

Causes of Academic Challenges in English Writing Skills at the 12-Year Basic Education Level in Karongi District, Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of academic challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District. A survey research design was used in this study. The theory that guided this study is the cause-and-effect theory (the theory of causality). Qualitative data were analyzed through descriptive analysis, while quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics. Instruments used in this study were a questionnaire, an interview, and classroom observation. The target population was 1,114 learners and teachers from three secondary schools. The total number of learners was 88. The sample size was 100 subjects selected from the population by using the cluster random sampling technique for learners since all three senior classes were participants. The purposive sampling technique was used in interviews with three (3) deputy head teachers in charge of studies and three (3) English teachers. This technique was also used to select nine (9) teachers to be given a questionnaire, including three (3) English teachers interviewed. The main findings were the following: Mother tongue interference hinders learners' development of English writing skills. The results from the study indicate that most of the respondents (58.1%) strongly agree that learners make mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and tenses when they are writing, while 32.5% agreed with the statement. Teachers who do not give effective feedback lead their learners to have challenges with their writing skills. Learners lack sufficient vocabulary and grammar to boost their writing skills. The storybook reading strategy, which includes listening to stories, can help learners gain new vocabulary from reading and listening. It is recommended that school leaders organize competitions in writing skills on the part of both teachers and learners and provide rewards to the best performers. School leaders should introduce English clubs in schools and strengthen them in the schools where they are introduced. We recommend that the government and stakeholders in education increase continuous training for teachers in the English language. The recruitment of new teachers should also take into consideration the level of English language proficiency.

Key words: Academic Challenges, Causes, Productive Skills, Writing Skills

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the development of strong writing skills is very important in today's globalized world. Effective communication is needed in various domains, like academic settings, professional workplaces, and online interactions. The ability to express ideas concisely and clearly is highly valued (Hacker & Sommers, 2020). In an academic environment, writing skills are very crucial for learners to excel in their lessons. The writing skill is not only needed in academics but also contributes to critical thinking and analysis abilities (Zinsser, 2006; Ngabonziza, 2020). The English writing skill is a very important one. It involves producing language in written form (Dornbrack & Dixon, 2014). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2024), 765 million adults are illiterate, while 250 million children do not have basic literacy. In Africa, more than 90% of learners who complete school have writing difficulties.

In Africa, the status of English writing skills varies across the continent. In many African countries, English is used as a second or third language. English is also used as a medium of instruction in school (Hewitt, 2018). The level of writing proficiency varies from one country to another. In Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, English is spoken as a first or second language. These countries have a higher level of English proficiency, including writing skills, but in other countries with a lower level of English proficiency, writing skills are limited due to different factors, including poorly trained teachers, insufficient resources, and linguistic barriers in some regions. There are various organisations that are working to enhance English writing skills in Africa, such as the British Council and other international organisations (British Council Africa, 2021).

Regionally, in East Africa, where Rwanda is located, one of the many challenges is that children are limited in their access to quality education. According to Akala (2019), many children have limited access to quality education, and others drop out of school due to different factors such as conflicts and poverty, to mention but a few. This lack of access to education does not allow the development of basic writing and reading skills. According to Cheruiyot (2024), the East African curriculum in many countries is based on memorization and rote learning instead of focusing on writing skills and critical thinking. This approach does not allow students to be well equipped to effectively express their ideas in writing (Odundo, 2020). Furthermore, many teachers in East Africa are not well trained in teaching writing, or some of them do not have access to teaching resources and material, which negatively impacts their ability to teach writing skills to their students. According to the World Bank (2021), language barriers play a great role in the status of the status of writing skills in East Africa. Even though English is an official language in most East African countries, it is not the first language for many students. This constitutes a big challenge in learning to write effectively in English and can also lead to a wide gap between students with different language backgrounds.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Different authors, such as Qasem (2020), White (1986), and Chastain (1998), claim that writing as a productive skill is challenging for learners. Qasem (2020) argues that writing is challenging since it requires extensive knowledge of grammatical rules, presentation and organisations of thoughts, and cognitive arrangement, which are needed to deliver the message successfully. It is also more complicated, and it seems to be the hardest one compared to other language skills. Chastain (1998) notes that even for those who are native speakers of the language, the written mode of a language is not easy for them. It involves a graphic presentation of speech and the presentation of thoughts, and their development can be structured in different ways.

Fifteen years after the implementation of the 2009 educational reform in Rwanda, which changed the medium of instruction from French to English, both students and teachers are still facing adaptive problems in writing skills. When they communicate in writing, they face many challenges. Sometimes they mix languages while writing or produce ungrammatical sentences. It is possible to find new teachers at schools in different districts who are unable to communicate in the medium of instruction, which is English, yet they have to teach in English and should demonstrate mastery of writing and speaking skills. There is a gap in knowledge on both sides. While Segikwiye (2017:15) claimed that "the lack of enough skills of teachers and students in English affects academic performance," other researchers, such as Martirosyan et al. (2015), pointed out that the lack of language competency and challenges in writing, speaking, listening, and reading affect academic success.

This lack of proficiency in English is also underlined by Uwiyubashye (2017), who states that nowadays students are being instructed in the English language, yet they finish their studies without having the ability to express themselves in that language in oral or written form. He added that even those who are studying English as a subject are not able to express themselves in the English language due to a lack of enough skills in the language.

So far, most studies have focused on the lack of proficiency in English among learners in general or their inability to express themselves, but none of them has focused on the challenges they face in producing productive skills, specifically writing skills. It is in this context that this study focuses on productive skill challenges, namely the writing skill, which should enable learners and teachers to fluently express themselves in written form.

1.2 Research Objectives

The general objective of this research was to explore the causes of academic challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District. The specific objectives were: (1) to identify academic challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District; (2) to find out the causes of academic challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District; and (3) to suggest strategies for addressing the causes of challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 The Cause and Effect Theory

The cause-and-effect theory is attributed to the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He was the first to introduce the concept of cause and effect in his work on physics around 350 BCE. The exact year is unknown, but different philosophers continued to explore the idea of cause and effect throughout history (Hankinson, 1998). Bunge (1962) asserts that the cause-and-effect theory, which is also known as the theory of causality, provides explanations about actions (causes) and their sequences (effects). In this theory, the proposition is that every event has a cause, which

leads to an outcome or effect (Pearl, 2000). The theory of causality is an influence by which one event (a cause) contributes to the production of a consequence, which is another event (an effect), where the cause is responsible for the effect and the effect depends on the cause.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Identification of Academic Challenges in Writing Skills in English

According to Adam (2015), the writing skills challenges in foreign secondary schools in the English language fall into two categories. The first category is that of errors made by learners who are not familiar with the language itself, especially those who make grammatical and lexical errors. The second category of challenges has to do with the medium of instruction rather than the language; for instance, the challenges of organising information, spelling, and punctuation. Fitriani and Apriliaswati (2015) have similar ideas; they summarized those challenges as linguistic challenges. Misbah et al. (2017) claim that the lack of vocabulary is one of the challenges learners undergo while studying writing skills. Vocabulary is a foundation for sentence building, which is the core of effective writing skills. Learners use spoken or written vocabulary to express their ideas. According to Asep (2014), cited in Moses and Mohamad (2019), in their everyday lives, learners use written and spoken words to communicate their thoughts, their feelings, and their beliefs in their surrounding community.

Grammar plays a crucial role in writing. Students who have very limited knowledge of grammar have trouble with morphology and syntax (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). As claimed by Fareed et al. (2016) and Marzano (1982), learners make mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, basic sentence structures, articles and tenses, clarity, punctuation, and capitalization. Another challenge is spelling; when learners have problems with spelling, they also have problems with writing, because poor spelling leads to poor writing (Nyang'au, 2014; Afrin, 2016). The learners spell letters and words according to how they pronounce them, which leads to wrong spelling. Other errors frequently made by learners are omission, substitution, insertion, and ambiguous errors (Altamimi & Rashid, 2019; Al-Zuoud and Cabilan, 2013). For example, omission errors occur when the inflectional or derivational morpheme is left out in English words, e.g., “bill” as an error for “billed” and “chool” instead of “school.” Substitution errors occur when the speller substitutes one of the letters of the usual or standard spelling of a word with another, e.g., “*hangry” instead of “hungry”. Insertion errors occur when the speller adds an additional letter while writing a word, e.g., “*famouse” instead of “famous”, “*prouduce” instead of “produce”. Ambiguous errors are mistakes that are seen as inter-lingual or developmental, and most of them mirror the learner’s mother tongue, e.g., *permission or *permision instead of permission, meaning authorisation (Altamimi & Rashid, 2019, p. 178–191).

2.2.2 Causes of Academic Writing Skill Challenges in English

Various authors have found out the causes of academic writing skill challenges (Hasani, 2016; Ellis, 1994). According to Hasani, the following are causes of academic writing challenges: Lack of motivation for learners, insufficient time for writing, lack of practice in reading and writing, and lack of proper feedback on learners written assignments. Similarly, Ellis (1994) points out that the lack of teaching material or facilities, overpopulation of students in a class, learners’ social backgrounds, and unproductive teaching methods are the causes of academic writing skills challenges.

According to Alfaki (2015), the creativity of learners in writing skills is very much affected by the lack of free writing opportunities. Alfaki claims that the majority of teachers do not care about this exercise in their respective classes. This is one of the reasons why learners lack improvement in their academic writing skills. Maley (2012) pointed out that free writing helps in the development of the language in different areas such as lexicon, grammar, and speech production. Carson et. al. (2001) argue that in order to have proper writing activities, there is a need for enough time to accomplish the writing work since there are different stages in writing. The learner needs time for proofreading, putting together scattered thoughts in his or her mind, arranging ideas, and making a draft. These activities require time. This idea is supported by White and Arndt (1991), who noted that, due to a lack of time, learners are not able to communicate their ideas in written form.

Most teachers are not able to provide proper guidance to their learners on how to write well while teaching writing and reading skills. Teachers should not be judgmental while giving constructive feedback on their learners’ writing. This becomes a big issue in grading the written works of learners as everyone uses his or her own way of writing (Gramme, 2008; Zamel, 1985).

Ngwenya and Chingwe (2023) found out different causes of poor academic writing skills challenges, such as lack of practice, teachers who do not give effective feedback to their learners, and a lack of constructive criticism and comments to encourage learners. In contrast to Ngwenya and Chingwe (2023) as well as Cohen and Cavalcanatic (1990) found that some teachers are reluctant to teach writing skills, and in some schools, reading

resources are not available in such a way that teachers teach writing lessons without preparation. This prevents learners from acquiring academic writing skills effectively; they learn writing skills in the classroom, but they only practice outside of their schools.

2.2.3 Strategies for Addressing Causes of Challenges in Writing Skills in English

Several researchers found different strategies for addressing learners' academic writing challenges (Foster, 2015; Fogel & Ehri's, 2000; Hudson, 2004). According to Foster (2015), learners can improve their capacity for grammar by developing a culture of reading and participating in some activities related to grammar. Good readers are also good writers. Fogel and Ehri's (2000) and Hudson's (2004) supported reading activities, and they noted that when learners are reading, they come across different writing structures, forms, and new words. The reader needs to know the message communicated by reading. He or she also needs to use those forms, new words, and structure in writing. Notice that even teachers who do not have adequate grammar cannot do an analysis of a written text.

Gbollie and Keamu (2017) assert that learners need to be motivated and their attention needs to be attracted by their teachers in order to well learn the writing skill. Ngwenya and Chingwe (2023) point out some strategies to solve academic skills challenges. Such strategies include organising workshops for teachers to enhance students' academic writing, providing effective feedback in order to show the strengths and weaknesses of the learners, giving constructive feedback to learners either individually or in groups, and engaging learners in writing completion.

Learners should try their best to memorise the spelling of words, as this could help them develop academic writing (Nyang'au, 2014; Hilton, 2008; Can, 2009). Similarly, scholars such as Quian (1999) argued that having a good vocabulary collection can help learners communicate effectively, either in written or spoken communication. Finally, Nation (1983) suggests that the use of a dictionary and more reading practice can be helpful for learners who have limited vocabularies.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study used survey research design. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in this study to find out learners' academic writing skills challenges, their causes and strategies in GS Nyegabo, GS St Michel Mubuga, and GS Nyagatovu.

3.2 Population

This study was conducted in Karongi District and involved three secondary schools, namely GS Nyegabo with 226 learners and 10 teachers; GS Nyagatovu with 181 learners and 7 teachers; GS St. Michel Mubuga with 663 learners, and 21 teachers, three (3) deputy head teachers in charge of studies, and three (3) head teachers of these schools. The total number was 1,114 people.

Table 1

Target Population

No.	School	Staff (head teachers & Dos)	Teachers	Learners	Total
1.	GS Nyegabo	2	10	226	238
2.	GS Nyagatovu	2	7	181	190
3.	GS St. Michel Mubuga	2	21	663	685
Total		6	38	1070	1114

3.3 The Sample Size Procedure

The researcher arranged to meet with the respondents for primary data collection by visiting the schools. The cluster random sampling technique was used since the schools were chosen randomly in different geographical locations. In those schools, all three seniors were participants. The purposeful sampling technique was used in the interview, where the interview was conducted with three deputy head teachers and three English teachers of the three schools investigated; these were chosen for a purpose as they were deemed to have the needed information.

3.4 Sample Size Calculation

In order to determine the sample size, we applied Solvin's formula as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N \text{ with the } 2}$$

Where:

N= sample size

N=Population

e=Standard error = 0.5

$$n = \frac{1114}{1+1114(e)^2} = 99.9 = 100 \text{ person}$$

Table 2

Sample Size Distribution

No.	School	Dos	Teachers	Learners	Total
1.	GS Nyegabo	1	3	30	34
2	GS Nyagatovu	1	3	28	32
3	GS St Michel Mubuga	1	3	30	34
Total		3	9	88	100

The researcher used an interview technique where three (3) deputy head teachers in charge of studies and three English teachers were interviewed. Nine teachers (9) were given a questionnaire. They were chosen purposefully by using our own judgement because we thought they could provide the desired information we needed in this study. There were three teachers from each school: one English teacher, one science teacher, and one social science and humanities teacher. Those teachers were chosen because we believed that they had information on how the English language is taught and the challenges learners face in the different areas they represent in this study.

3.5 Cluster Random Sampling Technique and Purposive Sampling Technique

The cluster random sampling technique was used since the schools were chosen randomly in different geographical locations. In those schools, the students of all three senior classes were participants in the research study. The purposive sampling technique was also used in the interview, where the interview was given to three (3) deputy head teachers and three (3) English teachers of the three schools investigated; they were chosen for a purpose as it was deemed that they had the needed information.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

3.6.1 Questionnaire

In this study, different kinds of questions were asked, namely closed-ended questions where multiple choices were used. We used Likert's system to provide answers to the statements that were given to the respondents. There were three questions related to the three objectives of the study, with eight sub-questions each. One open-ended question was used, where the respondents were allowed to express themselves. This was an essay question to find out about writing challenges. In this writing question, the researchers provided learners with 5 minutes to write a paragraph of seven (7) lines on a given topic, which was "the importance of tourism in Rwanda." In this writing, the researcher was looking at fluency, organisations of thoughts, clarity, consistency, syntax, errors, spelling, and punctuation. The number of questions was four. The researcher used multiple-choice questions due to the following advantages: They present high flexibility and high objectivity, and the analysis and interpretation of data are fast and easy. The open-ended questions help the respondent express their feelings. The questionnaire was used to collect primary data. To achieve this, a pilot study was conducted at GS Kibuye, where five questionnaires were distributed to three learners and two teachers at the secondary school. The questionnaires were given to two master's students in English to test the relevance and efficacy of the questions before being used in the field.

3.6.2 Classroom Observation

Classroom observation is a method that the researcher uses directly to observe teaching and learning practices. As it takes place in real time, the observer takes note and tries to code instructional behaviour in the classroom (Good & Brophy, 2000). We used a check list to find out the writing challenges in the classroom environment. The checklist included items such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and accuracy.

3.6.3 Interview

We organised a dialogue with the interviewees, namely deputy head teachers and English teachers. The role of the researcher was to guide the interviewees so that they would not go astray. The interview was conducted in an isolated place. We included the interview because we wanted to get more information beyond what is written. We chose to conduct interviews with deputy head teachers and English teachers because we deemed that they had the specific desired information.



IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Findings

In this study, the data were sorted according to the objectives of the study. The responses were presented in simple tables that show frequencies. Descriptive analysis was adopted for qualitative data, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The study involved 97 respondents who were given the questionnaire, including nine teachers and all 88 learners in grade three. All 97 questionnaires were distributed, but only 75 were answered because two learners were absent from class. This indicates the participation of 97.9 (95*100/97). Regarding the interview, it was conducted with 3 deputy head teachers in charge of studies and 3 English teachers from the 9 teachers chosen for a purpose. All three deputy head teachers in charge of studies and three English teachers answered the interview questions.

This section is divided into four sub-sections: challenges, causes of the challenges, strategies to mitigate the challenges, and a discussion of the findings.

4.1.1 Challenges

This section addresses the first objective of this research, i.e., to investigate challenges learners face in writing skills in English in 12 Years basic education in Karongi District. The data for this objective are presented in table 2 for learners' responses while teachers' responses are presented in table 3.

Table 2

Academic Writing Skills Challenges (Learners' Responses)

Item	SA		A		SD		D		N	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Learners make grammatical and lexical errors in their writings	37	43.0	40	46.5	3	3.4	2	2.3	4	4.6
2. Students lack sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas while writing.	46	53.4	35	40.0	1	1.1	1	1.1	3	3.4
3. Students have no knowledge of morphology and syntax.	41	47.6	40	46.5	1	1.10	3	3.4.1	1	1.1
4. Learners have a problem of organizing information while writing.	50	58.1	34	39.5	0	0	0	0	2	2.3
5. Educational background of teachers who may not have the writing skills	40	46.5	36	41.8	3	3.4	3	3.4	4	4.6
6. Learners have challenges in spelling and punctuation	43	50	40	46.5	2	2.3	1	1.1	0	0
7. Learners have very limited grammar	47	54.6	39	45.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
8. Learners make mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and tenses.	50	58.1	28	32.5	5	5.8	3	3.4	0	0

The results from Table 2 show that learners have challenges with their writing skills. The results from the study indicate that most of the respondents (58.1%) strongly agree that learners make mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and tenses when they are writing, while 32.5% agreed with the statement. Learners have a problem organising information while writing: 58.1% strongly agree with the statement, while 39.5% agree with the statement. Additionally, learners have challenges with spelling and punctuation: 50% strongly agree with the statement and 46.5% agree with it. These findings from the students are supported by the findings from the interview and paragraph writing. In the interview, the answers from interviewees were the following: Learners have challenges in sentence structure, organisations of ideas, and grammatical errors. With regard to the paragraphs written by the student, it was difficult to read the paragraphs; it required a lot of effort to find out the meaning communicated through the writings as the paragraphs lacked cohesion and coherence, clarity, consistency, and unity; and the ideas were not well organized. Learners made grammatical mistakes in writing, such as the use of wrong tenses and adding (s) in plural to all nouns, even those that normally do not take s, such as 'mans' instead of men and 'foots' instead of feet.

As Table 2 indicates, learners face many challenges in developing their writing skills. The main observation was that the organisations of ideas, grammatical errors, and mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, tenses, spelling, and punctuation are more challenging since they are mentioned in the questionnaire, the interviews, and reflected in the paragraph writing exercise. The difference is that in paragraph writing, learners have shown a lack of cohesion, coherence, clarity, and consistency in their paragraphs.

Table 3
Academic Writing Skills Challenges (Teachers' Responses)

Item	SA		A		SD		D		N	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Learners make grammatical and lexical errors in their writings	5	55.5	4	44.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Students lack sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas while writing.	3	33.3	6	66.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
3. Students have no knowledge of morphology and syntax.	2	22.2	6	66.6	0	0	0	0	1	11.1
4. Learners have the problem of organizing information while writing.	4	44.4	5	55.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Educational background of teachers who do not have the writing skills	3	33.3	4	44.4	1	11.1	1	11.1	0	0
6. Learners have challenges in spelling and punctuation	5	55.5	4	44.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Learners have very limited grammar knowledge	4	44.4	3	33.3	0	0	1	11.1	1	11.1
8. Learners make mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, in subject-verb agreement, tenses.	4	44.4	5	55.5	0	0	0	0	0	0

The results in Table 3 show teachers' responses to learners' challenges in writing skills. According to teachers, learners lack sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas while writing; 66.6% agreed with the statement, while 33.3 strongly agreed with it. It can also be seen from the table that learners have no knowledge of morphology and syntax because 66.6% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 22.2 strongly agreed with it. The table also shows that learners make grammatical and lexical errors in their writings; 55.5 strongly agreed, while 44.4 agreed with the statement. These findings are complemented by the findings from the interview. Answers to the question 'What are challenges do you face when you are teaching writing skills to your learners?' are summarized in the following responses from one teacher: '*Learners confuse some letters, they confuse some sounds, they are not able to differentiate tenses and their usage*'. Learners are not at the same level in writing skills; only a few of them are advanced, while others are very weak. The management of those two types of learners seems to be difficult for them.

4.1.2 Causes and Perceived Effects

This section addresses the second objective of this research which was to find out the causes and effects of academic challenges in writing skills in English. The data on this objective are presented in table 4 for learners' responses while teachers' responses are presented in table 5.

Table 4
Causes and Perceived Effects of Writing Skill Challenges (Learners' Responses)

Item	SA		A		SD		D		N	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Lack of learners' practice in reading and writing cause challenges in learners writing skills.	42	48.8	34	39.5	3	3.4	4	4.6	3	3.4
2. Lack of enough time for learners does not make it possible for them to communicate their ideas in written form properly.	35	40.6	36	41.8	4	4.6	6	6.9	5	5.8
3. Most of teachers are not able to provide proper guidance to their learners how to write well while teaching writing and reading skills.	40	46.5	30	34.8	5	5.8	6	6.9	5	5.8
4. Teachers who do not give effective feedback lead their learners to have challenges in writing skills.	56	65.1	30	34.8	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Not enough writing activities in the classroom are given to the learners.	25	29.0	21	24.4	20	23.2	15	20	5	5.2
6. Poor background of learners in writing	36	41.8	34	39.5	6	6.9	7	8.1	3	3.4
7. Poor background of teachers in writing	39	45.3	40	46.5	4	4.6	3	3.4	0	0
8. Lack of free writing opportunities in classroom	50	58.1	31	36.0	3	3.4	2	2.3	0	0

The data in Table 4 shows the causes and effects of learners' academic writing skills challenges. Teachers who do not give effective feedback lead their learners to have challenges with their writing skills. A large number (65.1%) strongly agree with the statement, and 34.8% agree with the statement. Most teachers are not able to provide proper guidance to their learners on how to write well while teaching writing and reading skills. 46.5% strongly agree,

while 34.8% agree with the statement. Lack of free writing opportunities in the classroom was another cause, where 58.1% strongly agreed and 36.0% agreed with the statement. These findings are corroborated by the findings from the interview. The teachers say that learners who come from educated families have better writing skills than those who come from uneducated backgrounds. Also, learners who have a chance to be taught by skilled teachers with advanced writing skills or who studied in good schools dominate other learners, and they do not have many problems with their writing skills. In our view, a skilled teacher in writing has positive effects on learners writing. We support the argument that prior knowledge contributes to the acquisition of new knowledge provided to the learner. However, if prior knowledge is not connected with the new knowledge, no effect will be produced.

Table 5
Causes and Perceived of Writing Skill Challenges (Teachers Responses)

Item	SA		A		SD		D		N	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. The lack of learners' practice in reading and writing cause challenges in learners writing skills.	4	44.4	3	33.3	1	11.1	0	0	1	11.1
2. Lack of enough time for learners does not make it possible for them to communicate their ideas in written form properly.	6	66.6	2	22.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
3. Most of teachers are not able to provide proper guidance to their learners how to write well while teaching writing and reading skills.	2	22.2	5	55.5	0	0	0	0	2	22.2
4. Teachers who do not give effective feedback lead their learners to have challenges in writing skills.	5	55.5	4	44.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Not enough writing activities in the classroom are given to the learners.	0	0	2	22.2	3	33.3	3	33.3	1	11.1
6. Poor background of learners in writing	4	44.4	2	22.2	2	22.2	0	0	1	11.1
7. Poor background of teachers in writing	3	33.3	4	44.4	0	0	2	22.2	0	0
8. Lack of free writing opportunities in classroom	7	77.7	2	22.2	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 5 shows teachers' responses to the causes and effects of learners' academic writing skills challenges. A large number (77.7%) of respondents strongly agree that the lack of free writing opportunities in the classroom is the main cause of writing skill challenges, while 22.2% agreed with the statement. According to 66% of the respondents, a lack of time for learners does not make it possible for them to communicate their ideas in written form properly. Even teachers agree that there are some teachers who do not give effective feedback; 55.5% of them strongly agree, while 44.4% agree with the statement. These findings are completed with the findings from the interview and classroom observation. It was stressed in the interview that the poor background of learners and teachers in writing skills causes negative effects on teaching and learning processes. Data from the interview further indicated that some teachers do not teach dictation, and other teachers do not value writing competitions. Finally, the participants underlined that background knowledge in English writing skills affects learners in writing skills.

4.1.3 Strategies

This section addresses the third objective of this research, which was to suggest strategies for addressing causes and effects of academic challenges that learners face in writing skills in English. The data responding to this objective are presented in table 6 for learners' responses while teachers' responses are presented in table 7

Table 6*Strategies for Addressing Learners' Writing Skills Challenges (Learners Responses)*

Item	SA		A		SD		D		N	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Teaching grammar can help learners to solve academic writing skills challenges.	50	58.1	30	34.8	2	2.3	3	3.4	1	1.1
2. The provision of effective feedback by teachers to their learners can be a solution to learners' academic writing challenges.	51	59.3	31	36.0	0	0	0	0	4	4.6
3. Training learners to read more materials can help them to solve their academic writing challenges.	49	56.9	32	37.2	0	0	3	3.4	2	2.3
4. Memorization of spelling of words is one of the solutions of learners' academic writing challenges.	52	60.4	30	34.8	2	2.3	2	2.3	0	0
5. Learners' readiness challenge can be solved by preparing them through physical and mental preparation.	38	44.1	31	36.0	5	5.8	7	8.1	5	5.8
6. Encourage learners to read since good readers are also good writers	45	52.3	30	34.8	3	3.4	4	4.6	4	4.6
7. Organizing workshops for teachers to enhance students' academic writing	31	36.0	30	34.8	10	11.6	9	10.4	6	6.9
8. Engaging learners in writing completion in order to help them to communicate in target language.	33	38.3	34	39.5	6	6.9	6	6.9	7	8.1

The results from Table 6 display proposed strategies to solve learners' academic writing skills challenges. The provision of effective feedback by teachers to their learners can be a solution to learners' academic writing challenges. Indeed, 59.3% strongly agree with the statement, while 36.0% agree with it. Also, the table shows that 58.1% strongly agree with the statement that teaching enough grammar can help learners solve academic writing skills challenges, and 58.1% strongly agree. Memorization of the spelling of words is another solution to learners' academic writing challenges, since 60.4% strongly agreed and 34.8% agreed. These findings corroborate those from the interview. In the interview, different strategies were proposed by the participants, such as English clubs, writing competitions in schools, providing rewards to the best performers, and encouraging learners to read and write short stories in English by providing enough books. Notice that reading feeds writing.

Table 7*Strategies for Addressing Learners' Writing Skills Challenges (Teachers' Responses)*

Item	SA		A		SD		D		N	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Teaching enough grammar can help learners to solve academic writing skills challenges.	3	33.3	6	66.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. The provision of effective feedback by teachers to their learners can be a solution to learners' academic writing challenges.	7	77.7	2	22.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
3. Training learners to read more materials can help them to solve their academic writing challenges.	3	33.3	5	55.5	0	0	0	0	1	11.1
4. Memorization of spelling of words is one of the solutions of learners' academic writing challenges.	2	22.2	7	77.7	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Learners' readiness challenge can be solved by preparing them through physical and mental preparation.	3	33.3	4	44.4	0	0	0	0	2	22.1
6. Encourage learners to read since good readers are also good writers	5	55.5	2	22.2	0	0	0	0	1	11.1
7. Organizing workshops for teachers to enhance students' academic writing	3	33.3	4	44.4	0	0	0	0	2	22.2
8. Engaging learners in writing completion in order to help them to communicate in target language.	5	55.5	4	44.4	0	0	0	0	0	0

The findings in Table 7 indicate teachers' responses to proposed strategies to solve learners' academic writing skills challenges. The provision of effective feedback by teachers to their learners can be a solution to learners' academic writing challenges. 77% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement. Memorization of the spelling of words is another solution to learners' academic writing challenges. The respondents agreed with that statement at

77.7%. Also, teaching enough grammar can help learners solve academic writing skill challenges. This can be seen in the responders' responses, where 66.6 agree and 33.3 strongly agree. These findings were completed by the findings of the interview. The respondents proposed the following writing strategies: Dictation, writing competition, reading regularly as reading will help to increase the amount of vocabulary, revising and editing your work, asking feedback from your teacher or any other person experienced in writing, planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 Challenges

In response to the first objective, i.e., to identify academic challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District, results from the study indicate that the majority of the respondents (58.1%) strongly agree that learners make mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and tenses when they are writing, while 32.5% agreed with the statement. This is echoed by Fareed et al. (2016) and Marzano (1982), who found that learners make mistakes related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, and basic sentence structures. These findings are like the findings from Fareed about paragraph writing, where Fareed identified mistakes related to subject-verb agreement, tenses, punctuation, capitalization, and preposition. Learners have a problem organising information while writing: 58.1% strongly agreed with the statement, while 39.5% agreed. Additionally, learners have challenges with spelling and punctuation: 50% strongly agreed with the statement, while 46.5% agreed. Adam (2015) claimed that learners have challenges organising information, spelling, and punctuation in writing. Another challenge is that learners lack sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas while writing: 53.4% strongly agree with the statement, while 40% agree with it. This concurs with Misbah et al. (2017), who claim that the lack of vocabulary is a challenge for learners while studying writing skills. Vocabulary is a foundation for sentence building, which is the core of effective writing skills. The educational background of teachers who may not have writing skills was another challenge; 46.5% strongly agreed with the statement, while 41.8% agreed. According to Altweissi and Maaytah (2022), the teacher's educational background is very important. Teachers must have a good mastery of instructional language in order to bring about the desired learning outcome in their class. In the same way, Beckman-Anthony (2008) pointed out that the input of the language teacher is very important for learners who are studying the language. The more children get input, the more they develop language skills than those who get less input. Additionally, Fakeye (2012) stated that there is a close relationship between what teachers know and what they teach their learners. This study also shows that learners have no knowledge of morphology and syntax, as 47.6% strongly agree and 46.5% agree with the statement. In the same way, Moses and Mohamad (2019) argued that students who have very limited knowledge of grammar have trouble with morphology and syntax.

4.2.2 Causes

In response to the second objective, which was to find out the causes of academic challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District, the findings indicate that teachers who do not give effective feedback lead their learners to have challenges in writing skills. A large number of 65.1% strongly agree with the statement, besides 34.8% who agree with the statement. This is in line with Ngwenya and Chingwe (2023), who found that the causes of poor academic writing skills challenges are teachers who do not give effective feedback to their learners and a lack of constructive criticism and comments to encourage learners. These causes lead to poor academic writing skills in learners' work in the classroom. Feedback is very important in the teaching and learning process. When the feedback is effective, it helps learners improve their writing skills. When the feedback is not effective, learners do not improve their writing skills.

Most teachers are not able to provide proper guidance to their learners on how to write well while teaching writing and reading skills; 46.5% strongly agree, while 34% agree with the statement. This is supported by Gramme (2008) and Zamel (1985), who argued that most teachers are unable to provide proper guidance to their learners while teaching writing skills. For example, teachers should not be judgmental while giving constructive feedback to their learners' writing. When the learners lack proper guidance in writing activities, the effect is negative because they cannot develop their writing skills properly. Guidance is the key to whatever we do. When learners do not get proper guidance, it is not easy to develop their writing skills. They keep facing challenges with productive skills.

Lack of free writing opportunities in the classroom was another cause, where 58.1% strongly agreed and 36.0% agreed with the statement. In the same way, Maley (2012) pointed out that free writing helps in the development of the language in different areas like lexicon, grammar, and speech production. Lack of free writing opportunities leads to poor writing in school. When a learner practices free writing, it helps her or him develop writing skills. The study showed that the lack of learners' practice in reading and writing is one of the major causes of challenges in learners writing skills. 48.8% strongly agreed with the statement, while 39.5% agreed. This is supported

by Hasani (2016), who noted that the lack of practice in reading and writing is a challenge for learners in writing skills, which results in poor performance in writing.

The poor background of teachers in writing skills was another cause. 45.3% strongly agree with the statement, while 46.5% agree with it. This is in line with the findings from the interview, which show that the lack of role models among teachers skilled in writing and speaking skills is challenging. Some teachers do not teach dictation, and they do not value writing competitions. In the teaching and learning process, teachers' background matters. When teachers have a poor background in writing skills, the learners are also poor in writing skills. It is a common belief that "you cannot give what you do not have." Teachers' backgrounds affect learners' performance negatively, not only in writing but also in other skills. The lack of enough time for learners does not make it possible for them to communicate their ideas in written form properly; indeed, 40.6% strongly agree and 41.8% agree with this statement. Similarly, White and Arndt (1991) stated that, due to a lack of time, learners are not able to communicate their ideas in written form.

4.2.3 Strategies

In response to the third objective, which was to suggest strategies for addressing the causes of challenges in writing skills in English in 12 years of basic education in Karongi District, the results indicate that the provision of effective feedback by teachers to their learners can be a solution to learners' academic writing challenges, with 59.3% strongly agreeing with the statement and 36.0% agreeing with it. This is supported by Ngwenya and Chingwe (2023), who pointed out that effective feedback helps to highlight learners' strengths and weaknesses, and constructive feedback is given to learners either individually or in groups. 58.1% strongly agree with the statement that teaching enough grammar can help learners solve academic writing skills challenges, while 34.8% agree. This is in line with Foster (2015), who states that learners can improve their capacity for grammar by developing a culture of reading and participating in some activities related to grammar. Good readers are also good writers. Memorization of the spelling of words is one of the solutions to learners' academic writing challenges; this idea is supported by 60.4% of respondents who strongly agreed and 34.0% who agreed. Similarly, learners should try their best to memorise the spelling of words because it helps in developing academic writing (Nyang'au, 2014; Hilton, 2008; Can, 2009). Training learners to read more materials can help them solve their academic writing challenges; 56.9% strongly agree with the statement, while 37.2% agree. This is supported by Nation (1983), who is of the view that the use of dictionaries and more reading practice can be helpful for learners who are limited in their vocabulary.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The main findings show that learners face challenges in academic writing skills in English as a medium of instruction. Mistakes they make are generally related to pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, tenses, punctuation, capitalization, morphology, and syntax. The causes of learners' academic writing skills challenges are teachers who do not give effective feedback, teachers who are not able to provide proper guidance to their learners on how to write well while teaching writing, and finally, a lack of free writing opportunities in the classroom. The writing strategies proposed in this study are the following: Teachers should provide effective feedback to their learners and have a good command of grammar. Memorization of words' spelling is also among the solutions to the learners' academic writing challenges. Finally, the use of dictionaries and more reading practice can be helpful for learners who have limited vocabulary. This study has focused on various challenges pertaining to writing skills. Further studies may focus on specific challenges, to be more precise, such as sentence structure, degree of formality and informality and, the use of the academic register among others.

5.2 Recommendations

To develop their writing skills, learners should participate in internal and external competitions between schools in English of any kind. Every teacher should contribute to improving students' writing skills rather than leaving the task to English teachers. This means that teachers of other subjects need to correct not only the content of students' work but also the language errors. Finally, the recruitment of new teachers should take into consideration the level of the level of English language proficiency.

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