



## **ANALYSIS OF ERRORS OF SUBJECT VERB AGREEMENT IN ENGLISH WRITING SKILL: SPECIAL REFERENCE FROM HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA STUDENTS,**

**ADVANCED TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, JAFFNA.**

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*This study was a classroom-based action research. The purpose of the research was to identify the types of subject verb agreement errors in Simple Present Tense and to find out the factors causing such errors. In this study, two different constructive teaching and learning activities were used by the researchers with a view to exploring how constructive teaching and learning activities help the students overcome subject verb agreement errors in Simple present tense and how these activities help them internalize subject verb agreement rules. Forty first year students who follow Higher National Diploma in English at the Advanced Technological Institute of Jaffna, Sri Lanka took part in the study. The study started with the pre-test which helped to identify the types of subject verb agreement errors. This was followed by a mixed method which revealed the factors causing errors. The students were taken through two different constructive teaching learning activities. Two post-tests were held after the completion of each constructive teaching and learning activity. After the intervention feedbacks were collected from the students to find out their impressions regarding the intervention activities. The outcome of the study showed both constructive teaching and learning activities showed progress and more students preferred the second constructive teaching and learning activities. It was found that second constructive teaching and learning activity was more effective than the first one.*

**Keywords:** Constructive teaching and learning activities, error, subject-verb agreement, types of errors.

### **Introduction**

Subject-verb agreement plays a vital role in English Language. Incorrect subject-verb agreement can confuse the reader that the reader may find it difficult to understand. Even though a person may have expertise knowledge in a subject, he/she cannot communicate effectively and his/her ability to share that knowledge will be significantly affected. A thorough knowledge in subject-verb agreement is indispensable for the learners whose mother tongue is not English.



Despite the fact that the grammatical rules are taught by the teachers the students continue making errors. The research was carried out to find whether these errors can be minimized by using constructive teaching and learning activities as the intervening activity. To find out the types of errors related to Subject Verb agreement the students were asked to write three types of essays. The students were taken through intervention activities namely writing exercises, correction of errors in a sentence designed by the researchers and two focus group discussions were followed by the intervention activities. For data analysis Correlation and coefficient was used to compare the pre- test and Posttest to find the improvement of the students.

### **Research problem**

Despite the fact that various studies have been carried with particular attention to subject-verb agreement errors, a study done by the researchers by taking the students who follow Higher National Diploma in English at a tertiary Institution and whose mother tongue is Tamil and using two different constructive teaching and learning activities with a view to minimizing the errors related to subject-verb agreement has not been proceeded yet. This gap was identified by the researchers. When evaluating the assignments of the students or even in the class when marking the exercise books, it was noticed by the researchers that the students made errors in the subject-verb agreement. The students could not convey what they wanted to convey exactly in writing due to the error that what they wanted to convey could not be comprehended by others. Moreover, it is compulsory for the Higher National Diploma in English holders to be equipped with sound grammar knowledge and they must eliminate or minimize the errors related to subject-verb agreement the reason being that those who successively completed Higher National Diploma in English are appointed as Teachers of English. It was also realized by the researchers that the future generation would be affected by this when these students are appointed as Teachers of English and their errors remained persistent. To resolve this problem, it rendered indispensable to do a research with a view to minimizing such errors and finding the effective constructive teaching and learning activities preferred by the students.

### **Research Problem Statement**

The major problem of this study is to introduce two different construction teaching and learning activities and identify the effective construction teaching and learning activities preferred by the students after identifying the types of errors and the factors causing errors.

**“How far is the construction teaching and learning activities are effective to minimize the errors related to subject- verb agreement in Simple Present Tense?”**

### **Hypothesis**

H1- There is a positive relationship between Constructive Teaching Method and Subject Verb-Agreement



H2-Before Constructive Teaching Method the errors are high in comparing with after introducing the Constructive Teaching Method.

Based on the above hypothesis, the researchers developed the following research questions.

### **Research Question**

“Which types of error were identified before testing?”

“Which types of errors were identified after testing?”

“Is there any relationship between the Constructive Teaching Method and Subject Verb-Agreement?”

“Is there any improvement in using subject verb agreement in their writings after introducing the method??”

### **Objectives of the research**

1. “To make analysis of the errors in Subject -verb agreement in Simple present tense”
1. “To find out the types of errors in subject verb agreement in Simple present tense before introducing the constructive teaching and learning activities” (Pre- test)
2. “To find out the types of errors in subject verb agreement in Simple present tense after introducing the constructive teaching methods” (Post- test1 and Post-test2)
3. “To identify the relationship between the Constructive Teaching and learning activities and Subject Verb- Agreement”
- 4.” To compare the pre-test and post- test of the errors in subject verb agreement in Simple Present Tense”
5. “To provide suggestions and recommendations for improving in using subject verb agreement in Simple Present tense”

### **Significance of the study**

It is a fact that the knowledge of grammar helps the learners express their ideas effectively. The learners who can express their ideas without errors in subject-verb agreement can effectively convey the intended message. Many researches reveal the fact that the students tend to make more errors when they write something rather than when they are given exercise based on subject – verb errors.



The researchers strongly believe that the findings of this research will be applicable not only to the students who follow Higher National Diploma in English but to the other students who follow other courses in the Advanced Technological Institute, Jaffna. This will help even the students who follow various courses in other Tertiary Education Institutes which come under the purview of Ministry of Higher Education. So, ultimately thousands of youths in this country will get benefitted in such a way that they will communicate in the proper way without making errors that the intended message can be conveyed by others and this will contribute in the overall development of the country.

This research aims at finding the most appropriate strategy to resolve the problems in terms of errors related to subject-verb agreement and the findings of this research can be used in teaching the students who learn English as a second language.

The students will also know the common errors in the subject – verb agreement by this research and the students who follow their studies in English medium are expected to develop their writing style. Further those who pursue higher studies either in their own country or in a foreign country need to improve their writing. The research finding is also useful to these students.

There is no doubt that the research findings can be used by the teachers, policy makers and the administrators, curriculum designers in various ways such as planning the teaching, preparing course materials, revising the curriculum, introducing remedial teaching methods, etc.

### **Scope of the research**

This study was carried out by randomly selecting forty first year HND in English students from the ATI, Jaffna. Generally, 200 students get enrolled in the first year. These forty students were sufficient for the data collection.

The participants of this research were only the students whose mother tongue is Tamil and who learn English as a second language. So, these students represented only the Northern Province.

The students make errors in subject-verb agreement in writing and speaking, but the researchers focused on the errors in Simple Present Tense made by the students only in writing and when analyzing the errors only the subject-verb agreement errors were taken into consideration.

### **Literature review**

David (2005) stated that the subject-verb agreement interfered with communication. For example, “I angry.” Here, though the meaning is apparent, the grammar rule is ignored. According to David, it doesn’t affect the message of communication the students but he says that the students should master grammar rules and it will give a good impression.



Albert Agbesi Wornyo (2016) examined grammatical errors of seventy-eight students from first year, Faculty of Science, University of Education, Winneba. The study framed with pre-test, group discussion and posttest. The group discussion followed by constructivists' activities which consisted of learner-centered activities. The study showed an improvement in student's performance in grammar and usage.

Dr. (Mrs.) Amina Gogo Tafida and Dr. Shittu Kelani Okunade stated that the subject-verb agreement problem was very common in communication and they focused on four areas of subject/verb agreement and recorded errors which were grouped as errors followed by tense, nouns, and errors involving intervening variables. He recommended to make students more sensitive to subject - verb agreement in the input which enabled them to use English Language in natural setting.

Mampoi Irene Chele examined the linguistic environment in which subject - verb agreement errors occurred in students' academic work at National University of Lesotho (NUL). This study highlighted competence or performance errors. The study consisted of two stages. In the first stage, students did a test in their field of study and the subject- verb agreement errors were not focused. In the second stage, a follow up test was given to the same group of students. They were given sentences which were a mixture of correct, incorrect and ambiguous sentences and were asked to evaluate the grammaticality of the sentences. The main findings of the study were that the subject- verb agreement errors were prominent in complex linguistic environments that the performance errors appeared frequently in simple sentence construction (Simple errors) while competence errors were found to be prominent in complex linguistic environment" (Chele, 2015)

Zhen Ye examined the intermediate proficiency of the English Language Learners who were given a pretest before discussing the subject-verb agreement. The explanation about the subject-verb agreement was given in details from grammar book. The same test was given as a post test. During the discussion, it was found out that is the bilingual method was more comprehensible and beneficial when compared with monolingual method.

Stapa and Izaha (2010) examined the subject-verb agreement problem in Malaysian ESL learners who faced difficulties due to L1 influence. There is no such rule regarding subject- verb agreement in L1. Stapa and Izaha categorized the errors as: subject-verb agreement of person, subject – verb agreement of number, agreement with coordinated subject, agreement with indefinite expression of amount and notional agreement and proximity. They found the difficulties and recommended to take remedial actions to curb this problem.

## **Methodology**

### ***Conceptual model***

The following conceptual model was developed by the researchers. Here, the independent variable of the study is Constructive Teaching and learning activities and the dependent variable of the study is Subject Verb Agreement.



***Source: Developed by the researchers***

### **Sample of the study**

The sample of this study consisted of 40 students who follow Higher National Diploma in English at the Advanced Technological Institute, Jaffna. In Advanced Technological Institute, Jaffna there are 3000 students who follow different Higher National Diploma courses and among them around 200 students follow Higher National Diploma in English. Out of 200 students, forty students were taken as a sample of the research. Random sampling technique was used for the unbiased representation of the total population. It was observed that the majority of the students were females.

### **Data type and the data collection instrument**

Pre-test was used to identify the types of subject verb agreement errors. A mixed method namely face-to-face structured interview, questionnaire, observation was used by the researchers in order to find out the factors causing the errors. Each constructive teaching and learning activity was followed by post-test. Focused group discussion which was followed by each constructive teaching and learning activity revealed the impressions of the students regarding each constructive teaching and learning activity. In this study only the primary data which were both quantitative and qualitative were used by the researchers.

### **The Procedure**

For the pre-test the students were asked to write an essay on a topic and the word limit was limited to 200 words. This study was confined with analyzing the subject verb errors in the Simple Present Tense, the title of the was chosen by the researchers. With the pre-test data the types of errors in relation to subject – verb agreement in the Present Tense were analyzed. A mixed method namely face-to-face structured interview, questionnaire, observation in order to find out the factors causing the errors.





After the types of errors in relation to subject – verb agreement and the factors causing such errors being carefully analyzed the constructive teaching learning activities were designed by the researchers with a view to subject-verb agreement rules being internalized.

The students were taken through two intervention activities namely writing exercises, correction of errors in a sentence designed by the researchers and two focus group discussions were followed by the intervention activities.

Constructive teaching and learning activities were used by the researchers to explore how these approaches which are student-centered could help the students overcome their subject verb agreement errors in Simple present tense. Two Constructive teaching and learning activities were used by the researchers namely Constructive teaching and learning activity 1 and Constructive teaching and learning activity 2.

During the Constructive teaching and learning activity 1, the students were taken through activities in terms of correction of errors in sentences. The students were given sentences containing subject verb agreement errors. The task of identifying the errors was given to the students as group activity in which they had to identify the errors and correct them. The students were guided by the researchers to identify the errors when they faced any difficulty. The students were asked to maintain a notebook in which they were asked to write the sentences containing errors and the sentence after correcting the errors. Finally, the students were encouraged to find out the subject verb agreement grammar rules. The researchers also added some rules which the students failed to find out. The objective of this constructive teaching and learning activity was that the students should find out the grammatical rules themselves instead of their being taught or instructed. At the end of this constructive teaching learning activity 1, the students were asked to write a paragraph the word limit of which was 200 words and this was considered as post-test 1.

During the Constructive teaching and learning activity 2, the students were asked to write a paragraph the word limit of which should be 200 words. Sentences with subject verb agreement errors were highlighted and the students were asked to correct them. The students were asked to work on the sentences individually and sometimes in groups. The students were asked to share their findings with the entire class. The researchers added some points when they felt it was necessary. The students were asked to note down the subject verb agreement errors that they made as well as the corrections in a note book. At the end of each session, the paragraph written by the students were corrected by the researchers and provided to the students with feedbacks. The students had to write seven paragraphs during the Constructive teaching and learning activity 2 and at the end of this Constructive teaching and learning activity 2, they were asked to write a paragraph the word limit of which was 200 words and this was considered as post-test 2.

## Data presentation and Data analysis

### Types of errors

Surface Strategy Taxonomy, a classification of errors proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982 in Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005) was used by the researchers to detect the errors in terms of Simple Present Tense. This taxonomy describes as to how the surface structures are altered and according to this taxonomy, there are four sorts of errors namely, addition, omission, misformation and misordering. Of four types of aforementioned, the researchers found only three types of errors in the writings of the students. But, misordering was not identified among the students' errors.

**Table 1: The following data shows the types of errors which were identified before introducing the Constructive teaching Method (Pre-test)**

Types of errors	No of students	Percentage
Addition	241	64.95%
Omission	74	19.94%
Misformation	56	15.09%

**Table 2: The following data shows the types of errors which were identified after introducing the Constructive teaching Method (Post-test1)**

Types of errors	No of students	Percentage
Addition	183	55.28%
Omission	84	25.37%
Misformation	64	19.33%



**Table 3: The following data shows the types of errors which were identified after introducing the Method (Post-tes2)**

Types of errors	No of students	Percentage
Addition	117	50.21%
Omission	57	24.46%
Misformation	59	25.32%

When the errors of the students were analysed, it was revealed that most prevalent type of errors committed by the students was addition making up around 64.95% and omission and misformation were found to be 19.94% and 15.09% respectively. When the types of errors were analysed after introducing constructive teaching method 1 and 2, addition remained the most prevalent type of error and the percentage was 55.28% and 50.21% respectively. No significant relationship was found in terms of the percentage of omission and misformation after introducing constructive teaching method 1 and 2. When the errors of the students' were viewed from linguistic categorization's perspective the errors were found when identifying whether the subject is singular or plural, when using verbal and nominal sentences and use of inappropriate use of verbs.

### Factors causing errors

The sources of the errors namely inter-lingual transfer, intra-lingual transfer and misleading contexts of learning, overgeneralization, faulty teaching, avoidance, inadequate learning, false concepts hypothesized were identified by the researchers.

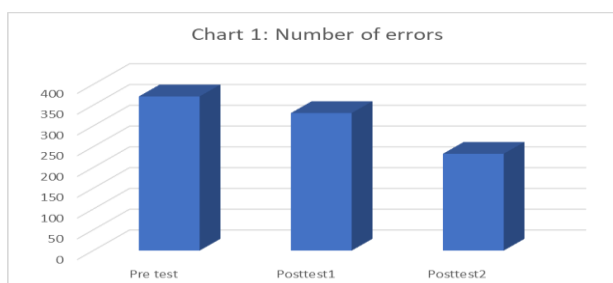
It was revealed that the other factors causing the errors related to subject-verb agreement namely, students forgetting the basic rule of SVA in which the 'head word' of the subject should be traced first, the teacher's failing to monitor and correct the errors found in writing which is the important factor for high rates of errors in sentence, the unprofessional attitude of some teachers, auto correction option available in MS word and other popular computer application making the students unaware about the types of errors, students attitude towards learning grammar in both primary and secondary education, non-availability of professional or trained teachers, non-availability of adequate, interesting materials like audio-visual system, the students being dependent on memorization showing less interest of writing due to the fear of making errors.

### Total errors

The table 4 and the bar chart below mentioned show the total errors made by the students during pre-test and post-test1 and post-test 2.

**Table 4: Total errors**

	No of errors
Pre test1	371
Post-test1	331
Post-test2	233



371 errors were identified in the pretest. The number of errors compared with the pre-test was reduced by 10.78% after introducing constructive teaching method1 (post-test1). The number of errors compared with pre-test further reduced by 37.19% in post-test2.

The points equivalent was determined by the researchers and it was based on number of errors. Points equivalent used in the study was based on the criteria given below in the Table 5.

**Table 5**

Grade	Number of errors	Points equivalent used in the study
A	No errors	5
B	0 – 5	4
C	6 – 10	3
S	11 – 15	2
W	Above 15	1

Number of grades calculated in the pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test2 are given below in the table 6.

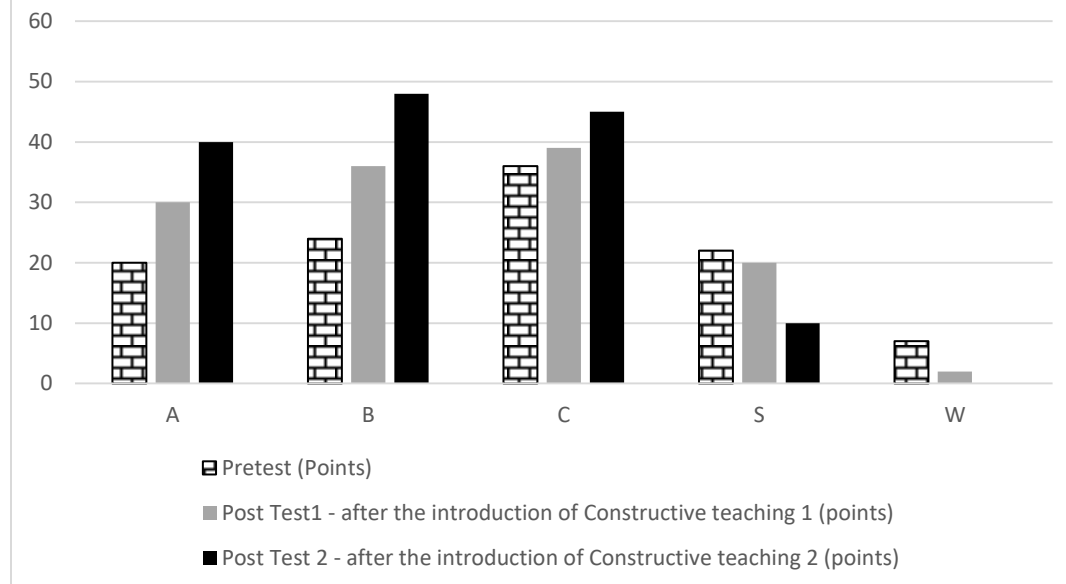
**Table 6**

Grade	Pretest (Number of students)	Post-test1	Post-test 2
A	4	6	8
B	6	9	12
C	12	13	15
S	11	10	5
W	7	2	0

**Table 7:** Total points calculated in the pretest, post-test 1 and post-test 2

Grade	Pretest (points)	Post Test1 (points)	Post Test 2 (points)
A	20	30	40
B	24	36	48
C	36	39	45
S	22	20	10
W	7	2	0
	109	127	143

**Figure1: Points equivalent used in the study**



When the total points calculated in the pre-test, post-test1 and post-test2 was viewed, a progress was noticed. When compared with pretest and posttest1 16.51% progress was noticed and when compared with pretest and post-test 2, 31.19% progress was noticed.

For the purpose of analyzing the number of errors related to subject – verb agreement made by the students during the pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test2, Grades A, B, C were considered as a group and Grades S and W were considered as another group by the researchers. The rationale of these two groups being formed was to make a comparison of 10 or less than 10 errors made by the students and more than 10 errors made by the students during pre-test, post-test1 and post-test2. This comparison helped the researchers find the effectiveness of two different constructive teaching learning activities used as intervention activities by the researchers.

From the table 7 above, students' performance in the pre-test showed that 73.39% of the total points calculated considering grade A, B and C. When a comparison is made with the post-test 1 and pre-test2, the percentage of the points considering grade A, B and C remained 82.67% and 93.00% respectively. Therefore, a comparison of students' performance in the pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2 showed that there was a progress followed by each the constructive teaching and learning activities namely constructive teaching and Learning activity 1 and 2. It was noticed that students' performance after post-test2 was the highest.

When analyzing the points considering grades S and W, it was found that the percentage of the points in the pre-test was 26.60%. The percentage of the points followed by the constructive teaching and learning activity1 and 2 remained 20.18% and 6.99% respectively. This analysis showed that the percentage of the points considering grade S and grade W decreased and that the percentage was drastically decreased after post-test2.

## **Correlation and coefficient (r) method**

The correlation and coefficient (r) method was used to analyze the effectiveness of each constructive teaching learning activity. When compared with the pre-test and post-test 1, i.e. after the introduction of the first Constructive teaching and learning activities the correlation and coefficient (r) was found to be 0.893 which indicated a strong positive relationship and it was concluded that other factors influencing the subject-verb error was only 10.7%.

When the pre-test and post-test 2 i.e. after the students' being taken through the second constructive teaching and learning activities were compared, the correlation and coefficient (r) remained  $r = 0.739$  which was less than the previous value of the correlation and coefficient. This also indicated a strong positive relationship and it was concluded that other factors influencing the subject-verb error was only 26.1%

## **Final findings**

The researchers could identify the factors causing errors and types of errors. Addition, Omission and Misformation are the three types of errors found in the writing. Addition remained the most prevalent type of error in pre-test and in post-test 1 and post-test 2. However, no significant relationship was found in terms of the percentage of omission and misformation after the constructive teaching and learning activities being used.

Considering the factors causing the errors and types of errors, the constructive teaching and learning activities were designed by the researchers. The analysis of the data revealed that there was a strong positive relationship between subject-verb agreement errors and two different constructive and teaching learning activities. The researchers concluded that the second constructive teaching and learning activities were preferred by the students and that the second constructive teaching and learning activities remained most effective for the students to internalize the subject-verb agreement rules and to minimize the errors related to subject-verb agreement.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the research findings and discussion, the following recommendations can be made.

The Constructive Teaching and learning activities which are learner centered help learners overcome the errors related to subject – verb agreement and internalize the subject-verb agreement rules. In this research, the researchers used two different constructive teaching and learning activities and the second constructive teaching and learning activities were preferred by the students. However, constructive teaching and learning activities can be decided considering the preference of the students and prior knowledge about the types of errors made by the students and factors causing the errors which enable a teacher or anyone to decide the appropriate method.



The role of the teacher in constructive teaching and learning is being a facilitator who can use the deductive approach rather than teaching the grammar rules. Making the students aware of the grammar rules without the students being taught them in a traditional way helps the learners internalize the grammar rules.

Only the errors related to subject-verb agreement in Simple Present Tense was considered by the researchers in this research. The future study can be done considering the other tenses or after finding the tense in which the errors are most prevalent.

In this research, the students were asked to maintain a notebook to write down the errors made by them and the corrections during the intervention activities. This encouraged the students to eliminate the errors and get engaged in the activities. Moreover, the different techniques were used by the researchers to create an environment conducive for learning and for the active participation. Such techniques can be applied by the other researchers and the teachers.

The performance of the students during the constructive teaching and learning activities were observed by the researchers which enabled them to evaluate the effectiveness. Therefore, the evaluation is important to assess the effectiveness of the intervention activities.

### **Future study**

This research was about to analyze the learner errors in subject verb agreement in English before and after the introduction of Constructive Teaching and learning activities and to find out the effective constructive teaching and learning activities. This research can be used as a reference for other researches focusing Subject Verb Agreement with different objectives, sample and methodology. Those who engage in researches in future are able to analyze other strategies and different approaches to eliminate or minimize the errors related to subject-verb agreement and this research will support to find the gaps in language testing.

### **Limitations of the study**

There are certain limitations of the study.

1. Sample size was small and it represented only the first year Higher National Diploma in English students.
2. The mother tongue of the participants of the research is only Tamil.
3. The research could not be done continuously due to the unavailability of the students at the Advanced Technological Institute.
4. Only two intervention activities were used in this study.
5. Only written skill was taken into consideration in this research.





6. The time was limited so that every variable could not be considered in the research.

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