-organised simple, compound, and complex sentences. L2 lecturers only impart class lessons, guide the students, and prepare them for examinations, including marking their scripts. This means that it is up to the participants to decide whether they want to improve their sentence composition or not. If they want to improve, lecturers are the designated people to consult when encountering difficulties or if certain aspects are difficult for the participants.

### 5.3 Merits

This is an exploratory study centred on investigating the challenges commonly faced by undergraduate first-year English majors in constructing grammatical present and past simple, compound, and complex sentences. All the selected participants had given their consent to participate in this study, and fortunately, none of them ever withdrew. This made the process of data collection carried out easily because the participants were fully aware that they were being studied. During data collection, the participants behaved well and showed a high standard of respect and good manners

towards me as the researcher. There was peace and unity among the participants themselves, as well as between me, the researcher, and the participants, which enabled me to collect data from them freely without fear of being insulted or mocked.

By using document analysis (participants' essay writing) and group discussions as data collection methods, I identified multiple sentences that contain different types of errors, such as run-on sentences, comma splices, fragments, subject-verb agreement errors, and omission of commas, among others. The following causes of errors in sentence composition were identified during group discussions: lack of studying grammar books, difficulty with grammar rules, lack of resources, social media influences, transfer of L1 elements into L2, etc. Based on the data presented in themes 1 to 5, I found that most participants are familiar with constructing simple sentences but face difficulties in combining clauses to form compound and complex sentences that are both logical and grammatical. Therefore, the results collected from the participants carry the qualities of validity and reliability, which are essential requirements of scientific research.

During group discussions, the participants and I discussed the differences between independent and dependent clauses, as well as compound and complex sentences. The participants were also required to define the term '*phrase*'. The purpose is to identify if the participants know the difference between clauses and phrases. Although some of the participants failed to define '*phrase*' correctly, most of them demonstrated that they fully understood the term '*phrase*'. I also found that most participants were able to distinguish between independent and dependent clauses, but the challenge was that some of them struggled to link these clauses to form compound and complex sentences. Some of the major causes were that the participants had low proficiency in using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, as well as punctuation marks. Therefore, the findings obtained from the participants' essay writing are like those collected using group discussions.

Although this study focuses on first-year undergraduate English majors, the findings may also be helpful to second- and third-year students. They will be able to link different words in coherent and cohesive manners to form simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatical. The results might also help Grade 12

students to obtain an in-depth understanding of how simple, compound, and complex sentences are composed, so that they may not face difficulties in constructing these types of sentences at the tertiary level. In Chapter 4, this study provided in-depth explanations of the common syntactic rules required for sentence composition, such as subject-verb agreement, the correct use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, noun-pronoun agreement, verb consistency, article usage, and the use of commas, among others. The explanations of these rules will be helpful to participants in understanding how to correspond plural subjects with plural verbs and singular subjects with singular verbs. Furthermore, they will help them on how to combine independent and dependent clauses to form comprehensible compound and complex sentences.

#### 5.4 Demerits/limitations

Although all participants contributed to this study, a few did not respond to some questions during group discussions, which makes it difficult for me to conclude whether they are skilled at sentence composition or not. Fortunately, I had reviewed their essay writing and identified numerous errors they made. I found that participants who remained silent during group discussions had low proficiency in linking words to form compound and complex sentences. Another challenge was the participants' handwriting. Some participants wrote words using the smallest font, which made me struggle to read what they had written, whereas others fused some words, which also made it difficult for me to read their essays. This led to time-consuming data collection and analysis.

During group discussions, I asked the participants to differentiate between independent and dependent clauses, as well as between compound and complex sentences. Most participants answered these questions correctly, while a few demonstrated limited knowledge on those aspects. The challenge emerged when other participants intended to copy what others said, which made it difficult for me to justify whether the participants had the knowledge to combine clauses to form compound and complex sentences or not.

The participants mentioned that a lack of resources, poor exposure to L2, limited knowledge of grammar, using social media in English, and the complexity of grammar rules are some of the common causes that influence them to face difficulties in

constructing grammatical sentences. These causes are understandable because participants learn in different ways and have varying cognitive abilities. However, the challenge was that I could not enter the participants' minds to confirm if indeed those factors are the ones causing them to construct sentences that are ungrammatical. This may sometimes lead to biases. To avoid biases, I clearly indicated that those factors were stated by the participants, so that the readers will understand why the participants struggle in sentence composition. The analyses and interpretations of the findings were based on the information provided by the participants. No manipulation of the data, no biases, no exaggerations, and no distortions.

The findings reflect the participants' knowledge of the sentence composition process. Another challenge was that the participants had different mother-tongues, which made it difficult for me to identify whether certain errors committed by the participants were caused by the interference of their L1 or it was just that the participants had limited knowledge of grammar. Fortunately, most errors that I have identified were not caused by participants' L1; they occurred because of limited knowledge in grammar and other causes.

## 5.5 Recommendations

Based on the data presented and analysed in Chapter 4, it was found that participants have different cognitive abilities in learning and learn in different ways. The methods they use to obtain knowledge in L2 are different. Some prefer to study grammar books, slides, or articles, while others prefer to engage with their tutors, and some rely on class lessons. I have proposed some of the best ways that might be helpful to participants to obtain in-depth knowledge or advance their understanding of how to link different words coherently and cohesively to form simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatical while adhering to the assigned syntactic rules.

### 5.5.1 Reading grammar books

Most L2 grammar books consist of different chapters that focus on various aspects, such as syntax, morphology, parts of speech, clause structures, punctuation, language rules, language usage, and phonetics. Therefore, it is important to inform the participants that they should sometimes visit their school's library to look for grammar books and then go to chapters that focus on sentence composition. Most grammar books have sections that focus on explaining the grammar rules that should be

followed when constructing sentences. They also establish how independent and dependent clauses are combined using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Furthermore, they provide examples of sentences that contain errors and their corrections. By studying grammar books, participants may obtain an advanced understanding or in-depth knowledge of how simple, compound, and complex sentences are composed. Since compound and complex sentences were difficult for most of the participants, reading grammar books might help them find it easier to understand how independent and dependent clauses are combined while sticking to the syntactic rules required to govern the formation.

#### 5.5.2 Attending English language class lessons

L2 Lecturers play important roles towards the students' academics; they provide lessons, prepare them for tests and examinations, give them assignments and presentations, and guide them on how certain questions are answered. In other words, lecturers assume parental responsibilities towards students within the university's premises. Attending L2 classes is added as an advantage to the participants in the sense that whenever they do not understand certain aspects related to sentence composition, they will actively enquire or consult their L2 lecturers.

The lecturers possess the experience, advanced knowledge, and high proficiency in teaching students, as well as the best pedagogical strategies to use in their instruction. Therefore, L2 lecturers may provide participants with adequate lessons on how words are combined to form simple, compound, and complex sentences, while adhering to the assigned syntactic rules. I recommended that participants read grammar books to obtain in-depth knowledge of sentence composition. However, sometimes participants may study grammar books but still face difficulties in mastering the process. Thus, attending L2 class lessons will enable them to have the opportunity to ask questions on the grammar aspects they do not understand.

#### 5.5.3 Visiting Internet platforms

In today's world, numerous global platforms, such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, QuillBot, and YouTube, are designed to offer advanced lessons and knowledge to students, teachers, and lecturers. These platforms provide videos, slides, notes, quiz activities, mini-tests, and their memoranda, as well as lessons that focus on how simple, compound, and complex sentences are composed. They also establish

syntactic rules and their explanations, which the participants can use when constructing sentences. They further provide lessons on how the independent and dependent clauses are linked using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions to produce compound and complex sentences that express a complete thought to the readers. Lastly, they provide lessons that focus on the differences between simple, compound, and complex sentences, which may be helpful to participants in distinguishing the structural variations of the three sentence types.

During group discussions in Chapter 4, I found that most participants had smartphones and laptops, which they used to communicate with each other, their tutors, lecturers, and other people. They also have laptops that they use to type their assignments, attend online classes, play games, stream music on Spotify, and watch movies on YouTube. It is advisable that participants use both their smartphones and laptops to access the platforms mentioned in the above paragraph or any of their preferred options. The university offers free Wi-Fi access, which participants can connect to using their smartphones or laptops to access online platforms or websites, in case they do not have data.

Additionally, most of the accredited on- and off-campus participants' accommodation residents also have unlimited free Wi-Fi, which is purposely installed to ease learning and virtual classes. One of the best platforms that the participants can use is Kahoot. It offers an instant response to whatever the participants ask. For instance, if the participants can type '*what is the difference between compound and complex sentence*', it provides answers in approximately 5 seconds or less. Internet platforms can help participants learn how to link different words to build simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatically correct in academic writing.

Despite the challenges faced by students as identified in this study, Zhu (2019) and Phuong (2021) noted that errors are an inherent part of the learning process, highlighting areas of difficulty that require additional support for students. Errors also inform lecturers and teachers on how they can refine or modify their pedagogical strategies to ensure that students receive adequate knowledge in syntax. Thus, it was essential to conduct this study to help students improve their sentence composition.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

This study raised three important questions in Chapter 1, which are as follows: (1) Why is it so essential to initiate the advancement of students' proficiency levels in subject-verb agreement form to compose complete sentences? (2) What is the significance of establishing the structural variation between phrases, clauses, and sentences in students' written texts? (3) What are the common syntactic rules that the students should master to compose comprehensible sentences that are grammatical?

Based on the data presented and analysed in Chapter 4, it is found that most participants are aware of the differences between phrases, clauses, and sentences. They also understand the structural differences between dependent and independent clauses, as well as compound and complex sentences. However, most of the participants faced difficulties in linking clauses to form compound and complex sentences. It is because they have limited knowledge in the correct use of punctuation marks, coordinating, and subordinating conjunctions. Subject-verb agreement was also challenging for most of the participants. A total of Eleven (11) participants committed subject-verb agreement errors in their written texts. Therefore, there is still a need to impart lessons that focus on the effective use of the subject-verb agreement rule, so that the participants may obtain in-depth knowledge on how the subjects and verbs should be effectively aligned.

The common rules that are difficult to master for most participants include subject-verb agreement, noun-pronoun agreement, verb consistency, the use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, punctuation, the correct use of the indefinite article, and the use of a comma after an introductory statement, among others. Participants must master these rules to use them correctly and produce grammatically correct sentences in academic writing. During group discussions, participants stated that there are numerous syntactic rules, which they find difficult to master. Other factors revealed include a lack of studying grammar books, their L1 influences, limited exposure to L2, using social media in English, inadequate lessons imparted by their L2 teachers during the secondary level, and a lack of resources, all of which limit their ability to construct well-organised and grammatical sentences. Therefore, the collected data has managed to answer all the research questions.

Although this study was conducted to empower first-year English majors to link different words to form simple, compound, and complex sentences that are grammatically correct, it can also be helpful to second- and third-year students. They may also obtain in-depth insights on constructing sentences that are well-organised and grammatical to express their ideas or answer different questions during tests and examinations in a written form. In addition, it also accommodates Grade 12 students in gaining an advanced or broader understanding of sentence composition, enabling them to organise different words to construct logical sentences that are both coherent in speaking and writing at the tertiary level. The findings will help English lecturers identify the most difficult areas that participants struggle with in sentence composition. In response to this, they may refine their pedagogical strategies to help participants produce meaningful sentences, thereby avoiding a communication barrier.

The results will also enable researchers to identify the struggles participants face in constructing grammatical sentences. In response to this, the researchers will have opportunities to develop strategies that help participants link clauses to form compound and complex sentences that are organised and meaningful. In my view, learning is a continuous process, meaning that most people acquire new knowledge daily. Therefore, the fact that the students committed different types of errors does not necessarily mean that they are not serious about their studies; rather, it is a sign that the participants should devote their time to mastering the syntactic rules needed to be followed during sentence composition, so that they can express their ideas clearly in academic writing.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:  
**Mr T Ndou**STUDENT NO:  
**19012967****PROJECT TITLE: An analysis of syntactic errors in sentence construction: a case study of selected undergraduate first-year English majors at a South African University.**ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHSSE/25/EMS/06/0804**

## SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr MJ Maluleke	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies and Linguistics	Supervisor
Mr T Ndou	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies and Linguistics	Investigator -Student

Type: **Master's Research**Risk: **Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment (Category 2)**Approval Period: **April 2025 – April 2026**

The Research Ethics Social Science Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
  - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviation from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
  - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,
  - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
    - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
    - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
    - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
  - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
Date Considered: April 2025Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof M. Mwale-ManjoroSignature: 

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Research questionnaires**

#### **Essay writing**

The data of this study were collected from the selected 20 participants using a combination of document analysis (essay writing) and group discussions as data collection methods. The students were requested to write an essay about two (2) pages long on the following topic:

**The roles of tutors in empowering students' performance in English learning.**

The expected maximum length of the essay was two (2) pages. The case studies were also used to link and compare the results of this study with those of previous studies by other researchers, as presented in the literature review section of Chapter 2.

#### **Group discussions**

During group discussions, the students were divided into two groups. Each group was composed of 10 students to ensure that students cooperated, participated, and expressed themselves fully. The aim of dividing the students into 2 groups was to ensure that every student had the opportunity to engage in the discussions, share ideas, and answer the questions individually. It has been assumed that if all the 20 selected students could be in one group, some would not participate while others would tend to copy what others said, which may delay the findings. In other words, a small group of 10 students is more manageable and controllable than studying the entire 20 students at once. The following closed-ended questions were posed to each student in all groups:

1. What is a phrase?
2. What is the difference between an independent and a dependent phrase?
3. What is the difference between compound and complex sentences?
4. What are the factors making you as students face difficulties in sentence composition?

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Research Instruments**

Since this study used group discussions and essay-writing to obtain the results from the selected students, a laptop and a hard-copy book were used to secure and store the findings.

#### **1. Hard-copy book**

At first, a hard-copy book was used to record all sentences that contained errors identified in students' essay writing. It also records the findings collected during group discussions. If the study was focusing on both spoken and written productions, voice recorder devices would have been used as a third instrument. Therefore, there was no need to use a voice recorder device because this study only focuses on written production.

#### **2. Computer**

A laptop was used as a second instrument. The findings written in the hard-copy book were transferred and recorded on the Microsoft laptop to ensure that the findings are fully secured and protected from getting lost, and to simplify data analysis using thematic analysis. The advantage of using a computer is that it has a OneDrive, which can be used to store any form of data that can be accessed using any other device. In this study, the findings that were recorded on the computer were also uploaded on OneDrive, in case the computer and hard-copy book could get lost or stolen. If these instruments used to store the data are lost, I will be able to retrieve the data on OneDrive using another laptop or smartphone. OneDrive stores data on the internet, which can only be accessed by people who know the username and password of the account.