

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**THE PROBLEM OF DANGLING MODIFIERS AND SENTENCE  
FRAGMENTS IN THE WRITING OF STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN  
BOLGATANGA GIRLS SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**



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## DECLARATION

### Student's Declaration

I, MARTINA AZURE, declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works that have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE: .....

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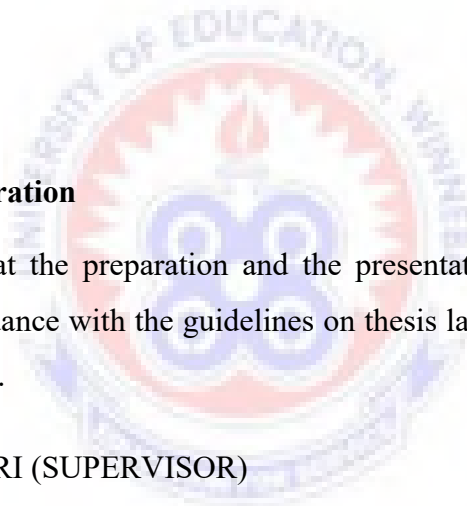
### Supervisors' Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and the presentation of the dissertation were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on thesis laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ).



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## GLOSSARY

CLT	:	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	:	English as a Foreign Language
L1	:	First Language
L2	:	Second Language
LAD	:	Language Acquisition Device
PPP	:	Presentation Practice Production
SCHJ	:	Society of the Holy Child Jesus
SLA	:	Second Language Acquisition



## ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students. Bolgatanga Senior High School was used as a case study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population was students and teachers of the school. A sample of 188 students and 2 teachers of English were purposely selected for the study. Essay test and Questionnaires were used in data collection. The findings of the study revealed that sentence fragment errors were the most committed errors. Furthermore, students' language background, motivation, and attitude, failure to practice writing, poor vocabulary and grammar knowledge, complex nature of the rules of the English language, environmental factors, and inadequate skill of writing were the main sources of students' poor performance in writing. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that teachers should give due attention to the errors their students made and lessen those areas accordingly. Similarly, students should shape their learning strategies to benefit a lot from writing activities and assignments by considering the long-term benefits of the English language in general and writing skills in particular. Furthermore writing tutorial classes should be arranged to help students develop their writing skills.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Overview**

This chapter comprises the following subtopics: background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, and research questions. Also, the chapter spells out the significance of the study, delimitation, limitation, definition of terms, and organization of chapters.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

English language is the most widely used language worldwide making it one of the most important languages used in communication worldwide. It is used in diverse fields; in some places the English language is used as a second language hence people are expected to learn it at school since it is the medium of communication. Ghana also uses the English language as a medium of communication. Like other countries that have been colonized by Europeans, Ghanaians have their native languages but the English language is used as their medium of communication since they were colonized by the British. The colonial powers set up schools to educate the Ghanaian populace a way of spreading their religion. The students had to learn everything about the language. The grammar of the language according to MacMillan (2017) states that the grammar explains the forms and structure of words (morphology) and how they are arranged in sentences (syntax). In other words, the grammar provides rules for the common use of both spoken and written language

As mentioned early on, that the English language is used as a second language in the country, every Ghanaian child is taught the language and the language is also used to teach other subjects, yet there many people who still have problems using the language

to communicate effectively as a result we have many errors in both speaking and written language. This could be a result of many factors Broughton et al. (1980) pointed out some of the possible reasons/sources of errors and summarized as follows.

- Poor teaching (bad teaching) and the syllabus
- The learner himself
- Transfer errors
- Mother tongue interference
- Students' diverse linguistic background
- The learning process (pp.133-136).

These have an impact on the writing of some students who have ended up using dangling modifiers and sentence fragments during their composition writing thereby distorting the intended purpose of a piece of writing that the student wants to communicate. McArthur (1992, p. 352-353), says that a dangling modifier is a specific case of which is the dangling participle is an error in sentence structure whereby a grammatical modifier is associated with a word other than the one intended, or with no particular word at all, also Theodore (1985, p. 128) describes, a dangling modifier as a phrase or a clause that is not clearly and logically related to the word or words it modifies (i.e. is placed next to).

Since the right word is not being modified it brings about the distortion that people make in their writing.

## **1.2 The Statement of the Problem**

As we are aware of the lasting importance of English, that is, as a medium of communication, as a second language, it is used in almost all fields especially as a medium of instruction in schools in Ghana. The language is flexible and continues to

change. It has rules which one needs to follow to come out with the accepted standard of the language. This is essential towards speaking or writing correctly. It is therefore important to let students into those rules in order that they are used appropriately. If this is not done, then we will have the interference of the L1 which is substituted into the English Language to take the place of what someone wants to express. According to Brown (2000), the first language, however, may be more readily used to bridge gaps that the learner cannot fill by generalization within the second language. With time, they get fossilized such that one is not able to tell whether we are making use of the right grammar or not.

The dangling modifiers and sentence fragments are one of the confusing causing problems of the English language in the language of students of the Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School. This affects their writing in that the intended meaning of the written sentences and speeches are illustrated since a wrong word or phrase is being modified so one may intend to modify a subject and end up modifying the object.

Rozimela (2010, p. 83) says that a good mastery of English writing skills is deemed pivotal and helpful due to the nature of written form in mastering English Language. Similarly, Leki (2009, p. 5) states that having adequate writing skills helps our readers comprehend our ideas very easily. It is therefore important for students to communicate well in their writing to put across the messages they intend to give appropriately.

It is for the purpose of writing clearly that this research was conducted to investigate the problem of dangling modifier and sentence fragments in Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the composition of students of Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School.
2. Identify the sources of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the composition of students of Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School.
3. Seek possible ways to minimize the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the composition of students of Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Based on the above objectives, the following research questions guided this research:

1. What are the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments that can be seen in the composition of students of Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School?
2. What are the sources of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the composition of students of Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School?
3. What are the possible ways to minimize the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the composition of students of Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will have the following significance;

1. It will help language teachers to be aware of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the composition students commit and shape their ways of teaching writing skills accordingly.
2. It will inform teachers to practice giving remedial actions and a special treatment for less successful students.

3. It will raise the awareness of learners about dangling modifiers and sentence fragments they commit in writing and revise their learning strategies accordingly.

### **1.6 Delimitation**

The investigation sought to identify the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in composition writing among Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School students. Attention was focused on writing as an aspect of English language since there is the need to communicate well in their writing to put across the messages they intend to give appropriately.

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

This research was restricted to the selected Senior High School in the Bolgatanga District of the Upper East region because of the time constraints on the part of the researcher. This did not permit a wider study of other schools in the district. There was also lack of willingness on the part of the respondents to answer the questions; however, the researcher assured the participants that the information will be treated with utmost confidentiality and that it is only used for the purpose of the study.

### **1.8 Definition of Terms**

**Dangling modifiers:** A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence. A modifier describes, clarifies, or gives more detail about a concept.

**Sentence fragments:** A sentence fragment is a group of words that resembles a sentence. It will start with a capital letter and have ending punctuation; however, it is neither an independent clause nor a complete idea.

Senior High School: It is an institution where secondary education takes place.

Composition: It refers to the act of writing.

Morphology: It refers to the study of the internal structure of words and forms a core part of linguistic study today.

Syntax: It refers to the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language.

Grammar: This refers to the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general.

Errors: An error is something you have done which is considered to be incorrect.

Fossilization: It refers to the process in which incorrect language becomes a habit and cannot easily be corrected.

Generalization: A generalization is the formulation of general concepts from specific instances by abstracting common properties.

Remedial: This refers to an action is intended to correct something that is wrong or to improve a bad situation

### **1.9 Organization of the Chapters**

This dissertation has been divided into five chapters. Chapter one consists of the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, significance of the study, Scope of the Study, research questions, limitation and organization of the study. The second chapter reviews literature relevant to the study. Chapter three presents the methodology which includes the study design, study population, research instruments, data collection and ethical consideration. Chapter



four covers the analysis and discussion of the data collected. Chapter five provides a summary, conclusion, and recommendations.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses previous studies carried out which were related to this study. Thus, a thorough search through available literature showed that a number of studies and articles on the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing had been carried out at various levels of education both local and foreign. Prominent authors such as Krashen (1976, 1982), McArthur and Bernstein (1992), and Selinker (1972) have written on that and have recommended practical and effective methods of teaching English grammar alongside writing as a way of improving the errors that students make during their writing, so that they will not commit many grammatical errors in writing. In this chapter, the following sub-topics would be focused: second language acquisition; what writing is; types of errors; significance of errors in writing; sentence fragments in writing; and dangling modifiers.

#### 2.1 The Concept of Writing

Writing involves more than just producing words and sentences (Hanner, 2001, p. 2). For one to be able to produce a piece of writing, he or she should be able to write a connected series of words and sentences which are grammatically and logically linked, so that the purpose one has in his or her mind will suit the intended readers. This is to say that, the style of language used in a piece of writing designed for layman and people living in the village, for example, should be different from the one designed to educated people such as students, teachers, doctors, professors, etc. Therefore, in presenting a piece of discourse we should consider the correctness of form, the appropriateness of style, and the unity of topic.

Broughton et al. (1980), on the other hand, pointed out that we can negotiate meaning in conversational discourse. He said that when we write, unlike when we talk, we are engaged in an activity which is usually at the same time both private and public. It is private because the act of writing is by its nature solitary, but it is public in that most writing is intended for an audience, often one which is extremely difficult to define. He explained that the act of writing differs from that of talking in that it is less spontaneous and more permanent. For this reason, the conventions of writing tend to be less flexible than those of conversation, and the language which is used tends to be standardized.

Mohammad (2008, p. 8) said, “of the four skills in English, writing is considered to be the most complex and difficult skill to master. This difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing of ideas but also in translating these ideas into readable texts.” From this point of view, one can understand that writing is a complex process which demands cognitive analysis and linguistic synthesis.

Boughey (1997, p. 126-127) pointed out that writing is a process of “exploring one’s thoughts and learning from the act of writing itself what these thoughts are”. This process also succeeds in giving thoughts a permanence which they would not have in their unwritten state. By externalizing and giving permanence to thoughts, the act of writing allows writers to reconsider, clarify, and revise those thoughts more readily than if they had not been written down. Boughey (1997, p. 127) adds that in contrast to speaking, writing is produced and received in a context which is devoid of support for the communication of meanings. The result of this is that, in writing, meanings must be explicit. Understanding of the need to be explicit forces writers to engage with the propositions contained in their text more than in speaking. In speaking, meaning is constructed through a process of interaction which involves both the speaker and the

listener. Speakers and listeners prompt each other by providing links between propositions. In doing so, they help each other to construct a meaning which may not, in fact, be completely shared. In contrast to speaking, writing is a lonely process requiring writers to explore, oppose, and make connections between propositions for themselves, a process which is conducive to learning. So, a misplaced word or a phrase or a clause in students' write ups could give a different meaning to the message being conveyed. Misplaced words or phrases or clauses are most of the time seen in the essays of most students. The messages they want to carry across are sometimes entirely different when they put on paper. Students mostly write what they say, hence, this leads to several modifiers being misplaced.

## **2.2 The Monitor Model to Second Language Acquisition**

There are several theories that surround second language acquisition. Some of these theories include the monitor model, Interlanguage theories, Universal grammar, Cognitive theory, among others. The proponents of these theories tell us how the second language is learnt. It is when the language is learnt that it can be used in writing. For the sake of the project topic, attention was focused on the monitor model by Krashen.

The monitor model explains the relationship between acquisition and learning and it defines the influence of the latter on the former. The monitoring function is the practical result of the learned grammar. According to Krashen (1982), the acquisition system is the utterance initiator, while the learning system performs the role of the 'monitor' or the 'editor'. The 'monitor' acts in a planning, editing and correcting function when three specific conditions are met:

- i. The second language learner has sufficient time at their disposal.
- ii. They focus on form or think about correctness.

iii. They know the rule.

This model developed by Stephen Krashen has the following hypothesis:

**i. The Acquisition versus Learning Hypothesis**

Acquisition is a subconscious process, like first language acquisition, learning is a conscious process resulting into "knowing about language" (Krashen, 1982). Learning does not "turn into" acquisition and it usually takes place in formal environments, while acquisition can take place without learning in informal environments (Krashen, 1976, 1982).

**ii. The Monitor Hypothesis**

Learning has the function of monitoring and editing the utterances produced through the acquisition process (Krashen, 1982). The use of the monitor is affected by the amount of time that the second language learner has at his/her disposal to think about the utterance he/she is about to produce, the focus on form, and his/her knowledge of second language rules (Krashen, 1981).

**iii. The Natural Order Hypothesis**

There is a natural order of acquisition of second language rules. Some of them are early-acquired and some are late-acquired. This order does not necessarily depend on simplicity of form while it could be influenced by classroom instruction (Krashen, 1985). Evidence for the Natural Order Hypothesis was provided by a series of research studies investigating morpheme acquisition orders.

**iv. The Input Hypothesis**

According to Krashen (1985), receiving comprehensible input is the only way that can lead to the acquisition of a second language. To him, if a learner's level in a second

language is  $i$ , he/she can move to an  $i + 1$  level only by being exposed to comprehensible input containing  $i + 1$ .

**v. The Affective Filter Hypothesis**

According to Krashen (1985), comprehensible input will not be fully utilized by the learners if there is ‘mental block’, that is the affective filter that acts as a barrier to the acquisition process. It appears that the role of conscious learning is somewhat limited in second language performance. Krashen suggests that there is individual variation among language learners with regard to ‘monitor’ use. He distinguishes those learners that use the ‘monitor’ all the time (over-users); those learners who have not learned or who prefer not to use their conscious knowledge (under users); and those learners that use ‘monitor’ appropriately (optimal users).

An evaluation of the person’s psychological profile can help to determine to what group they belong. Usually, extroverts are under-users, while introverts and perfectionists are over-users. Lack of self-confidence is frequently related to the over-use of the ‘monitor’.

From the hypothesis above, Krashen does not believe that learned competence can become acquired. However, I have noticed in my own way that being conscious of what I was going to say has eventually helped me acquire a few structural items. In countries like Ghana, where English is our L2, interaction between speakers of English is unusual. Nevertheless, there are people who develop very good fluency and accuracy without having traveled to the USA or the UK. I also feel acquired competence can become learned competence. Many times, I have discovered rules that nobody taught me, and, if we consider that acquisition includes sounds, intonation, vocabulary, and body language as well, then many times I have become aware of certain pronunciation

patterns and gestures that I later included in my monitor. Krashen says the statements are generated in the LAD, but I believe they can also be generated in the monitor, as when we think of what we are going to say. Self-correction can then be available either from the monitor or from the LAD. In the affective aspect of this theory, I believe there are two affective filters, one to control the amount of input and another for the output. This could explain why some students vary their performance depending on the situation they are in especially when it comes to writing of essays. As you can see, the input affective filter not only controls the amount of language that goes in, but also selects where this intake should go: to the LAD or to the monitor. One easy way to encourage acquisition in the classroom is by having the students pay attention to the gestures used in a normal communication act; that is, if the student is giving directions, he or she should use his/her hands as he does this. Teachers should encourage the use of body language in class. Thus, the students will not concentrate too much on the form, but on the meaning as well, and how this meaning goes together with non-linguistic information. So, when the students are conscious of putting what they say into writing, the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments will be a thing of the past. This makes it a keen concern to the researcher to know whether students really monitor what they write.

### **2.3 Grammar and Error**

When dealing with the concept of grammar, our first point of contact is Chomsky. He propounded what we call the universal grammar. Chomsky claims that there are certain principles that form the basis on which knowledge of language develops. These principles are biologically determined and specialized for language learning (Chomsky, 1969, 1980, 1986). The Universal Grammar is referred to as the first language learner.

Its principles were adopted by second language researchers and were applied in the field of second language acquisition.

There are different ways a second language is acquired; they may be different yet each one makes an important contribution in second language learning. These equip the learner with some amount of the rules of the second language to enable them communicate effectively. Again, those that emphasize the innateness of the language, the learner who is already equipped with rules of the first language is able to transfer some rules of the first language into the second language, hence writing without any dangling modifiers or fragmented sentences.

The above can be a positive learning experience in order to help the learners improve their language and use English flawlessly. The theories can be considered as important factors in second language acquisition. It is clear that the theories are relevant to the issue of linguistic competence of the English learner. In addition, the theories concentrate largely on the nature of the Learner's performance.

Traditionally, morphology and syntax are the two main components discussed under grammar, the former is dealing with words structure while the latter is said to be handling the structure beyond the level of words. Syntax errors are sorts of errors at the levels of structure beyond the word level to what are termed as phrase, clause, sentence and paragraph to some extent. It is important to discuss some structural rules of making sentence patterns, since sentence is not happening as vacuum but constructed basically on several different kinds of phrases that are traditionally called 'parts of speech' consisting of any single words or group of related words that take their grammatical functions in a sentence and missing one or group phrases may impede the meaning of a sentence and render it to fragment. So, when the rules of the language are not critically



discussed and a student has L1 interference for example, begins to jam up sentences making the meaning ambiguous. For instance, a word is said to be a verb if it has an infinitive form such as: to ask; to begin; to cut; and to play (Wiredu, 2013). This means that if it is possible to express a word in this form, then that word is a verb.

Blakesley and Hoogeveen (2012) in their book titled, 'Writing: A Manual for the Digital Age, Brief, Spiral Bound Version', a phrase is a word group that does not contain the subject –verb pair needed for a complete sentence, and it can be a part of sentence function as verb, noun, adjective or adverb but it can never be a sentence on its own. There are five syntactic errors at the phrase level. They are noun phrases (NP), verb phrases (VP), adjective phrases (AJP), adverb phrases (AVP) and preposition phrases (PP). For instance, a student writes,

*'Having finished the assignment, the TV was turned on.'*

The phrase "Having finished" is a participle expressing action, but the doer is not the TV set (the subject of the main clause): TV sets don't finish assignments. Since the doer of the action expressed in the participle has not been clearly stated, the participial phrase is said to be a dangling modifier.

On the other hand, a clause structure is considered larger than phrase structure to involve well-formed phrases. It is defined as a group of words that are posed to form a part of a sentence with a subject and a predicate. Clause units are the basic grammatical packages for communication, for making statements, asking questions, or issuing instructions and requests, a clause is usually the minimal syntactic unit needed (Blakesley and Hoogeveen, 2012, p. 23). The clause structure errors are kind of deviants that violate the internal or textual relationship between parts of phrases, clause errors

are dealing with whole phrases entering into the structure of clauses. For instance, analyzing the sentence below,

*'Although nearly finished, we left the play very early because we were worried about our sick cat.'*

the clause *'Although nearly finished'* illogically modifies 'we', the pronoun directly following the clause. You can rectify the problem by reinserting the subject and verb that are understood in the clause. The correct form should be; "Although the play was nearly finished, we left early because we worried about our sick cat."

The sentence is a linguistic structure which involves a combination of clauses into a larger unit. The sentence is the most important and the largest unit of the grammar of any language as well as the most problematic and controversial of all grammatical units (Blakesley & Hoogeveen, 2012, p. 24) because it is indeterminate. Errors at sentence level are beyond the application of clauses. However, the whole phrases and clauses can be blended to form a sentence. The blended phrases and clauses may be ill formed or ungrammatically constructed.

The following is an example of the most severe and obvious problem with a dangling modifier which sometimes the resulting sentence just does not make sense:

*'Hoping to garner favour, my parents were sadly unimpressed with the gift.'*

This is a dangling modifier because it is unclear who and what was hoping to garner favour. It is unlikely that the parents were hoping to garner the favour, since they would not have given an impressive gift to themselves, but the sentence offers no other options. This sentence could be corrected by adding proper subject identifying the person who was hoping to win over the parents. So, the correct form is hoping to garner

favour, my new boyfriend brought my parents a gift that sadly failed to impress them. According to Shaughnessy (1997, p. 26), a sentence error can be called consolidation error if it comprises the two subtypes of clauses coordination and subordination.

## **2.4 The Sources of Error in L2 Writing: Social and Cognitive Factors**

### **2.4.1. Social Factors**

Myles (2002) stated that both social and cognitive factors affect language learning. Exploration of social factors gives us some idea of why learners differ in the rate of L2 learning and in proficiency type (for instance, conversational ability versus writing ability). Research based on direct (self-report questionnaires) and indirect measures generally shows that learners with positive attitudes, motivation, and concrete goals will experience success. Likewise, learners' negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success or by failure.

Similarly, Gardner (1985) stated that there is a direct relationship between learner attitudes and learner motivation. Gardner's socio-educational model was designed to account for the role of social factors in language acquisition. It inter-relates four aspects of L2 learning:

- i. The social and cultural milieu (which determines beliefs about language and culture),
- ii. Individual learner differences (related to motivation and language aptitude),
- iii. The setting (formal and/or informal learning contexts), and
- iv. Learning outcomes (Myles, 2002, p. 5).

Gardner explains that integrative motivation involves a desire to learn an L2 because individuals need to learn the target language to integrate into the community. In addition to this interest, the people or the culture represented by the other language

group may also inspire them. On the other hand, instrumental motivation acknowledges the role that external influences and incentives play in strengthening the learners' desire to achieve. Learners who are instrumentally motivated are interested in learning the language for a particular purpose, such as writing a dissertation or getting a job. According to the theory, if second language learning takes place in isolation from a community of target language speakers, then it benefits more from integrative motivation, whereas if it takes place among a community of speakers, then instrumental orientation becomes the more effective motivational factor. Motivational factors however, probably do not make much difference in their own, but they can create a more positive context in which language learning is likely to flourish (Myles, 2002, p. 5). If students show an overall interest in the target language (integrative motivation), perceive that there is parental and social support, and have a desire to achieve their professional goals (instrumental motivation), they can become more proficient in their ability to write in English, despite the initial lack of self-motivation. Hence, writing teachers should be aware of how the instrumental motivation of their L2 students will influence the effectiveness of their lessons. Generally speaking, if L2 learners are motivated to integrate into the L2, they will develop a higher level of proficiency and positive attitudes, which can have a positive effect on their writing (Myles, 2002, p. 6).

Myles (2002) concludes that learners may continue to exhibit errors in their writing for the following social reasons:

- i. Negative attitudes toward the target language
- ii. Continued lack of progress in the L2
- iii. A wide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture, and, a lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning (p.6).

#### **2.4.2. Cognitive Factors**

Myles (2002, p. 7) argues that academic writing is believed to be cognitively complex. Acquisition of academic vocabulary and discourse style is particularly difficult. According to cognitive theory, communicating orally or in writing is an active process of skill development result in gradual elimination of errors as the learner internalizes the rules of the language. Indeed, acquisition is a product of the complex interaction of the linguistic environment and the learner's internal mechanisms. With practice, there is continual restructuring as learners shift these internal representations in order to achieve increasing degrees of mastery of L2.

Myles (2002, p. 7) explained that one model that applies to both speaking and writing in a second language is Anderson's (1985) model of language production, which can be divided into three stages:

- a) Construction: in which the writer plans what he/she is going to write by brain storming, using a mind-map or outline;
- b) Transformation: in which language rules are applied to transform intended meanings into the form of the message when the writer is composing or revising; and
- c) Execution: This corresponds to the physical process of producing the text (Myles, 2002, p. 7). The first two stages have been described as “setting goals and searching memory for information, then using production systems to generate language in phrases or constituents.”

Myles elaborated that in structuring information, the writer uses various types of knowledge, including discourse knowledge, understanding of audience, and sociolinguistic rules. Organization at both the sentence and the text level is also

important for effective communication of meaning, and ultimately, for the quality of the written product. For instance, coherence problems may be due to not knowing how to organize text or how to store the relevant information. The transformation stage involves converting information into meaningful sentences. At this point, the writer translates or changes his/her plans into a mental representation of the goals, ideas, and organization developed in the construction stage. Revision is also part of this stage. Revision is a cognitively demanding task for L2 learners because it not only involves task definition, evaluation, strategy selection, and modification of text in the writing plan, but also the ability of students to analyze and evaluate the feedback they receive on their writing (Myles, 2002). In addition to this, O'Malley & Chamot further explain that due to the complex process of writing in a second language, learners often find it difficult to develop all aspects of the stages simultaneously. As a result, they selectively use only those aspects that are automatic or have already been proceduralized. In order to enhance or facilitate language production, students can develop particular learning strategies that isolate component mental processes.

O'Malley and Chamot have differentiated strategies into three categories:

- a) Metacognitive, such as planning the organization of written discourse or monitoring (that is, being aware of what one is doing and responding appropriately to the demands of a task);
- b) Cognitive, such as transferring or using known linguistic information to facilitate a new learning task or using imagery for recalling and using new vocabulary, and
- c) Social/affective strategies, which involve cooperating with peers, for example, in peer revision classes (O'Malley & Chamot 1990, as cited in Myles, 2002. p. 7).

Odlin, (1989, as cited in Myles, 2002, p. 8) adds that languages transfer is another important cognitive factor related to writing error. Transfer is defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired. The study of transfer involves the study of errors (negative transfer), facilitation (positive transfer), avoidance of target language forms, and their over-use. Behaviorist accounts claim that transfer is the cause of errors, whereas from a cognitive perspective, transfer is seen as a resource that the learner actively draws upon in interlanguage development. In other words, "the L1 can have a direct effect on interlanguage development by influencing the hypotheses that learners construct" (Ellis, 1994, Selinker, 1972, as cited in Myles, 2002, p. 9).

To sum up, we can see that writing in a second language is a complex process involving the ability to communicate in L2 and the ability to construct a text in order to express one's ideas effectively in writing. Social and cognitive factors and learner strategies help us in assessing the underlying reasons why L2 learners exhibit particular writing errors leading to sentence fragments and misplaced modifiers.

## **2.5 Types of Errors**

It is important to help learners to overcome some errors they make. Tono (2003, p. 804) studied error taxonomies and classified errors into two types:

### **i. Linguistic category classification**

This type of taxonomy specifies errors in terms of linguistic categories and in terms of where the error is located in the overall system of the target language. For instance, it indicates at what level of language the error is located: in phonology, grammar, lexis, text or discourse and if it is at grammar level, what particular grammatical construction does it involve?

ii. The surface structure taxonomy

This type of descriptive taxonomy was first proposed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982). Many researchers such as Dulay et al., 1982, Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, James, 1998 & Kaeoluan, 2009 describe this taxonomy as being based on how learners alter surface structures of the language when they use it incorrectly. According to these researchers, errors can occur because of change in surface structure in specific and systematic ways. There are four ways in which learners "modify" target forms in specific and systematic ways. These are omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering.

It is therefore evident that these errors may be realized in any level of the second language. Students make these errors in writing in their construction of sentences.

## **2.6 Error Analysis**

Error analysis is one of the major topics in the field of second language acquisition research. Learner errors are seen as a natural and indispensable part of the learning process. They are also seen as inevitable, since learners are encouraged to explore the target language (Makinop, 1993, p. 33). As to this researcher, errors are an inevitable feature of learning. They are not evils to be eradicated rather they in fact are part of learning and reveal the strategies that learners use to learn a language, so that they provide valuable insight into the language learning process.

Brown (2000) further elaborated that the fact that learners do make errors and that these errors can be observed, analyzed and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learner, led to a surge of study of learners' errors, called error analysis. Error analysis become distinguished from contrastive analysis by its examination of errors attribute to all possible sources, not just those resulting from



negative transfer of the native language. Error analysis easily superseded contrastive analysis as we discovered that only some of the errors a learner makes are attributable to the mother tongue, that learners do not actually make similar errors in learning one target language. Brown (2000) makes clear that errors (over manifestations of learners' systems) arise from several possible general sources: interlingual errors of interference from the native language, intralingual errors within the target language, the socio linguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic or cognitive strategies and no doubt countless affective variable.

Ellis (1997) gave practical advice and provided clear examples of how to identify and analyze learners' errors. The initial step requires the selection of a corpus of language followed by the identification of errors. The errors are then classified. The next step, after giving a grammatical analysis of each error, demands an explanation of different types of errors.

Hence, according to Ellis, in order to identify and analyze learner's errors one can use the steps as follows:

1. Collection of samples
2. Identification of errors
3. Classification of errors
4. Explanation of errors

When collecting data, one has to consider what the purpose of the study is and then try to collect relevant data for the study's aim and research questions that needs to be answered (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 57).

Before analyzing a text, it is important to define what an error is beforehand. For example, when identifying grammatical errors in English learners' texts one has to compare them to what is grammatically correct in English grammar books which I will do in my study (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005:58). However, if the aim is to analyze learner's errors in oral production one has to take into count which English variety the learners are exposed to when identifying their errors.

Corder writes that in order to describe an error one has to specify how the English learner's error differs from the native speaker's (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005, p. 60). Therefore, a categorization of the grammatical errors needs to be developed, as these five following principles below show. All examples are taken from Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005, p. 61):

1. Errors of omission: when the learner has left out a word e.g. "My sister happy".
2. Errors of addition: when the learner has added a word or an ending to another word which is grammatically incorrect e.g. "I have eated".
3. Misinformation/Substitution: when the learner uses the wrong form of a morpheme or structure e.g. when they use the wrong preposition in a sentence such as "It was the hardest time in my life".
4. Misordering: e.g. when the learner places a morpheme incorrectly in a grammatical construction such as "She fights all the time her brother".
5. Blends: when the learner is uncertain of which word to use and blends two different phrases e.g. "The only one thing I want".

Even though these principles seem clear and easy to use it is still sometimes very problematic to distinguish which type of an error has occurred. Sometimes for example a sentence can be so confusing that it can have two different reconstructions and

therefore two different types of errors. The type of error is therefore dependent on the researchers' reconstruction of the sentence (Ellis, 1994, p. 57).

Furthermore, one can categorize the errors by word class, e.g. verb, subject or adjective and also develop further categories within each word class. For example, verb related errors can be divided into errors of tense, error of aspect etc. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 60).

So, in order to find out why the error was made in the first place one has to try to explain it. This is the most important part of Error Analysis as it really describes which factor has affected the learner to make such an error. However, it is not easy to make a distinction between an error and a mistake which makes the explanation of errors more difficult. Furthermore, when researchers try to explain second language (L2) learners' errors they often use different factors to categorize the different types of errors. Some factors are for instance:

1. Transfer errors – this factor includes all errors where the L2 learner has used his/her L1 to create a sentence which has led to the error.
2. Overgeneralization error – when a learner overuses the same type of grammatical rule or structure, thus creating wrong grammatical structures.

## **2.7. Significance of Errors**

Far from being unwanted forms, Edge (1989) points out that errors children make when learning their first language are signs of positive development, and could indicate acquisition of language rules. This can also be related to students learning a second language. If a student makes errors such as 'I goed to the school last week.' it can be an indication of:

- a) What and how much the learner has acquired; in this case the learner knows that to form a past tense, he/she must add 'ed' to the verb.
- b) What and how much is learnt; that some verbs have irregular past forms.

For the teacher, such evidence of a student's progress is essential. During the execution of lessons and the subsequent post-lesson analysis, teachers can assess acquired and yet-to be acquired areas of their students' competence and thus tailor the lesson material and processes in planning subsequent lessons.

With this idea, Corder says errors are significant in three different ways (Corder, 1967, 1983). First, errors tell teachers how far towards the goal learners have progressed and consequently, what remains for learners to learn.

Second, errors provide researchers with evidence on how language is learnt or acquired, what strategies or procedures learners are employing in their discovery of the language (Corder, 1967).

Thirdly, errors are indispensable to learners themselves because errors can be regarded as a device the learners use in order to learn. The making of errors is a strategy employed both by children acquiring their mother tongue and by those learning a second language. Errors can be accepted as a kind of learning activity in learners. When teachers are marking students' essays and they come across misplaced modifiers and fragmented sentences in their essays, they help the teachers to know the level of the students. That is to say that such errors give feedback to the teachers to know how much the students have been able to learn the rules of the L2. With the errors committed by the students, the teachers are able to find out why their students are making errors and then plan appropriate remedial lessons. Knowing the errors help to improve the teaching

and learning process. If learners' errors and the causes of those errors are identified, errors can be corrected, though not all. Moreover, error analysis helps direct the focus of the teaching and learning process.

## **2.8 Sentence Fragments in Writing**

Sentence fragments have long been a form that most teachers try to eradicate from students writing. However well-intentioned this may be, does it help students become better writers of nonfiction? Writers often write a group of words that does not express a complete thought. Such group of words are called sentence fragment. Basically, and conventionally, a complete sentence must contain a subject and predicate. A fragment is an incomplete sentence sometimes it may be a participial (ing) phrase or dependent clause that belong to preceding sentence (Fine, 2010, p. 27). Thus, sentence fragment fails to be a sentence because it cannot stand by itself. Sometimes it does not contain even one independent clause (Fine, 2010, p. 28). In other words, as Fine (2010) asserts that a “sentence fragment is a word group that cannot stand as a sentence even if you give it a capital letter initial and end up with punctuation”.

According to Fine (2010, p. 29), sentence fragment appears under four different circumstances; as follows:

- a) A fragment results when the subject is omitted.

Example.

Fragment: Fans were anxious for the concert to begin. But waited patiently.

Sentence: Fans were anxious for the concert to begin. But they waited patiently.

- b) A fragment results when all or part of the verb is omitted.

Fragment: Some of the footballers in the Nigerian team last year.

Sentence: Some of the footballers were playing in the Nigerian team last year.

- c) A fragment results when the subject and complete verb are omitted.

Fragment: The parent spent over N5000 on toys for their children. Most of it on the two girls.

Sentence: The parent spent over N5000 on toys for their children. They spent most of. It was on the two girls.

- d) A fragment occurs when a dependent clause is capitalized and punctuated as a sentence.

Fragment: Since she was graceful as well as daring. She was an excellent dancer.

Sentence: Since she was graceful as well as daring, she was an excellent dancer.

Fragments should be avoided in academic writing and other formal contexts. However, it is important to be aware that it is the norm in casual speech and writing in some contexts, fictional and nonfictional. Writers do use fragments sparingly but wisely. In a fiction, a formal narrator can use fragments to show emphasis or a precise effect. In non-fictional writing as well, a writer is free to use fragments occasionally especially in formal prose as a technique to create emphasis through an abrupt change of rhythm (Fine, 2010, p. 30).

Schuster (2006), in his article titled: “A Fresh Look at Sentence Fragments” investigated “fifty essays reprinted in the Best American Essays 2001 and the ‘Best American Essays 2003’ and found that the essayists effectively used sentence fragments in their work to the extent to which he found 505 sentence fragments in the fifty essays. This does not mean that fragmented sentences cannot be seen in students’ essays in

Ghana. It is in this light the researcher wants to know what students make and the problems associated with that.

## **2.9 Dangling Modifiers**

The English language is one of the most fascinating subjects that we can investigate, and those of us who speak and write English can find pleasure in seeking to understand its various aspects. Although the English language is flexible and continually changing, it is possible to follow certain principles and to observe certain characteristics of usage which can make grammar a relatively exact study and one which can widen the scope of the individual in a satisfying way. Knowledge of Standard English and its acceptable forms is basic to the education of all college students. Learning a grammatical term is an essential step toward understanding what is correct and what is incorrect in speech and writing. The dangling modifier is one of the most insidious and confusion-causing problems in the English language. A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence. A modifier describes, clarifies, or gives more detail about a concept. Modifiers are important elements of writing, describing and qualifying another word to craftily change its meaning. As such, they are often employed across many pieces of writing to stellar results. Unfortunately, they are also misused in a huge way. A modifier must always have a word to modify. This fact seems almost too obvious to warrant discussion. And yet we frequently see sentences similar in construction to this one: "Hearing a number of entertaining stories, our visit was thoroughly enjoyable". "Hearing a number of entertaining stories", is a modifying phrase. But where in the sentence is there a word for it to modify? Certainly, the phrase cannot logically modify visit: it was not our visit that heard a number of entertaining stories. Who did hear the stories? We did. Since, however, the word (we) does not

appear in the sentence for the phrase to modify, the phrase is said to "dangle" (Overby, 1990, p. 185).

A dangling modifier fails to refer logically to any word in the sentence. Dangling modifiers are usually introductory word groups (such as verbal phrases) that suggest but do not name an actor. When a sentence opens with such a modifier, readers expect the following clause to name the actor. If it doesn't the modifier dangles" (Hacker, 1996). A typical example of a dangling modifier is illustrated in the sentence, "Turning the corner, a handsome school building appeared" (Merriam Webster, 1995, p. 315). The modifying clause "Turning the corner" is clearly supposed to describe the behaviour of the narrator (or other observer), but grammatically it appears to apply to nothing in particular, or to the school building. Similarly, in the sentence "At the age of eight, my family finally bought a dog", the modifier "At the age of eight" dangles in mid-air, attaching to no named person or thing (Wilson and Glazier, 2008, p. 134).

When the modifier occurs at the beginning of the sentence, readers usually expect it to modify the subject of the sentence. When it does not logically does that, the modifier is said to dangle. A dangling modifier can change the intended meaning of the sentence dramatically, which makes readers have to slow down in order to sort out the meaning. The dangling modifier also sometimes creates strange images in readers' minds (Azar, 1999). They can also occur at the end of sentences. Dangling modifiers occur when you do not pay close attention to syntax. It is important to place modifying words, phrases, and clauses next to the words they are supposed to modify.

To recognize dangling modifiers (Overby, 1990) says they usually appear as two types of constructions – as verbal phrases and as elliptical clauses (is a dependent clause in which the subject and/or verb are omitted).



Dangling modifiers may be corrected in two general ways (Martin & McChesney, 1977):

- 1) Leave the modifier as it is.
- 2) Change the main part of the sentence so that it begins with the term actually modified.

Here are examples; “Hoping to excuse my lateness, the note was written and given to my teacher.”

Here, it seems as though we have a subject: "my lateness." However, "my lateness" is part of the modifier, rather than being part of the subject itself.

To correct that we need a subject that is modified by "hoping to excuse my lateness," since obviously the note itself didn't have any hope, because it's a note. The right form should be “Hoping to excuse my lateness, I wrote a note and gave it to my teacher.”

Similarly, consider this sentence: “After reading the great new book, the movie based on it is sure to be exciting.” Again, we are left wondering exactly who read the great new book. The phrase can't possibly be modifying the movie, since the movie can't read.

To correct this, a subject must be added so the modifier has something to describe, change or limit. The correct form should be “After reading the great new book, Anna thought the movie based on it was sure to be exciting.”

## **2.10 Methods of Teaching Grammar**

Grammar teaching is defined into two broad categories by Ellis (2006, p. 84): narrow definition and broad definition. The narrow definition explains that grammar teaching as the traditional grammar teaching that involves “presentation and practice of discrete grammatical structures”. He further explains the broad definition of grammar teaching

as the one that: “involves any instructional technique that draws learners’ attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it meta-linguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it”. Learning a language basically means learning its grammar (Takala, 2016). In the process of learning, grammar occupies a central position (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). Hence, it has been a debate whether grammar should be taught through the explicit presentation of grammatical rules or through its use.

English as Second Language practitioners discuss about two possible ways of teaching grammar to students. One is inductive approach and other one is deductive approach (Thornbury, 1999). Takala (2016) explains the deductive approach as ‘teachers might get their students involved with the new grammar topic by using leading questions and then introducing the topic of the day themselves’ (2016, p. 18), while the deductive pattern is followed in the traditional grammar-translation method.

Takala further states that the latter approach is closely related to explicit teaching and the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model. According to Nassaji and Fotos (2011, p. 4) the PPP model consists of a structured three-stage sequence for grammar instruction: a presentation stage, a practice stage, and a production stage. In the presentation stage, the new grammar rule or structure is introduced, usually through a text, a dialogue, or a story that includes the structure. In the practice stage, students are given various kinds of written and spoken exercises to repeat or reproduce the new forms. Then the production stage comes, where learners are encouraged to use the rules that they have learned in the presentation and practice stages, more freely and in more communicative activities.

Nassaji and Fotos (2011) explain the purpose of each stages. The purpose of the presentation stage is to help students become familiar with the new grammatical structure and keep it in their short-term memory, while the practice stage is to help students gain control of the knowledge introduced in the presentation stage and finally the aim of the practice stage is to fully master the new form by enabling learners to internalize the rules and use them automatically and spontaneously, which helps develop fluency. Nevertheless, Takala (2016) considers that although the PPP-model is a very popular lesson structure, teaching grammar does not have to consist of these three stages. Being the focus on how students perceive learning grammar now we pay our attention to studies that deal with students' perception with regard to learning grammar.

Pazaver and Wang (2009) investigated the impact of explicit instruction of grammar teaching among the foreign students in Canada. They found that the participants, who are Non-Native Speakers of English, were in favour of grammar instruction and considered it was very important for a person to learn a new language. The study asserts that explicit grammar teaching is beneficial to learners despite the current movement toward a communicative approach to English language teaching. Nabei (1995) studied perception of learning grammar among the Japanese students learning in America and found that Japanese students considered direct grammar instruction is not necessary for successful language learning. They were satisfied with the communicative instruction. This view that students did not like direct grammar instruction contrasts with the view expressed by Pazaver and Wang (2009) above. Takala (2016) also considers that the goal of teaching grammar should be a successful communication. Another view supports Nabei (1995) and Takala (2016) is of Sopin (2015) who studied the importance of form focused grammar instruction or explicit grammar instruction among the Libyan

students. He found that even though students felt that direct or explicit grammar teaching was important at the beginning stage, when their language proficiency improved, they favoured communicative approaches.

Sadat (2017), as a result of his review on teaching grammar, concludes that language instructors should blend grammar teaching with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in order to achieve both linguistics and communicative competence in the classroom. He further states that ‘any language instructor should take into consideration some important questions such as what, how, when, and why should we teach grammar?’ Also, teaching grammar will largely depend on the level of the learners, therefore a good teacher always teaches based on the levels of the learners’ (2017, p. 6). The foregoing brief review indicates that there are arguments for and against the direct teaching of grammar. Even though there is an agreement that learning grammar is favourable, the fact has not been empirically proven in our context. Despite the studies that investigate the students’ perception regarding learning grammar are available in other contexts, in the South East Asian context such studies are rarely available. The English language teaching, being traditionally influenced by Grammar Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method in this part of the world, a study to investigate the students’ perception of learning grammar seems important. Hence, this study was undertaken to investigate the problems of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students. This will help the researcher and other scholars to the teaching method to use in order to gradually eradicate the problem.

### **2.11. Related Studies**

Writing in L2 has been a highly instrumental for students because they are required to write assignments, exams and tests using the language. Several studies have been

contacted in this respect identify the errors in students' writing paying attention to dangling modifiers and sentence fragments. Indah Rahmalia in 2016 conducted a study in Indonesia to find out the sentence problem made by the students in essay writing. Using 5 data source from students' writing, the study was focused on exploring students' mistakes. The finding of this study showed that the most sentences problem made by the students in essays were 24 sentence problems in fragmented sentences, comma splice and the last were 2 sentences problem in choppy sentences.

Analyzing the errors made by Taiwanese EFL college students, Chen (1998, pp. 224-237) reported that most Taiwanese students have difficulties in the use of English tenses due to the absence of verb conjugation in Mandarin which causes modifiers to be dangling. Another grammatical error that is frequently found in Taiwanese EFL students' compositions is the misuse of English articles. Chen (2000, pp. 282-296) considered that English articles could be one of the most difficult grammatical parts for EFL students as there is no an equivalent syntactical device to the English article system. Likewise, Jiang (1995, pp. 187-201) analyzed Taiwanese EFL learners' errors in English prepositions and found that a great number of errors derive from language transfer. The researcher stated that compared to English speakers, Mandarin speakers use fewer prepositions for more concepts, therefore increasing difficulties in learning English prepositions.

In addition, some researchers employed error analysis to examine the error types in EFL students' English writings (Kao, 1999, pp. 1-32 & Lin, 2002, pp. 180-206). They investigated compositions written by 80 EFL students. The results revealed that errors in the use of articles had the highest error percentage (11%). Both errors in the use of prepositions and errors in the use of verbs had the same error rate 9% and were

considered the second highest. This researcher confirmed that L1 related errors were the largest portion of the total errors. Lin (2002, p. 204) examined 26 essays from EFL students at the second cycle level. The results of this study indicated that the four highest error frequencies were sentence structures (30.43 %), wrong verb forms (21.01%), sentence fragments (15.94%), and wrong use of words (15.94%), respectively.

Also, to discover learning deficiencies in writing English, Kao (1999. p. 28) examined 169 compositions from 53 students who were English major students. A total of 928 errors were found, among which grammatical errors occurred with the greatest frequency, 66%, Semantic errors occurred 18% of the time, and Lexical errors occurred with the least frequency, 16%.

In Africa and Ghana to be precise, according to the chief examiners report for 2018, poor punctuation, poor spelling and wrong use of tenses were dominant in some of the essays.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

From the discussion, one can deduce that the study of errors on dangling modifiers and sentence fragments would be significant to teachers, to researchers and to the students as well. It has been discovered that when we write, unlike when we talk, we are engaged in an activity which is usually at the same time both private and public. Error analysis is carried out not only in order to understand errors, but also in order to use what is learned from error analysis and apply it to improve language learning and teaching. And teachers can also build up a picture of the frequency of types of error; thus, they can find out whether, for example, mother tongue interference, or teaching techniques, or problems inherent in the target language are the major cause of their students' errors.

For many of us, Krashen's SLA theory changed our concept of language teaching and has suggested new ideas for communicative language teaching. Nevertheless, the implications of this theory should be adapted according to the teacher's individual situation in order to obtain the best results. The years to come will give more shape to this theory, so that, together with other teaching theories and approaches, it will improve our methodology and our results.

This has come to light that the use of English in Ghana cannot be modulated so there is the need to ensure that its users are able to perform well. It is in this light the researcher wants to conduct his research in the same area focusing on students' problem in dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in writing in the Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the description of the methodology employed in carrying out the study. It focuses on the study area, study type, research design, population, sample and sampling technique, research instruments, validity and reliability, the procedure for data collection, data analysis and finally, ethical considerations.

#### 3.1 Study Area

Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School is a public secondary school in the Bolgatanga District of the Upper East Region of Ghana. The school, located in the Bolgatanga town of the Upper East Region, is an all-female second cycle institution. It was established in 1956 as a girls' middle boarding school and converted to a women's teaching college in 1965 and to a girls' Senior High School in 1973. The total population of the school is about 2,500. The school offers Home Economics, Science, General Arts, Visual Arts, and Business.

The researcher chose Bolgatanga as her study area because that is where she lives and Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School because she is a teacher in the school.

#### 3.2 Study Approach

The researcher used the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach; involves gathering of narrative data on variables over a period of time in order to gain insights into issues of interest (Kuranchie, 2014). It focuses on meaning through verbal narrative descriptions and observations rather than numbers. Qualitative researchers study things



in their natural settings, attempting to understand, or interpret phenomenon, in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Cohen & Manion, 1994, Neuman, 2003).

The purpose is to generate knowledge and create understanding about the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students. Hence, causing the researcher to choose this study type. The researcher adopted the qualitative research approach because the study does not involve in statistical procedure for investigation, hence the qualitative research approach helped the researcher to study deep into the problem. It was appropriate to adopt the qualitative research approach since it enabled the researcher to find out the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students. Qualitative data gathered were studied and analysed to produce a meaningful picture of how dangling modifiers and sentence fragments affect the writing of students.

### **3.3 Research Design**

According to Maganga (2016), research design refers to the overall strategy that a researcher chooses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thus, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem. The study used a survey design. The aim of the survey was to obtain a lot of information, which can be analysed to draw patterns and comparisons (Bell,1993). Such a study aimed to obtain a variety of information from a representative selection of the population and sample.

The design is descriptive in nature. According to Best (1992), descriptive survey research studies have the following characteristics which suite the study:

- a) They use the logical methods of inductive-deductive reasoning to arrive at generalizations;

- b) They often employ methods of randomization so that error may be estimated when reserving population characteristics from observations of samples.
- c) The variables and procedures are described as accurately and completely as possible so that the study can be replicated by other researchers.
- d) They are non-experimental for they deal with relationships between non-manipulated variables in a natural rather than artificial setting. Since the events or conditions have already occurred or exist, the researcher selects the relevant variables for an analysis of their relationships.

Descriptive survey involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or answer questions that study people as they live their lives, so that we can describe their behaviours and mental processes (Creswell, 2005). It is an appropriate choice when the research aim is to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories. It is useful when not much is known yet about the topic or problem.

It was adopted by the researcher because it enabled her to collect data on the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students. It helped in producing a good amount of responses from students and teachers and also aided in the gathering of information.

### **3.4 Population of the Study**

According to Polit & Hunglar (1996), population is the entire aggregation of cases that meet a designated set of criteria. The population of the study was Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School. The school has a population of about 2,800 students and teachers. The area was chosen because the researcher is very familiar with the place. The target population that served as respondents for the study were teachers and students of the School and the accessible population was the second year students in the General Arts

classes of Gold Track and the teachers of English Language which comprises 350 students and teachers.

### **3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques**

A sample is the number selected from a population for a study. It is employed when it is not possible to use all members of the target population in a study due to factors such as time, hence, part of it is used to as a sample (Kuranchie, 2014).

The focus was on second year students in the General Arts classes of Gold Track of Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School. Those classes are the classes of the researcher. The school was chosen because the researcher has taught in the school for years now and she is familiar with the social and academic environment in the school. Marvasti (2005) advises that when choosing a setting for a research study, you must consider how difficult it is to enter a particular setting, what the emotional and financial cost might be, and therefore in choosing a site for your research work, always think through what is, and what is not practically and ideally possible.

The sample size for the study was 190 respondents made up of 188 students from Arts 1, 2, and 3 and 2 teachers.

The purposive technique was used to select the respondents for the study. The researcher believes that she can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in saving time. The researcher used this sampling technique because she was going to use all second year students in the General Arts classes of Gold Track and English Language teachers of the track. She employed this technique because those are the classes she teaches. She has been with the students for two years.

### **3.6 Research Instruments**

A research instrument is a tool used to collect, measure, and analyze data related to your subject. Research instruments can be tests, surveys, scales, questionnaires, or even checklists. The instruments that were employed by the researcher for the study were test and questionnaire.

#### **3.6.1 Essay Writing Test**

It has been pointed out that this study focused on identifying the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in writing among students in the senior high. Thus, essay writing test was used as a main data gathering instrument. The reason for choosing this tool was to give chance for students to produce sample compositions so that the errors on dangling modifiers and sentence fragments they commit could be identified, and based on the analytical score obtained in essay writing, students were categorized into three levels of achievement groups: high, average, and low achievers. To this end, a fixed numerical mark which was consistent with the senior high school's marking and grading procedures and standards was slightly adapted and used. This ranking of students into three achievement groups helped the researcher to see the relationship between student's essay writing achievement, and errors on dangling modifiers and sentence fragments committed by different achievers.

Accordingly, students from General Arts classes of Gold Track sat for essay writing test and wrote an essay of about 200 words on the topic “All that Glitters are not Gold” within 2 hours.

As Myles (2002) pointed out collecting data under controlled examination conditions is to get spontaneous samples of student's written language-samples that reveal their idiosyncratic ways of using English as a second language in writing. Previous take-

home assignments were suspected of plagiarizing from books or assignments written by former students. As he explained, in some cases students even ask friends to do the work for them (p.228).

### **3.6.2 Questionnaire**

The other tool used in the study was questionnaire. It consisted of items with close-ended questions, open-ended questions, and structured items. The questionnaire was commented on and evaluated by supervisor before it was administered to the teachers. This instrument was used as a supportive tool, and it enabled the researcher to get ample information about students' attitude toward the writing skills, their motivation, English language rules background, teaching methodology employed by teachers, strategies learners use in learning the writing skills, and to obtain further information on common difficulties students face in writing English. Not only this, but it also helped the researcher to support the results gained through essay writing test and identify possible sources of students writing errors. The data obtained through questionnaire were computed using SPSS 25.0 and analyzed.

### **3.7 Validity and Reliability**

Mugenda (2003) defines validity as the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of data actually represent the phenomenon under study. It is concerned with soundness and the effectiveness of the measuring instrument. Reliability is the degree of consistency with respect to the items provided for research. The researcher ensured that the research instruments were scrutinized by the supervisor of the researcher to ensure that they were clear, not ambiguous, and that the instruments were appropriate for the study.

### **3.8 Data Collection Procedure and Analysis Plan**

#### **3.8.1 Data Collection Procedure**

In this study, the steps of EA specified by Corder (1974 as cited in Ellis 1996, p. 48) were adapted and used in collecting, classifying, and describing the errors on the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments. These steps were as follows.

1. Collection of samples (dangling modifiers and sentence fragments)
2. Identification of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments
3. Classification/description of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments
4. Explanation of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments

Once the samples were selected, the researcher cooperated with Head of Department and the teachers in charge of English department of the school to collect data, and he made clear the purpose and focus of her study, and he arranged the date and time of the exam. Furthermore, those collaborative teachers were told to make clear to the students that the result to be gained would be used only for a research purpose, and it would not affect student's achievement by any means.

Then, the 188 students from were provided with the topic to write. Similarly, the questionnaire was distributed to the sample students and teachers on the same day after they had finished the writing test. Accordingly, so as to apply a consistent method of scoring, one teacher of English who had eight years of experience in teaching English, and reading and marking students' essays was selected and trained on how to mark and score the essays.

#### **3.8.2 Data Analysis Plan**

This section of the study has two main parts: descriptive analysis of errors and analytical scoring of students' essays, and analysis of students' questionnaire. In the first

part, three steps were gone through to analyse the data obtained from students' compositions. First, the essays were checked and read, and the dangling modifiers and sentence fragments were identified and coded by the researcher. Each composition was examined in detail using a Taxonomy of Errors stated in the literature review.

Then, the researcher counted the number of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments. The students were grouped into three achievement groups simultaneously. After the errors were carefully identified they were computed. Then their frequency was analysed and described. Next, the number and percentage of errors were averaged and tabulated.

In the second phase, each essay was analysed qualitatively, and a numerical score was given to represent each essay's adherence to principles of organization and coherence to evaluate students' essay writing ability and categorize students into three achievement levels: high, medium, and low achievers.

The analysis of data provided reflected facts and figures that ensured comprehensive results as well as statements about the findings of the study.

### **3.9 Ethical Consideration**

Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007) state that ethics concern right and wrong, good and bad, and so procedural ethics are not enough; one has to consider how the research purposes, contents, methods, reporting, and outcomes abide by ethical principles and practices. Creswell (2002), also states that respecting the site where the research takes place and seeking permission before entering a site are essential and ethical in every research. In this regard, the consent of the Headmaster of the school where the research was conducted was properly sought. The researcher visited the Head of the languages department and booked appointments with them. In order to build a rapport before the

study, a meeting was held with the English teachers and the students to seek their support for the study. The names were withheld for anonymity.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

In summation, with a focus on identifying the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students, the Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School was used as a case study. The school has a population of about 2,500 students. The researcher's attention was on General Arts students in the gold track. She used the purposive sampling technique since they are the classes she teaches. The research instruments, that is, essay writing test and questionnaire were used for the study. The data gathered were analysed qualitatively. Again, all ethical considerations regarding the study were observed.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Overview

This chapter discusses the results of the study. The results and discussion of the study are presented in line with the research questions that steered the study. Certainly, the results and discussion of the study are presented under the following subheadings; analysis of students' essays that account for the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students, and questionnaire were also discussed.

#### 4.1 Results of Students' Errors

The study adopted Kroll's (1990) Error Taxonomy. It identified, categorized, and analyzed the two writing errors made by students. The sentence fragments and dangling modifiers were categorized under sentence structure errors. This error taxonomy helped the researcher to frame and categorize the errors and focus on those specified areas while marking and coding students' compositions.

##### 4.1.1. Results of Types, and Frequencies

**Table 1: Types, and Frequencies**

<b>Error Type</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Number of errors</b>
Sentence Fragments	188	322
Dangling Modifiers	188	280
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>602</b>

*Source: Field Data, 2020.*

As Table 1 vividly illustrates, 188 essays were marked and coded, and the errors were identified and categorized according to the order the errors occupied in the set of error

taxonomy described in 4.1. As Table shows, 602 errors were committed by 188 students of the Gold Track of Bolgatanga Senior High School. These errors were recorded from fragmented sentences and dangling modifiers.

#### **4.1.2 Examples and Explanations of the Committed Errors**

In the aforementioned discussion, a discussion of two writing errors committed by the students was made. In this section, examples of the deviations were presented and discussed briefly. Similarly, based on the literature review an attempt was made to point out some of the possible sources of those errors to shed a light on those problematic areas for remedial actions and further investigations on the area under discussion.

#### **1. SENTENCE FRAGMENTS**

- i. “.....you think till heed to get a woman ...”
- ii. “.....so she ask her that it the same problem and .....”
- iii. “So her sister went to her friend had said that....”
- iv. “One day and they chart very well and girl said oh she like the guy .....”
- v. “.....but the was still not covenced.....”
- vi. “.....live a village call Deyali.....”

The above are some examples of fragmented sentences that were recorded in the students’ essays. From the samples above, you could realize that the idea the students intended too put across is different from what was written which resulted in a lot of fragmented sentences.

#### **2. MISPLACED/DANGLING MODIFIERS**

- i. .... the girl mother told daughter.....

- ii. She had lost her father and so her mother was taking care of her, her mother the money.....
- iii. ....kate man ...
- iv. ....the boy boss....

The above are examples of the dangling modifiers that were identified in the students' essays. In the first sentence, the possessive marker '-s' and 'her' were absent. The right expression should have been ".....the girl's mother told her daughter..." In the second sentence could be restructured to suit the context. In the third sentence, the student meant 'gate' and not 'Kate'. The last sentence also had omission of the possessive marker '-s'. The right form should be "...the boy's boss..."

## **4.2. Results of Teachers' Questionnaire**

### **4.2.1 Demographics of the Respondents (Teachers)**

The study sought some background information of the respondents which were relevant to the study. These included their sex, age, educational qualification, area of specialization, subject currently teaching, and the number of years in teaching. The results are provided in Table 5.

**Table 2: Biographical Data of Respondents (Teachers)**

Biographical Data	Category	Number	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	1	50.0
	Female	1	50.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	25- 28 years	0	0
	29- 32 years	0	0
	33 years and above	2	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Are you a trained teacher	Yes	2	100.0
	No	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
What is your educational qualification	Diploma	0	0
	B.ED.	1	50.0
	B.A.	0	0
	M.ED / M.A.	0	0
	M.Phil	1	50.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
What is your area of specialization during training?	English and Literature	0	0
	English	2	50.0
	Literature	0	0
	Others	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
What subjects are you currently teaching?	English and Literature	0	0
	English	2	100.0
	Literature	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>

For how long have you taught	1-2	0	0
	3-4	0	0
	5-6	1	50.0
	7-8	1	50.0
	9-10	0	0
	11 +	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field Data, 2020.*

Results from Table 2 shows that 1(50.0%) teachers who participated in the study was male with the remaining 1(50.0%) being female. The Table also shows that all the 2(100.0%) teachers were 33years and above. Therefore, from this data, the teachers are still active, and are energetic in teaching the subject.

Results from Table 5 also show that all 2(100.0%) teachers are trained teachers. Again, 1 teacher representing 50.0% has Bachelor of Education certificates and 1 teacher representing 50.0% has a Master of Philosophy certificate. It was noticed that none of the respondents had a diploma certificate. Rossner (1992), stated that language teachers must be better informed about their profession, obtain a teaching certificate, diploma, or degree in the English Language.

Furthermore, the 2 teachers representing 100.0% are specialized in English. Also, all 2 teachers representing 100.0% teach English in the school.

Finally, the 1(50.0%) of the teachers has 7-8 experience in teaching, whereas 1(50.0%) of the teachers has 5-6 teaching experience. This indicates that the teachers had taught for a good number of years and had gained experience so they were in a better position to comment on the subject matter.

#### 4.2.2 Descriptive Statistics

**Table 3: One of the four language skills students give the most attention**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Reading	1	50.0
Speaking	0	0
Listening	0	0
Writing	1	50.0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

Table 2 shows that reading 1(50.0%) and writing 1(50.0%) were chosen by the teachers. The result depicts that teachers pay much attention to reading and writing leaving the listening and speaking.

**Table 4: The difficulty level of writing lesson in the classroom among your students**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	100.0
No	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

As Table 4 shows, out of 2 teachers, all (100.0%) answered yes to the question. From this, we can understand that writing is difficult for the students though the level of the difficulty varies between the groups.

**Table 5: Level of difficulty students face while writing**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Very difficult	0	0
Difficult	2	100.0
Average	0	0
Easy	0	0
Very Easy	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

When teachers were asked about the level of difficulty students face while writing, all 2(100.0%) teachers responded that teachers face difficulty when they write. Based on this result, we can say that writing is a difficulty for the students.

**Table 6: The extent to which teachers introduce students to ways of effective writing and practice writing in English**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Very great extent	0	0
Great extent	2	100.0
Very less extent	0	0
Less extent	0	0
Not at all	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

Again, Table 6 shows that all 2(100.0%) teachers replied that they introduce their students to effective ways of writing and practice writing greatly. This, therefore, goes to prove that students were not practicing when they were at their basic level.

**Table 7: The number of times students practice writing in English outside the classroom**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Always	0	0
sometimes	0	0
Rarely	2	100.0
Not at all	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

Table 7 shows students' practice of writing outside the classroom. Here too, all 2(100.0%) teachers asserted that students rarely practice writing outside the classroom. This tells us that students rarely practice writing because their classroom lessons or tasks are not supported by further practical activities which invariably negatively affect students' writing ability.



**Table 8: The level of writing students mostly commit these errors in writing**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Sentence level writing	2	100.0
Paragraph level writing	0	0
Essay level writing	0	0
At all levels mentioned above	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

Regarding the writing errors students make, the teachers representing 100.0% replied that most of the errors students commit are at the sentence level. From this one can deduce that it is mostly due to the linguistic background knowledge of the student.

**Table 9: The difficulty of English writing makes them lose interest in learning it**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	100.0
No	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

As can be seen in Table 9 above, all the two teachers representing 100.0% affirmed that students lose interest to write since writing is difficult for them than other English language skills. This shows that in line with the difficulty of writing there is a motivational difference among students which may in turn impact students' writing skills either negatively or positively.

**Table 10: Students' rating of difficulty of the aspects of writing.**

Item	Responses			
	Very Easy (%)	Quite Easy (%)	Quite Chall. (%)	Very Chall. (%)
Grammar	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(50.0)	1(50.0)
Misplaced modifiers	2(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
Vocabulary	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(50.0)	1(50.0)
Incomplete sentences	2(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
Translating ideas into readable text	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	2(100.0)	0(0.0)

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

As can be seen above, 1(50.0%) teacher affirms that grammar is quite challenging for a significantly large number of students, and the other 1(50.0%) teacher also mentioned that grammar is very challenging for the students. Students of these kind, therefore, need explicit grammar instruction.

Also, all the teachers representing 100.0% confirm that it is very challenging for students to express themselves. Based on this response, it can be deduced that most of the students face a challenge in expressing themselves as many other L2 learners do. Their attempt to write the result in misplacement of modifiers which is quite easy for them to do.

Regarding finding and using the right word or vocabulary, 1 teacher representing 50.0% implied that vocabulary is quite challenging for students in writing. The other one representing 50.0% also responded that finding the right word in writing is very challenging for students. This result implies that students lack the vocabularies of the language. This could be due to the fact that they do not read enough.

Further, all 2 teachers representing 100.0% asserted that students are fond of writing incomplete sentences in their essays.

Finally, all 2 teachers representing 100.0% confirmed that students are quite challenged in translating their ideas into readable texts. More often, teachers notice that the message they want to put across is entirely different from what they have written and that teachers have no option than to mark them down.

**Table 11: The reason behind the difficulty students face in writing**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Teaching materials	0	0
Teaching methods	0	0
Complexity of English	0	0
Language rules		
Lack of Vocabulary	2	100.0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

Table 11 shows that all 2 teachers representing 100.0% once again affirmed that lack of vocabulary is the main reason behind the difficulty students face in writing.

**Table 12: Perception towards errors committed**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly	0	0
Agree	2	100.0
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

As it is vividly illustrated, the 2 teachers representing 100.0% agree that committing errors of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in writing is a sign of failure. Based on the response, we can deduce that errors committed by students could be considered as a sign of failure.

**Table 13: Students' responses to giving out of marked scripts**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	100.0
No	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

As can be seen, out of the two teachers representing 100.0%, all admitted that they give the students back their scripts after marking.

**Table 14: Teachers responses on how often do you revise with your students writing lessons**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Everyday after class	0	0
Only for Exam	2	100.0
The day before a class	0	0
Before and after class	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

As can be seen from Table 14, the 2(100.0%) responded that they only revise writing lessons with their students when there is an exam.

**Table 15: Teachers' opinions regarding how teachers are important in developing the writing skills of students.**

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	100.0
No	0	0
Total	2	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2020.**

From Table 15 above, the 2(100.0%) asserted that they teacher is an important person to make students interested in learning writing. The result therefore proves that the role of the teacher in developing the writing skills of students is very important.

#### **4.2.3 Teachers' response to the error students mostly commit in writing**

When teachers were asked to state the error mostly committed by students in their writing, they all mention sentence fragments.

#### **4.2.4 Teachers' responses to why students commit errors of sentence fragments and dangling modifiers in writing in English.**

The following are what they listed in an attempt to answer the question:

- i. Students lack vocabulary
- ii. Students practice writing only in the classroom
- iii. Could also be a result of the less attention teachers give to writing lessons.
- iv. Students do not practice at home.

#### **4.2.5 Teachers' responses to why they think writing skill is relatively difficult than other skills**

Their opinion on the above statement was solicited. The following were the concerns they raised:

- i. The influence of the L1
- ii. Writing is a long term activity and that students should see it as such.
- iii. Students lack the application of the rules of the language.
- iv. The environment they find themselves is also a factor.

#### **4.3 Discussion**

As it has been clearly explained, the questionnaire was the second tool employed in this study to support the data obtained through essay writing and to get further information, from the teachers about students' English language background, major difficulties they face in writing, students attitude towards the English language in general and writing skill in particular. The tool, therefore, helped the researcher to identify possible sources of the errors, and the extent and habit of students' in practicing writing in English.

The teachers responded that students give priority to reading, speaking, and listening than writing. This attitude invariably results in the difficulty students encounter when writing. The teachers again asserted that students rarely practice writing outside the classroom, and they are not interested in practicing writing.

The findings obtained from open-ended questions also support this data. In light of this, the respondents showed that grammar, expressing themselves in writing, vocabulary, generating and organizing ideas, and translating ideas into readable texts are quite challenging aspects of writing to students. Furthermore, teaching methods employed in

teaching writing, the complexity of English language rules, and lack of vocabulary were some of the reasons behind students' errors in writing English.

In addition to that, they agreed that committing errors in writing is a sign of failure to the majority of the students. This has resulted from students' negative attitudes towards committing errors so that they rarely practice writing. In this regard, Myles (2002) asserted that writing teachers should be aware of how the instrumental motivation of their L2 students will influence the effectiveness of their lessons. He explained that if L2 learners are motivated to integrate into the L2, they will develop a higher level of proficiency and positive attitudes, which can have a positive effect on their writing.

On the other hand, regarding the feedbacks, the teachers admitted that they give the scripts to the students but as to whether they discuss with them is what the researcher does not know. Similarly, it was realized that students only revise writing only when there is an exam. Furthermore, though it is widely believed that learners should be autonomous in controlling their own learning and applying effective learning strategies by themselves, the participants asserted that a teacher is an important person in motivating and developing their writing skills, and this shows that students are seeking more from their teachers to fill the gaps ignored at the lower levels of learning.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

The study sought to investigate the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students. This final chapter presents the summary of the study, the conclusions that were drawn from the study, and recommendations that were made.

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

This study aimed to investigate the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in the writing of students. It aimed to identify, categorize, and analyze these two writing errors committed by students. It also aimed to highlight the possible sources of those errors and inform teachers to practice remedial actions and lessen those gaps in writing English.

One hundred and ninety gold track students and teachers participated in this study. The respondents were purposively selected. Essay writing test and questionnaire were the tools used to obtain the required data. The essay writing test was the major tool employed to get students' writing errors on sentence fragments and dangling modifiers and measure their writing fluency. Similarly, the questionnaire was also another tool through which the researcher got relevant responses from the teachers and support the results obtained via the writing test.

Students' written texts revealed that sentence fragment errors were the most committed errors. Furthermore, based on the results obtained it can be concluded that students language background, their motivation and attitude, failure to practice writing, poor



vocabulary and grammar knowledge, complex nature of the rules of the English language, attempting to translate forms and structures of the L1 in L2 writing, teaching methods, environmental factors, and inadequate skill of writing were the main sources of students poor performance in writing and writing errors.

Furthermore, the analysis obtained showed that there was a negative relationship between students writing fluency and writing error frequency which implies that when students writing fluency get increased their writing errors frequency would get decreased.

Finally, recommendations were made that teachers should give due attention to the errors their students made and lessen those areas accordingly. Similarly, students should shape their learning strategies to benefit a lot from writing activities and assignments by considering the long-term benefits of the English language in general and writing skills in particular. Furthermore writing tutorial classes should be arranged to help students develop their writing skills.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The number and analysis of fragmented sentences and dangling modifiers obtained from students' essays depict that most of the students had problems with that. Students found trouble choosing the appropriate subject, verb forms, and punctuations correctly.

These errors were resulted from inadequate lexical, sentence structure, and basic English verb knowledge and skill leading to errors of overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, avoidance, and building of false concepts.

Furthermore, it appeared to be that the sources of students' errors are attributable to inadequate or poor linguistic knowledge, and this was supported by the data obtained

from the teacher's questionnaire which revealed that students were not adequately exposed to practical activities in writing English when they were at the primary and junior high level of learning, and they also rarely practice writing out side class room.

Also, based on the review of literature and analysis of students' texts, it was concluded that the profound fragmented sentences and modifiers dangling made by the students might be attributed to lack of exposure to the English language and various writing activities and their motivation, studying habits, learning strategies. Teaching methods, lack of motivation, and students' attitude towards the English language in general and writing skills, in particular, were also among the major hindrances that accounted for students writing errors. Similarly, inadequate learning and linguistic input, and the complexity of English language structures also brought about students committing these to errors in their writing.

Finally, the researcher suggests that these findings cannot be generalized to other similar levels or areas as well than the target population under discussion; more research is needed to be carried out to find empirical evidence to support the sources of sentence fragments and dangling modifiers highlighted, and the statistical results obtained. Although the findings obtained here are not far to be generalized for the population under the present study, the researcher is optimistic that these findings will greatly benefit teachers and students for improving the teaching/learning process of writing.

### 5.3. Recommendations

- i. Lexical, sentence structure, and verb centered errors which led to fragmented sentences and modifiers dangling were the most committed by the students, so teachers should focus and lessen these aspects intensively.
- ii. Students should be taught grammar explicitly and they should also be provided with comprehensive linguistic inputs.
- iii. Teachers should remind students the long term benefits of writing assignments and activities so as to refresh students' awareness and attitude about English and writing in English.
- iv. Tutorial classes, remedial actions and special treatments for less successful students, writing clubs, and establishing writing language labs are highly recommended.
- v. The credit hours for writing and other English courses should be improved to meet students' needs.
- vi. Teachers should plan and show their students errors explicitly and give feedback to their students' work in time.
- vii. Teachers should identify the level of their students' essay writing achievements and help students become more proficient writers and develop mechanisms to minimize those writing errors.

### 5.4 Suggestions for Further Study

The study was restricted to the selected school in Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Hence, the circumstances in other areas may differ. It would be needful to research the major errors committed by students in the Central Region of Ghana.

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## APPENDIX A

Write a three-paragraph essay (introduction, body, and conclusion) using 200 words on the topic: “All that Glitters is not Gold”. Your essay will be evaluated in terms of unity, coherence, language, and content.



**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS**  
**THE PROBLEM OF DANGLING MODIFIERS AND SENTENCE FRAGMENTS IN**  
**THE WRITING OF STUDENTS. A CASE STUDY IN BOLGATANGA GIRLS**  
**SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS**

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a study on the problem of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in students' writing, so this questionnaire is designed to gather data about the way you deal with the writing skills in general, and the students' attitude, opinion, motivation and other related things in particular. Your genuine and honest answers are paramount for the result to be gained from this study. Some of the questions are in the form of multiple choices while others are open ended. Thus, read each question carefully and give your answers accordingly.

Thank you in advance!

**SECTION A**

Background Information of the Respondent (Teachers)

1. Age: 25-28 (  )                      29 - 32 (  )                      33 and above
2. Sex: Male (  )                      Female (  )
3. Are you a trained teacher: Yes (  )                      No (  )
4. What is your educational qualification?
  - i. Diploma [  ]
  - ii. B.ED. [  ]



- iii. B.A [ ]
  - iv. M.ED / M.A [ ]
  - v. Others (specify)
- 

5. What is your area of specialization during training?

- i. English and literature [ ]
- ii. Literature [ ]
- iii. Theatre Arts [ ]
- iv. English [ ]

6. What subjects are you currently teaching?

- i. English and literature [ ]
- ii. English [ ]
- iii. Literature [ ]
- iv. Other [ ]

v. For how long have you taught?

- 1-2 [ ]     3-4 [ ]     5-6 [ ]     7-8 [ ]     9-10 [ ]     11+ [ ]

### SECTION B

1. Which one of the four language skills do you give most attention?

- A. Reading    B. Speaking    C. Listening    D. Writing

2. Is the writing lesson in the classroom difficult among your students?

- A. Yes        B. No

3. What is the level of difficulty students face while writing?

- A. Very difficult                                      B. Difficult  
C. Average    D. Easy

E. Very easy

4. To what extent did you introduce your students with ways of effective writing and practice writing in English?

A. Very great extent

B. Great extent

C. Very less extent

D. Less extent

E. Not at all

5. How often do your students practice writing in English outside classroom?

A. Always

B. Some times

C. Rarely

D. Not at all

6. At which level of writing do students mostly commit these errors in writing?

A. Sentence level writing

B. Paragraph level writing

C. Essay level writing

D. At all levels mentioned above

7. Does the difficulty of English writing make them lose interest in learning it?

A. Yes

B. No

8. How easy are these things when they write in English? Circle the most appropriate number (1=very easy 2=quite easy 3=quite challenging 4=very challenging)

8.1 Grammar	1	2	3	4
8.2 Misplaced modifiers	1	2	3	4
8.3 Vocabulary (finding the right word)	1	2	3	4
8.4 Incomplete sentences	1	2	3	4
8.5 Translating ideas into readable texts	1	2	3	4

9. What is the reason behind the difficulty students face in writing?

A. Teaching materials

B. Teaching method(s)

C. Complexity of English language rules

D. Lack of vocabulary

10. “Committing errors of dangling modifiers and sentence fragments in writing on the part of students are signs of failure” To what extent do you agree with this statement?

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. strongly disagree
- D. Disagree

11. Do you show the correct version of the errors they commit in writing when you mark and return their scripts?

- A. Yes
- B. No

12. How often do you revise with your students writing lessons?

- A. Everyday after class
- B. Only for exam
- C. the day before a class.
- D. Before and after a class

13. Do you think the teachers are important to make students become interested in learning

English writing skill?

- A. Yes
- B. No

14. What type(s) of the two error(s) do your students mostly commit in writing?

.....  
.....

15. Why do students commit errors of sentence fragments and dangling modifiers in writing in English?

.....  
.....

16. Why do you think the writing skill is relatively difficult than other skills? How?

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE ESSAYS

Once there was a man who very rich and wanted a wife to marry, but when ever he approach a ladies they deceive him and spend him money. It had continued for about years so he decided to be single. One day her younger sister come to his house he was very sad to the extent that he did not notice her sister's present so she ask her that it is the same problem and he said yes my sister to have her single for long dont you think till need to get a woman and children. So the sister said she is having off a friend she will talk to her and he said ok. So her sister went to her friend had said that her brother wants a wife who will love him and give birth to children for him; her friend said ok so his sister and the girl went there. One day and they chat very well and girl said oh she like the guy so she will tell her parent. The guy gave her a bundle of money for just transportation because she insisted to not go on his own. Later that day the girl never called or even to visit of the sister. The sister was also telling her friend that this is what has happen and her friend said you are a fool what are you waiting for go and



Tell him that you have accepted his proposal  
 but she was still not convinced. She did that  
 because they were very poor, ~~and~~ she had lost  
 her father and so her mother was taking care  
 of her, her mother managed to take care of her  
 so she did not want to lose her virginity  
 yet - the rich man kept on following to the  
~~extent~~ that she even traced their house and  
 so the girl's mother told the daughter that if  
 you don't marry this man and allow him go  
 away from our <sup>life</sup> I myself will personally  
 kill you, the <sup>girl</sup> ~~also~~ loved her mother and she  
 bore to see her mother in pain so she had to get married  
 to the man. They <sup>said together</sup> ~~there~~ for about some months and  
 the <sup>girl</sup> became disrespectful to the rich man and  
 house help. She was also making fun of her  
 friends for <sup>not</sup> getting a rich man <sup>that</sup> in her life <sup>not</sup>  
 knowing that all the properties like the cars the  
 house the big-big companies are not for him  
 but rather the boy boss - when the girl was in  
 the room and saw a coming inside and she thought  
 that was her husband in the car, the husband  
 came out dressed like a worker and she ~~ask~~  
 him the guy narrated the whole thing to her  
 and mother it that it is because love that  
 he did that. The mother now said oh God  
 I have betrayed my daughter ~~to~~ by saying  
 not all that ~~is~~ Glitters is Gold



Q. Once upon a time there was a village called Negali. There was a young handsome man who could fight and was having powers, and so because of his powers, he could turn into anything he wished to be and he was called Mejida. His mother always warned him never to reveal his secrets to anybody even his best friend.

One day, Mejida went to a party in the night and saw a beautiful shining lady dancing in the square and then Mejida moved closely to see clearly. The lady was dancing then all of a sudden she vanished. So he was not seeing her again. The following day Mejida told the village people about the girl and they asked him how she is, but he was not able to describe because it was dark he could not see her clearly. So after the announcement he left to his house and told his mother about her then the mother said if she belongs to you she will come back he said okay and entered inside his room.

However, the following three day time she came again and was dancing in the same square again and this time round Mejida moved slowly to her and held the hand and drag her out of the dance, and was now questioning her about her village, so the lady told him.

about herself, then megida said to the lady that they should go to his house and she will see the mother, then the lady said okay, so ~~they~~ when they got home, the mother was already sleeping so they decide to enter. They entered inside and ~~was~~ sitting when the lady started asking him about his powers, so he told the lady and the mother heard some noise and woke up and saw that it was her son.

The lady said in case we are walking in a bush and all a sudden an elephant appeared what will you do and he said he will turn into a bee and enter inside the ear, then she said again what if it turns into a snake he said he will turn into many python and bit it and she said again if it turn into a bull then he said he will turn into a tree and the lady said it would pull you down and then the mother heard everything, just then she ask if it turn into a dog and he said he will turn into a rabbit then she <sup>ask</sup> if it turn into a cow and he said he will turn into nee he didn't finished the last word and the mother appeared and was shouting, do you know her, do you know where she is coming from and you already started talking her about your power then the lady got angry and left. The mother said wait and I'll wake someone up and they would escort you home, she said no and left. Megida try to follow then the mother said not every thing that she is good so to respect he said okay and followed the lady by ~~the~~ the hand



already crossed all the (12) twelve villages at  
to mate and now got to a desert side mejiida  
ask where is your place that you let us walk  
all this far. Just then she turn into an old  
roughen woman standing then he say, she turn  
into an elephant the he entered inside her ears  
She turned into a dog then he turned into a  
rabbit and run, she follow and turned into a  
bull and he turned to a tree very continue like  
that until the lady turn into a cow and he turn  
ed into needle and pinch her then blood was coming  
out of the hand and she was was now looking,  
what is "nee", "nee", "nee", Oh mejiida mother what  
is "nee" nee. She sat there and was looking for  
"nee" and don't know what it is, so mejiida  
run back to the house and told <sup>his</sup> the mother about  
her then she said if I hadn't stop you then  
she would get to know the last one and said  
I told you not all that githers are gold because  
and left to her room.