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**Assessing Problems of Report Writing in English  
(The Case of Holeta ATVET College, Ethiopia)****Bifa Telila**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to assess problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language at Holeta ATVET College. The focus was to specifically assess the students' English language related problems in writing reports, the factors that impede students to use appropriate language aspects to write reports, and strategies being used to overcome the problems. Descriptive research approach was adopted in this study to describe and interpret events and procedures in looking at the participants, methods and instruments of the study. To this end, Likert Scale type questionnaires were designed and distributed for 180 students selected through both stratified and systematic random sampling techniques. In order to increase the validity of this study, semi-structured interview was also prepared for 6 purposively selected teachers. Finally, internal evaluation of documents written by the students was also conducted using checklists in order to crosscheck and triangulate the data obtained through questionnaire and interview. Evaluation was particularly conducted in order to see whether or not the participants' responses towards the questions matched with the actual documents' English language aspects produced/used by the students. Data from the students through questionnaire were analyzed in such a way that frequencies were counted for each agreeing, disagreeing and neutral responses. The extent of frequency of responses was assorted and set in percentage form in tables for which more descriptions and explanations were given. Data from interview and document analysis were also presented and analyzed qualitatively. In order to create holistic picture of these quantitative and qualitative data, however, the researcher assimilated/integrated, and thoroughly discussed, them all around subsequent thematic topics of the study. The findings of the study revealed that the students confront several problems and hence commit linguistic errors in writing practical reports of their practical works. Most of the students, thus, found it difficult to use all the essential written language elements in proper way to compose practical reports of their field works. It was also discovered that the students' report writing problems were mainly attributed to their weak/poor background/lack of prior knowledge to use the writing features of the language; and to some environmental factors, too. The results again indicated that very local, limited and/or insufficient writing strategies were being used to overcome the students' report writing problems through English language. Therefore, since report writing is a skill that could be improved through ample practicing, the ATVET College students should have been given chance of learning and practicing with the linguistic features of written English language to effectively and efficiently use them to write and pass on the intended meaning of their practical reports.

## **1. Introduction**

This study focuses on problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language. This part of the study consists background, research questions, objectives of the study, the scope and significances of the research work

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

Writing is one of the important skills to be exercised by College and University students that is believed to provide them a relatively permanent record of information, opinions, beliefs, feelings, and arguments on their topics of assessments (Caroll, 1999). Among the different writing genres, report writing is considered as an essential and crucial tool for students that help them develop confidence in composing and presenting their reflection on what they have practiced in a clear way on a subject matter (Mojica, 2010). Robin (2003) also remarks that proficiency with different genres of writing is essential and indispensable in learning processes. Similarly, Caroll(1999) states that any writing activity is taken as an important invention in human learning achievement. Furthermore, it enables learners to share their required communication not only with their contemporaries, but also with future generations (ibid, 1999)

At TVET College level, students are taught variety of subjects that are supposed to help them be competent in a particular field of specialization (MoE, 2008). For this purpose, TVET College students are expected to take a course called ‘Communicating and Working with Colleagues’ as a basic course in which report writing is given as learning out come. According to the objectives of the course, the students are needed to write practical reports on their field or laboratory practices/ works for different purposes: The primary purpose of why the students are ordered to write reports is, of course, to evaluate and verify whether or not they clearly understand a subject matter during practical activities. In the other way, the basic purpose of why the students write practical report is that it aims to help them clearly identify and know the basic concepts of the courses of their field of specializations at the real working places and then enabling them to express what they have already understood. The second and most important objective is, however, to enable them to develop their communicative skills through writing a highly structured report for different colleagues or organizations in their future working world. Hence, the students are expected to write practical reports that present actual facts of their work with some empirical descriptions and interpretations. They, therefore, prepare this kind of report in collecting and analyzing data in a certain manner, draw conclusions, and offer recommendations.

The course, thus, contains many activities/tasks to be covered during learning processes. In this course, duties are specified as performance criteria that TVET trainees need to know how to organize activities performed in written form, need to know the background of their colleagues to organize reports in light of their needs; and the ability to know how to receive and reply feedback provided by others in the team. Hence, the Holeta ATVETC students are taking it as a basic course in which writing practical reports is common that they are expected to state the result of their field/ laboratory works for their respective teachers. The long - term objective of teaching how to write practical reports is, yet, to increase the students’ communicative ability through writing concise and concrete reports with their future particular colleagues at workplaces.

The other point of focus is that though English Language is used as medium of instruction, it not considered and included in the curriculum to be explicitly taught as a learning course in TVET Colleges as a whole in the country. According to the new TVET Strategy, however, it is must for any TVET trainees to take, not only courses of their field of specializations in English language,

but also the assessment packages usually given after graduation at a given institution. The assumption is that after assessment on their field of specializations the students are expected to have National Certificate (NC) that functions at the International Benchmark (IB); by which they could be employed and work elsewhere in the world. This, thus, shows that there is a key role English language plays not only on their current practical report writing activities but also on their future performance in their working world.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

The students' English language ability to write effective reports on their practical works plays a great role in their both contemporary academic success and future careers. Hence, the key role of English language ability to write practical reports in Colleges has an important and encouraging impact on the academic achievement of students. This is because the ability to write various genres of writings effectively through English is becoming increasingly important in our global community (Weigle, 2002).

From his teaching acquaintances in the college, the researcher has experienced that any writing process will be effective and efficient if the students are able to manipulate the language with which they tend to learn and write reports of their practical works. Benson (2004) also argues that "instructing through a language that students may not manipulate well to write [various forms of writings] is an analogous to hold children under water without teaching them how to swim." This is simply to mean that prior to order students to write whatsoever writing is expected from them, deliberately teaching the language with its writing features is the primary action to be taken into consideration; because medium of instruction is the key role-player to maintain the whole teaching-learning environment smooth to run from beginning to end.

Writing healthy reports on different activities performed is, thus, not just an option for students but critical skill that it is a predictor of academic success (Graham & Perin, 2007). The same scholars attempt to see it in other way that poor writers have learning disabilities because they are unable to write reports at the basic required levels from them. To write effective reports, appropriate language elements and devices should be used in a meaningful manner so that the information is communicated clearly (Getachew, 2007, p.32). According to him, practical reports should be written with formal structure where every part of the reports is presented clearly in keeping the sequential flow of information.

Failure to use appropriate linguistic features of written English language in report writing activities, creates not only problems on the students' current academic achievement, but also makes them incompetent in their future working world. This may, therefore, result in social and economic crisis in the country in turn. The idea is authenticated in such a way that genres of writing activities, such as report writing, are mandatory activities for any advanced students as they help them be confident in their learning; which also forwards and/or creates future public consciousness on various issues of their country (Graham & Perin, 2007). Though English language is used as a medium of instructions in colleges and universities in Ethiopia, students' English language skills are very low. Particularly, their writing skills, to write various genres of writing, are often found to be below the expectations in these academic institutions (Hailemariam, 2011, p.3).

From his previous teaching knowledge, the researcher has observed that the College students have experienced difficulties and committed linguistic errors in writing reports of their practical works through English language. This has, thus, become common and debatable issue of the college that the students' English language related problems to write reports negatively affect their current academic achievements. Therefore, students with report writing problems in the

college face difficulties in their learning activities, which in turn have negative impact on their future careers.

Regarding this problem, several works seem to be carried out at university level in Ethiopia. However, adequate research work is not documented in writing skills in general and practical report writing problems in particular at Agricultural TVET Colleges' level. Some local researchers, such as, Belachew (2008) and Habtamu (2008) merely attempted to conduct their research works on the English language need assessment in TVET Colleges found in Addis Ababa and Mekele, respectively, neglecting the core and regular report writing activities taking place in these institutions. Hence, these could be taken as research gaps that the researcher could assess the linguistic errors/problems these Holeta ATVET College students encounter in writing practical reports through English using mixed research method approach to bridge the gaps.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

Based on the objective of the study, to assess problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language, the following research questions are formulated to be treated in the research work.

To assess the students' practical report writing problems through English language and the impeding factors, this assessment addresses the following research questions:

1. What linguistic problems do the students encounter when they write practical reports?
2. What factors do impede students to use appropriate features of English language to write practical reports?
3. What strategies, if any, are students and teachers using to overcome the problems?

### **1.4. Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.4. 1. General objective**

The general purpose of the study is to assess problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language at Holeta Agricultural TVET College; and so as to suggest optimum solution.

#### **1.4.2. Specific objectives of the study**

1. To assess linguistic problems students encounter in writing practical reports.
2. To find out factors impede students to use appropriate features of English language to write practical reports.
3. To assess the strategies being used to overcome the problems.

### **1.5. Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study was delimited to assess the problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language at Holeta Agricultural TVET College (HATVETC). In order to manage the study very carefully, it was delimited to graduating classes of the three departments (Animal Sciences, Natural Resources and Plant Sciences) found in the college. It was felt that assessing the problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language in more Agricultural colleges found in the region could not be carried out due to limitation of necessary resources and time. Hence, the study was delimited to this particular college to assess the problems students face in writing practical reports and the hampering factors that may hinder students from using appropriate English language.

## **1.6. Significance of the Study**

Report writing ability through English language is supposed to raise academic achievement of a college student in learning any other courses of specialization. The study is, thus, hoped to make the following significances.

First, the identification of the students' English language related problems/linguistic errors in writing practical reports will hopefully help the concerned bodies to critically think; and know where the hindering factors of this activity lie; and may give remedial solution, too.

Second, it will also provide them with vivid points to identify factors that impede students to use proper English language aspects in writing practical reports.

Third, it is hoped to indicate ways of how the students will use available writing strategies to reduce the problems; and thus enable them to enhance their report writing skills at the same time. Exploring factors that hamper the students from using suitable English language features in writing practical reports at Holeta Agricultural TVET College may function as the landmark whether or not English language should be taken into consideration to be included in TVET curriculum; and so is learned by students to enhance their report writing skills.

Fourth, ATVET students, on their part, will be aware of the factors of their linguistic errors in writing practical reports and so comment for the consideration of written English language linguistic features to be offered at TVET College level.

Finally, this study may motivate those who are interested in carrying out further research in this area.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The chapter deals with review of related theoretical and rigorous practical research works on the following points of focus. The section is, thus, organized into the following sub-headings that it consists of the conceptual meaning of practical reports, structures/components of formal written reports, types of written reports, importance of report writing, common linguistic errors in writing reports through English language, factors impede students to use proper English language features in writing practical reports, adverse impacts of report writing problems on students' academic achievement, and technical report writing problems reduction strategies.

### **2.2. The Meaning of Formal Written Reports**

Different scholars give different definitions for technical/practical report writing that Bryan (1975) defines it as "a representation of facts and findings, usually as a basis for recommendations; written for specific readership and probably intended to be kept as a record." In addition, report writing is a very formal document that is written by students for variety of purposes in different disciplines, particularly, in colleges and universities for their respective teachers (ibid, 1975). It is, hence, an account of something that conveys certain specific information to a specific reader. Ray (2007) also refers to a report as it is a very official document that is written to serve the range of purposes in various disciplines of learning and working world. It is a document which states the result of an assessment on a study that draws

conclusions and makes recommendations (ibid, 2007). Hence, findings pertaining to a given specific field work are written up into a report, which are considered to be legal document in both learning institutions and workplaces.

As per other researchers, the definitions of report writing is a regular duty of students from the day they join colleges and universities until the day they leave; there are many reports they will have to write (Mort *et al.*, 2009). The same scholars claim that report writing is an essential skill to be developed in colleges and universities. Another anonymous (2008) states a report as it is an obviously structured written document in which the writer identifies and examines issues, events, or findings of an assessment.

Having all these scholarly given definitions together, it can be said that a practical report is usually written by college and university students to communicate to their instructors on what they did in field practices, why they did it, how they did it, their findings and what they think the findings mean through the medium of instruction based on the nature of their respective field of specializations. Similarly, it is possible to say that report writing is a common way of teaching and assessing students at colleges and universities. It is, therefore, a skill that can be learned in colleges and universities. In general term of scholarly definitions cited above, writing a report is an integral part of students' learning activities in higher institutions based on their particular field of specializations.

### **2.3. Components of Formal Written Reports.**

Though reports vary in their type, nature and purposes, most of them have common basic components as separate sections. This means, practical reports are composed of a series of separate sections in which specific information is to be presented. In other way, Bryan (1975) states that the structure of a formal technical report may vary between institutions, organizations and disciplines/ field of specializations to lay out its sub-sections of distinct information. This shows that the structures of written reports are determined not only by the type, nature and their purposes, but also in the interests of the specific institutions and/or individuals for whom the report is required.

In general, the components of a given technical report can differ based on the purpose and the nature of institutions or specific individuals for whom the report is vital. Based on this, Mort *et al.* (2009) attempted to structure technical reports as to consist components such as title, abstract, introduction, method (which is also believed to consist design, participants, materials and procedures), results and discussions, sequentially. As it can be seen, the method section is outlined in composing a number of sub-headings to enable one to frame his/her conceptual sketch of report writing activities.

Anonymous (2008), however, seems to have different report structuring system that additional components such as acknowledgments, literature review, conclusions, recommendations, references and appendices are identified in addition to the indicated sub-sections above.

From this, one can deduce in such a way that formal written reports usually have series of components/structures with distinct points of focuses that enable readers to clearly understand the intended meanings of each section. This is because; well alienated written reports into variety of headings create a skeleton for the report that allows readers to progress logically through the material.

In this case, any type of written report usually has a title where some important points such as name of an institution, a writer and date of submission are, at least, included in a brief and attractive manner. Introduction is the other main component of a practical written report that Mort *et al.* (2009) discuss as it is required to give the background information about the topic of the report. In this case, the section is expected to state the aim of the investigation in looking at the areas to be covered for its purpose. The overall nature of the written report is vividly expected to be narrated under this sub-section (*ibid*).

The other important section of written practical reports identified in *www.rmit.edu.au* (2008) and by anonymous (2008) is materials and methods, for which they are described to state the methods or procedures a report writer uses to conduct his/her investigation. In material and methods section, a brief rationale is usually provided for why a method is used, how data are to be collected and analyzed, the conditions under which the investigation is conducted, number of participants and how they are to be selected and the material to be used for the investigation (*ibid*, 2008). This implies that a clear blueprint, about how report writing is performed, is designed in this section.

Bryan (1975) also discussed as results and discussions to be considered as other key components of practical report writing that the main findings of the practical works with clear explanation of how the results were obtained is presented in this section. Conclusions and recommendations are also common in almost all types of technical reports that the key findings and their implications including suggestions of authors, in which the identified problems are recommended to be solved, are indicated (Mort *et al.*, 2009).

From this, one can deduce the points in such a way that practical formal written reports should contain all the denoted series of sections so as to make it enclose comprehensive message to be addressed for a given specific reader.

## **2.4. Types of Written Reports**

Report writing is an officially written document of facts that requires a lot of preparation and knowledge; as well as individual assessment conducted on specific issues or events in schools or workplaces. There are different types and categories of reports that students have to accomplish during their education (Ray, 2007). Similarly, Mort *et al* (2009) added that written reports differ either by disciplines or by writing manners. In this case, during their time of college/ university stay students may be asked to write different types of reports, depending upon the subject area which they have chosen to specialize on. These could, thus, include laboratory reports, field work reports, and reports of a field trip which may also vary in their purposes (*ibid*, 2009).

It is believed that there are different approaches to teaching and learning writing techniques in literature. In this study, two approaches to writing in general and practical report writing in particular are discussed. While several types of written reports exist based on the various disciplines of studies, it is possible to group them all into the following two main categories as the product and process report writing. This classification is, actually, based on the nature and purposes of the written reports to be conducted by students in colleges.

### **2.4.1. The Product report writing**

The product report writing approach is a traditional approach to writing in which students usually are provided with a pre determined model and format and so encouraged to mimic it in order to produce a similar product. It is obvious that students are asked to write reports on what they

practiced for a given purpose. The concern of the product oriented writing approach is final outcome. Citing scholars such as Raimes (1983), Hedge (1988), Kalpan and Grabe (1996) and Jordan (1997) , Habtamu (2011) states that this approach to writing is to look at instances of writing and to analyze the features of written texts; the focus is the text that the students produce and it is expected to be correct in the needed skills of writing. Hence, the product report writing approach demands that a student should focus, sequentially, on forms, and duplication. Escholz (1980) points out that the product writing approach encourages students to use the same plan in a multitude of settings, applying the same form regardless of content, thereby, stultifying and inhibiting students (writers) rather than empowering them or liberating them to be autonomous and creative writers. Citing Badger and White (2000), Al-khasawneh (2010) also states about the product approach that writing concerns the knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development is the result of the imitation of input. According to him, the students are required to focus on a model, form and duplication. This can be stated in the other way that the students need to study model texts and attempt various exercises that enable them to draw attention to relevant features of a text, and then replicate them in their own writing (p. 6)

In general, the main focus of this report writing approach is the end result of the work than process that students should crossover. In this approach, report writing is assumed as an activity that starts at one point and ends up at a certain point in a linear fashion. This approach to report writing, thus, appears to simplify the nature of writing ignoring the needed practice in writing. Hedge (1988), however, prefers and encourages the process writing approach to be practiced more by writers in discouraging the product oriented writing approach, which aims at the end result of the given work.

#### **2.4.2. The Process report writing**

Process report writing is different from the product one in that it starts with something and passes through range of writing steps. Hailemariam (2011: 21) explains writing as a process of several steps, beginning first with generating ideas, revising, getting feedback from various readers or between revisions and writing again. The process writing approach, thus, focuses on how a text is written instead of the final outcome. Al-Khasawneh (2010) also indicates that the process report writing approach emphasizes on the importance of certain procedures such as pre-writing, drafting, evaluating, and revising (p, 7). According to Habtamu (2011), process writing focuses on steps in allowing students-especially young learners- to write with plenty of rooms left for errors. Nowadays, there is a relative consensus among writing scholars that writing is a process in which a number of operations go on simultaneously (Hedge, 1988; McDonough and Shaw, 1993). Citing White and Arndt (1991), Habtamu (2011) explains the process approach to writing as one that takes apprentice writers through the various stages when producing a piece of written work.

Overall, it is possible to see writing in general and report writing in particular that the focus is on process of writing that passes through several steps, not just to be obsessed with the final product. Regarding this, Rivers (1981), again, states that in the process approach, students look at how to generate ideas, how to organize them, how to express them, and how to draft to produce a readable text. In a related study, Temesgen (2008) stated that the process approach to writing is composed of a number of activities beginning with the planning to the end of the writing activity. It would be more appropriate to characterize writing as a recursive activity in which a student (writer) moves forth and back between the activities of drafting and revising (Hedge, 1988; Byrne, 1988). According to these scholars, drafting and revising are indispensable stages in the production of a piece of written work. Hedge (1988) describes the process of writing as consisting of three major activities or group of activities, as well. These are pre-writing, writing, rewriting and editing. According to this scholar, in the pre-writing phase, the



student (writer) considers two important issues: determining the purpose of writing (function) and deciding for whom (audience) the writing is. In the writing phase, the first draft is made after some brainstorming activities.

On the whole, good writers tend to pass much of his/her time on pre-writing concentrating on getting the content right first and go for details in writing stage like correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar until later. In the rewriting phase, revision is done to assess what has already been written and decide on clarity, completeness of information and coherence. It is an attempt of rechecking of what have been said. Revision is, therefore, a process of clarifying ideas, meaning, and purpose of writing (Chaturvedi, 2004:122). The editing stage is the final activity and consists of reading through and trying to make the final readjustment.

In general term, process writing approach is different from the product one in that it starts with something and passes through range of writing steps such as pre-writing, writing, rewriting (revision) and editing activities. Since report writing is an integral (intertwined) part of writing, it can also be categorized into this approach based on the nature and aim of the report to be conducted.

## **2.5. Importance of Report Writing**

It is believed that writing is an important intellectual activity to be done by students in college courses learning activities (McWhorter, 1996, p.357). As a general rule, the further the students progress in their education, the more various writing techniques they are expected to do; because they will face a wide variety of writing tasks, including essays, practical reports, and term papers (ibid,p.358). The same person, again, states as writing is an essential part of learning process that it enables students to condense, organize, and synthesize information of the subject matter under discussion (p.358). Hailemariam (2011), states that a student who is deliberately taught and equipped with a writing skill is assumed to be more advantageous in academic success than the students who cannot write well.

Report is, thus, a kind of technical writing that can be learned in schools because it will help students prepare, structure, write and edit to produce readable reports of their works (Mojica, 2010). Similarly, anonymous (2008) states the importance of writing reports as that the skills involved in writing a report will help the students to condense and focus information, drawing objective findings from detailed data. In addition, it is acknowledged that the ability to express ideas clearly and succinctly through report writing is an important skill that can significantly be enhanced by students in a planned and focused way for their academic achievement (ibid, 2008). Other scholars such as (Mort *et al.*, 2009) also argue that report writing is an essential technical writing skill to be developed by students to be effective and efficient in their learning; because throughout their study and future careers they are expected to write reports on various topics for different purposes. Similarly, Evans & John (1998) pointed out and confirmed the idea that college and university students are required to produce specific writing genres such as essays, practical reports, and research papers in academic contexts.

Hence, it can be inferred from this that developing writing skills in general and report writing ability in particular is an essential and inevitable activity of college and university students since it can help them be successful in their current academic performances and future careers.

## **2.6. Common Linguistic Errors in Writing Reports through English Language**

Second language users usually face several challenges as they work to successfully use the convention of their L2 for writing purposes (Mort *et al.*, 2009). English language problems are the existing challenges that most Ethiopian students encounter in composing whatever writing genres they tend to develop in academic context (Hailemariam, 2011).

By identifying and indicating the common linguistic errors in technical report writing through English language, the researcher can easily point out areas of errors to be rendered special attention to.

Byrne (1991) points out that those L2 users (students) face problems and commit errors in writing activities in the following language aspects in general. These are: graph logical and rhetorical problems.

According to Byrne (1991), graph logical aspects of language where students commit errors in report writing include spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of words and use of sub-headings, footnotes, table of contents and indexes. One of the expected mastery of any writing activity includes the ability to spell words accurately. However, since the relationship between sound and symbol of English is complex, spelling is a serious problem for many users of the language as a second language; and many writers are, thus, obliged to consult dictionary for verification (*ibid*, 1991).

Peters (2001) is being cited in Stirling's (2003) work and so identified some possible errors that poor spellers often make in writing in academic settings. These are:

1. Wrong initial letters – this indicates a serious problem that students are probably unable to read words correctly. They may need some deliberate work on phonics.
2. Using wrong phonic alternatives- a student uses a 'legal' spelling pattern for a sound but has chosen the wrong one for the word (example, to write 'pencil', wrongly spells as 'pensil')
3. Misspelling affixes – some of them are not aware of the affix as a separate identifiable part of words.
4. Being confused of single and double consonants.

In his conclusion, Stirling (2003) comments that students who use English as their L2 face difficulties to spell words correctly in their writing processes because of the reasons identified above.

Punctuation problems/errors are the other mechanical language aspects that students may face in writing processes. They are the governing rules in the use of visual mechanics in writing activities. It is true that punctuations are very important to be demonstrated in the process of composing texts for the value of clear and free from vague communication with readers through written texts. It is also suggested by Mort *et al.* (2009) that in the process of producing independent writing in academic settings, keeping consistency in the use of capitalization and punctuations with correct spelling will be acceptable before other readers. However, the ignorance, or misuse of punctuations and the others have a great impact on the readers' understanding of a text. Hence, the correct and appropriate use of punctuations is demanding to be valued and given due attention in certain writing activities (Hailemariam, 2011).

According to Byrne (1991), Rhetorical Problems are taken as other problems that students may face during writing. The term rhetorical is used to refer to all the devices which are needed in writing in order to produce a text in which the constructed sentences are organized into coherent whole. Hence, it is recommended that students (writers) should learn how to use them in appropriate places/contexts and be familiar with some of these devices (*ibid*, 1991).

Hailemariam (2011) also found that students(L2 writers) confront several challenges such as vocabulary selection and graphing, punctuation errors, idea generating and organizing problems, spelling errors and appropriate grammar usage in writing activities. In general term, shortage of vocabulary, idea generating and organizing problems, use of punctuations, capitalization and spelling errors with poor grammar usage are some of the problems/linguistic errors L2 writers commonly face in developing independent and readable texts of any type (ibid, 2011, pp.25-27).

Regarding English language spelling errors, Mihiretu and Melkamu (2011) claim that because of the influence of their mother tongue interference, Ethiopian University/College students try to write English words as the words seem to them to be pronounced; and, hence, commit spelling errors in their written communications. According to them, recognizing the spelling rules of English words is very difficult for L2 users to write due to the discrepancy between the pronunciations of many words and its spelling rules.

From this, it is possible to deduce that students of second language users face difficulties to use appropriately all the essential language elements to write practical reports/any different genres of writings/ unless they are deliberately taught and awaked about where L2 writers can commit errors. Hence, in view of this fact practical report writing is the type of technical writing that students may face the same challenges in developing it for specific purposes.

## **2.7. Factors Impede Students to use Proper English Language Aspects in Writing Reports**

Writing, in general, is the difficult skill as second language users face terrible situation in employing all the required ingredients of the language. Developing an effective writing which has a logical flow of ideas and cohesiveness is challenging, not only for second language users, but also for the native language speakers. This happens due to a number of factors. Citing (Norrish, 1983; Brown, 1994; Choom, 2004), Hailemariam (2011) states that humans in general and second language users (students) in particular experience difficulties/ commit errors in attempting to write effective genres of writings (p. 28).

According to him, inaccuracies are now considered as inevitable incidences in writing from several sources/several factors. Below is a brief discussion of the related literature on some of the possible sources of errors/factors of inaccuracies/ in using important aspects of English language as L2 in developing writing genres, particularly, in technical report writing activities in academic contexts.

### **2.7.1. First language interference**

Kefelegn (2003) reported that L2 writers exhibit more difficulties with the choice of appropriate vocabulary and/or in the use of general linguistic features in writing activities. In specific term, referring to McCarthy (1990), Getnet (2008) states that no matter an L2 user knows its grammar, without having various words to express a wide range of ideas, meaningful communication cannot be happen. It is also believed that students of second language users depend on their first language for how to communicate, how to think critically, and write as strategy in their learning activities (Cummins, J. 1992). Clearly put, students in academic context use to transfer all ideas, the language aspects and concepts of L1 into L2 in using it for different purposes. Citing scholars such as (Antunez, 2002; August, 2003),McNeir & Wambalaba (2006,p.12) verify the interference of L1 in L2 as that students who are not native English language speakers may have difficulty in distinguishing and pronouncing phonemes that are not there in their primary language to write. They may also be confused by phonemes in their first language that conflict

with English phonemes. Al-khresheh (2011) also asserts this that "... students face severe problems in writing..., most of the errors committed ... in their written production are because of the interference of their first language. Interference or transfer from native language could be taken as 'a matter of habit', and negative transfer would be obvious in cases of differences between the L1 and the L2" (p.427).

The researcher attempted to give illustrations from his experiences that some Afan Oromo speakers, for instance, commit most errors in the areas of spelling (word graphing processes) to produce sentences using English words. Hence, an Afan Oromo speaker, for example, unconsciously writes some words as 'Pensil' to write 'Pencil', 'Pepsi' to write it as 'Pepsi', 'Manajimant' to write it as 'Management'. This may happen due to nearly the same phonemes these letters (such as b&p, j&g) seem to have on our lips in pronouncing them to write on papers.

On the other way, students in using second language or foreign language for writing purposes may wrongly over generalize the rules; for example, after they had been told that the simple past form of verbs add '-d' or '-ed', they may then use to construct a sentence as 'We goed to the library' in over generalizing the rules as if all main verbs add '-ed' or '-d' to indicate their past form (ibid, 2011).

Hence, students may face challenges and commit errors in using appropriate elements of English language for writing reports and term papers for academic purposes due to an inevitable interference of first language; and hasty generalizations of rules in applying to all.

### **2.7.2. Writing incompetence**

As Hailemariam (2011) tried to cite (Norrish, 1983; Edge, 1989; Michaelides, 1990) in his work that because of various reasons students may sometimes become incompetent in acting as careless when they are writing through second language. According to him, incompetence due to carelessness may happen as a result of lack of know-how of the language which also results in lack of motivation and interest in turn. Referring to Norrish (1983), Hailemariam (2011) again states the cause/factors for students' lack of motivation and interest to use second language for accurate writing purpose is that they may not be deliberately taught all about the language aspects usage to write reports in using appropriate teaching materials that suit them.

To conclude, errors or inaccuracies produced by second language users (students) are occurred due to a number of reasons. These are such as first language interference and interfering nature of the target language itself, lack of knowledge on the language features which usually results in lack of motivation, interest and concern to write effective and efficient technical reports.

Hence, it can be said that second language users (students) should be deliberately taught the language features in order to make them motivated and self-reliant writers for their current academic successes and future careers in using proper language aspects.

## **2.8. Adverse Impacts of Report Writing Problems on Students' Academic Achievement**

It is true that medium of instruction has a decisive role on the academic achievement of students in particular and in teaching-learning activities in general. In other way, language of instruction is a key-role player that it helps maintain the teaching-learning situation run smooth from beginning to end. Hence, students whose English language proficiency is low will face difficulty to be successful in their report writing activities. Fakeye (2011) also suggests that the poor proficiency of students in English Language poses a great threat to their academic well-being and societal development. According to him, English language ability has a significant role on

students' current academic success and in their future social and economic life. In other way, there is a significant relationship between ones' language proficiency in writing whatsoever genres of writings and academic achievements. Similarly, Zakaria (2011:44) claims that English language users as their second language are disadvantaged in the academic world because their limited English proficiency hinders them to use appropriate features of the language for various purposes; which in turn negatively affects their academic performance. According to him, and from many other researchers' point of view, it is obvious that a lack of proficiency in the language of instruction to write reports of their practical works has harmful effects on a student's ability to deal with content-area texts, and word manipulating problems. Overall, the faulty usage of English language writing features negatively affects the whole theme and schema of the students' practical report writing processes. This, thus, adversely affects their current academic achievement, which in turn affects them in their future working life.

## **2.9. Technical Report Writing Problems Reduction Strategies**

Writing courses are commonly given for college and university students to enable them to write effective essays, term papers and reports. Kefelegn (2003,p.1),in citing (Leki and Carson, 1994; Johns 1986) asserts that writing courses at colleges and universities are, therefore, based on the assumption that what is taught and learned in these courses would help students overcome their previous writing problems and prepare them to write well in their subject area courses. Hence, in offering the writing courses, practical report writing is also another type of writing to be given for students in some colleges and universities so as to equip them in report writing skills. Studin (2011) says that "... a report has to be in a proper format, well-written, and without grammatical mistakes that students should use strategies to produce [comprehensive] written reports." According to him, a poorly written report with bad grammar, misspelled words, and necessary information missing negatively reflects on their academic success; and he also suggests that students should take ample time to think critically to write it well before starting to develop it. Collins (2008) states that writing reports can be difficult and time consuming for many students. But, it can be easily developed if students have the right tools to use in their report writing processes. According to him, writing strategies are the tools writers use to do their writing works. Good report writing, therefore, cannot be produced by accident/spontaneously. This means that successful students usually use some helping procedures/strategies to control every production of writing to make their writing effective and efficient.

Writing strategies are deliberate behaviors or actions that students use to make their writing more successful, self-directed and enjoyable. A writing strategy can take many forms. It can be a formal plan that a teacher wants students to follow to write a report, (ibid, 2008). Since any writing is with a mode of thinking, rewriting or revising, what we have written is also a mode of improved thinking (Chaturvedi, 2004:122).Revision is, therefore, a process of clarifying ideas, meaning, and purpose of writing. This shows that students are required to know and use all the necessary writing strategies to make their reports readable in light of the interests of their specific readers (teachers).

Collins (2008), on his part, also classifies and discusses writing strategies as prewriting, process writing, study of models and collaborative strategies as best problems reduction techniques to be used by students during writing reports of their practical works. Collins, hence, discusses each as following:

Pre-writing strategies are strategies used in writing activities to generate and clarify ideas. These kinds of strategies also involve brainstorming, which is a process of generating a lot of information within a short period of time; simply writing down a lot of possibilities without editing (ibid, 2008).

In similar way, the same scholar states that process writing approach helps interweave a number of writing instructional activities in an academic setting which needs extended writing

opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writings, which in turn assist students overcome writing problems.

In his view line, study of models also provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing to replicate the similar duplication.

Collaborative writing is the last classified writing strategy by Collins (2008) that it uses instructional arrangements in which students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions to overcome their mutual writing problems.

In general term, college students should use more writing strategies such as process and collaborative writing strategies to make their report writing fast, easier and successful and/or to make it to come out to be in the way the specific readers need it.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This part of the study deals with an overview of the research design, research population, sample and sampling techniques, data collecting instruments and analysis procedures.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

Mixed method approach, in which the researcher applied both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were employed so as to increase the quality of the final results of the research; and to clarify and illustrate the obtained findings from one method with the use of other. The researcher thought that this research method was appropriate to address best the objectives of the study; and help strengthen the assessment of the issue by supplementing one approach with other (Best & Kahn 1999). In one hand, the researcher used a qualitative research technique considering it as a suitable strategy to the current study to capture the various sorts of participants' experiences on the topic via interview. The reason for choosing qualitative method/technique to collect qualitative data is the need to attain highly personalized data that there are opportunities for probing more in detail and helps the respondents ask for clarifications if they have difficulties with the questions (Gray, 2004). On the other hand, quantitative approach was also used in which questionnaires were designed in order to triangulate and assure the trustworthiness of the desired information on the issue of the study.

#### **3.2. Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques**

##### **3.2.1. Participants of the study.**

It is believed that the primary purpose of the research works is to find solution to social problems or evils in considering the population upon which the problems are occurred. Population is, thus, any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher (Best & Kahn, 1999). Hence, participants of the study are helpful to assess the existing problems to draw valid implications on the basis of careful examination of the population.

This study, thus, would include the Holeta Agricultural TVET College (HATVETC) graduating class students of the departments of Animal Sciences, Natural Resources, and Plant Sciences of the year 2004 E.C. and their teachers in order to assess the problems these students encounter in writing practical reports through English language, the impeding factors to use proper English language aspects, and strategies being used to overcome linguistic errors in writing practical reports through English language. The researcher, hence, considered these subjects/participants of the study as relevant sources of information because the issue principally concerns all; though it affects the students more. In order to ease the report writing problems through English

language, ample information about the impeding factors to use essential language elements could, thus, be best obtained from these proposed informants, which enabled the researcher to suggest possible strategies that would help the students be effective and efficient in their learning activities in general and report writing in particular.

Hence, the conclusions of the study reflected the report writing situations of the students in Holeta ATVET College. The researcher selected the college because his experiences to the teaching-learning situations of the area allowed him to assess the students' report writing problems through English language on their practical works. Therefore, it was true that his justification, interpretation and familiarity to the teaching-learning conditions of the college helped him do the research on the topic. The researcher also selected the graduating class students of the year 2004 E.C. because he thought that the graduates are expected to develop the report writing ability that will help them be competent and self-reliant in their nearby future working world. Above all, the college was purposively selected that it was assumed to be representative of the other Agricultural TVET Colleges in Oromia because it is currently recognized and chosen as the Center of Competence (CoC); where students from all agricultural TVET colleges in the region are assessed for quality assurance on their field of specializations.

### **3.2.2. Sample and sampling techniques**

In this study, graduates of the year 2004 E.C. and teachers were used as pertinent informants. The researcher selected the college because he used to teach English language in the college; and he thought that the existing situation would enable him to conduct research on the topic and come up with reliable inquiry. Furthermore, the researcher preferred the college to conduct a study on the subject matter because it has become the current controversial social phenomenon of the college.

For the questionnaire data collecting purpose, both stratified random sampling and systematic sampling techniques were used at the same time to select respondents. Stratified random sampling technique was employed because it helped subdivide the total population of the students found in the college according to their respective departments. For this study, there were a total of 600 graduating class students of the year 2004 E.C. From this total population, 220 students belonged to Animal Sciences; while 200 and 180 students were from Plant Sciences and Natural Resources, respectively. They all stayed in the college for the last three consecutive years. And the researcher took 30% of the total enrolled students as a sample size in the college for questionnaire data gathering tool. Clearly put, 180 students were used as a sample size to fill the questionnaire. Hence, using stratified random sampling technique to subdivide the total population into smaller manageable groups, according to their respective field of specializations, to get accurate representative of the population is worthwhile (Best and Kahn 1999:17). This was done because the sample formed could not reflect the same proportion of various characteristics belonging to the population of those three departments. Then, the systematic random sampling technique was applied to pick out names of students in a definite sequence. Sample respondents from each department for the questionnaire were selected using systematic sampling technique. This was done by arranging all the names of the students of each department alphabetically and taking every 4<sup>th</sup> name from the list of the population till the researcher completed the required number for his sample group. This method ensures the 'no-zero' chance for every individual in the population to get picked up for the sample (Chaturvedi, 2004:163). The researcher could, therefore, draw accurate representative sample size of students of each department in applying the following mathematical approach.

If, for example, the

Total number of students in a department is 'A'

Sample Size is 'S'

Total number of the Students in the college is 'N'

Then,  $\frac{A*S}{N} = k$  , where 'k' represents random sample of students of a department.

In this case, the representative sample students of Animal Sciences, Plant Sciences, and Natural Resources departments were systematically quantified as the following, respectively.

$$\text{Animal Sciences} = \frac{220*180}{600} = 66$$

$$\text{Plant Sciences} = \frac{200*180}{600} = 60$$

$$\text{Natural Resources} = \frac{180*180}{600} = 54$$

Therefore, 180 students were employed as a sample size for the questionnaire data collecting purpose.

On the other hand, purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers for interview purpose. Clearly put, 6 teachers were selected and used for interview purpose by taking two from each department.

### **3.3. Phases of Data Collection**

Data collection process took place according to the following sequential procedures. In the first phase, questionnaires were prepared. The researcher then talked to the college deans and respondents to get permission; and the consent of the respondents to fill the questionnaire at suitable times and places. All the stratified names of the students were, then, taken into a computer and set alphabetically to apply the systematic random sampling technique through which all the students of each department had got the chance of being selected for the questionnaires. After that, questionnaires were distributed for the randomly identified students by the researcher himself.

All the participants were encouraged and asked questions so that they did not face any problems with respect to the clarity of language and the way to deal with the questions. Hence, questionnaires were administered and distributed to the randomly selected students.

In the second phase, semi-structured interview questions were prepared for some purposively selected teachers. Before the actual interview, the researcher did the same that he talked to each of the respondents to arrange the suitable times and places; and to get their consent regarding the use of audio recorder for the interview. In this case, some agriculture specialist teachers were chosen purposively to conduct interview on the topic under the study. This one-on-one interview was, almost, lasted for an hour depending on the rate of the respondents' expression of the responses. This was primarily done by informing the purpose of the interview. The responses of the interviewees were recorded for latter data analysis. Taking notes of the respondents' responses was additional way of documenting ideas of the interviewees.

In the third phase, some written documents (reports written by the students) were collected from the existing departments for evaluation purpose. Hence, material analysis checklists were prepared based on the points raised in the review of literature section to apply the internal evaluation and see the how use of the language aspects/elements in writing practical reports.



### **3.4. Instruments of Data Collection**

The information required for this research work appropriately described qualitatively and quantitatively. Hence, the researcher used both the qualitative and quantitative data gathering tools. Clearly put, semi structural interview and questionnaire were the main tools of data collecting; while document analysis (students' written report analysis), was used as a supporting instrument to obtain adequate and authentic information on the topic under the study. The first two were considered to be the main data gathering tools because the researcher thought them as the most efficient tools to explore or know the students' report writing problems through English language. These data collecting instruments were, therefore, proposed to be used to assess the problems that the students encounter in their practical report writing through English language; and potential impeding factors that hinder students to use appropriate English language aspects to write practical reports of their practical works.

#### **3.4.1. Questionnaire**

Questionnaire is used when factual and realistic information is desired to be elicited from subjects of the study; and hence helps that the availability of a number of respondents in one place makes possible an economy of time and provides a high proportion of usable responses (Best and Kahn, 1999, p.229). Many of the proposed respondents (students) were successfully completed the questionnaires with detail information regarding their English language related problems, factors that impede them to use appropriate English language elements to write reports, and strategies being used to overcome their problems. In this study, questionnaire was administered based on Ede's (1992) idea cited in Kefelegn (2003) and that of Best and Kahn (1999) to elicit the students' responses to their linguistic errors they might commit in writing practical reports of their practical works through English., to find out factors that impede the students to use proper language aspects, and strategies being used to overcome their technical report writing problems/errors through English language.

All the items that presented in the questions were carefully considered to be coincided with the points in the review literature. Questionnaire, therefore, was considered to be one of the data collecting tool that Likert Scale/method/ was employed to seek for short responses in the form of 'Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree' for each individual statement (ibid, 1999).Very few open- ended questions were also used at the end of the questionnaire papers so as to enable the respondents to freely add some missing points regarding their difficulties/linguistic errors, the impeding factors hinder them to use appropriate linguistic items they might think, and strategies being used to overcome the problems. However, the closed form questionnaire was chiefly used to enable the respondents to react to predetermined questions. Hence, it was prepared for randomly selected students to gain ample information in quantified form on the topic.

#### **3.4.2. Interview**

Interview is another data collecting tool that helps to obtain in-depth information through the hybrid one-on-one discussion approach. It, thus, helps elaborate data concerning respondents' opinions, experiences and feelings on the topic under the study. This study, apparently, is a mixed study; and so utilizes semi-structured interviews in a face-to face interaction to explore the respondents' beliefs and thoughts about certain items to be asked (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). This also in line with Lynch's (1996) view that the use of semi-structured interviews enhances the understanding of the data and makes the data collection more systematic as compared to the informal conversational approach. In the case of this study, its prime purpose was to collect

detailed data from small non random sample of population. In doing this, semi-structured interview was prepared for these purposively selected subjects of study to find out the problems, the hampering factors that hinder students to use appropriate linguistic features, and strategies being used to overcome the problems.

Similarly, this data gathering instrument was preferred to gather information regarding an individual's experiences, knowledge, opinions, beliefs and feelings on the issue under study; in which the interview items were outlined to determine the past, the current information as well as predictions for the future (Patton,1990). For this reason, series of interviews were used to gain subjective explanation of the respondents' own perspectives, specifically, about the hindering factors that hamper students to use proper linguistic features of English language to write practical reports. It was hoped that this data collecting tool would help enrich the researcher's assessment to be more acceptable and dependable. Hence, interview (semi-structured) was prepared for some purposively selected agriculture specialist teachers in order to gain wealth and in-depth information on problems of report writing through English language and the factors of these problems.

### **3.4.3. Document analysis**

Document analysis was employed as a tool of information gathering with which the researcher went through the students' written reports to evaluate how well the needed English language elements effectively and efficiently were used. It was taken as important tool that it could provide valuable information about the document to be evaluated (Cakit, 2006). According to this author, material/document analysis is the systematic assessment of the overall effectiveness of the materials in light of the set objectives. For this study, therefore, the researcher analytically evaluated the effectiveness of the linguistic features used in the documents.

Three documents, from each department, were collected and thoroughly analyzed in considering some common and essential written items such as word (vocabulary) graphing and manipulation ability, the how use of cohesive devises, use of appropriate tenses and structures, arrangement of words, use of capitalization, spelling and punctuations. The consistency of tenses and persons within a given sentence has also been called into attention during document evaluation. Material analysis checklists were adopted from Carrol (1990) that these items are common in any writing activities. Hence, the researcher has re adjusted the points of focus/the checklists in aligning each with the research questions and objectives of the study.

Consequently, internal inspection of the documents was applied to find out the language errors/problems that the students face in writing practical reports. This model of material evaluation was used in believing that it helps conduct an in-depth analysis to the language items used in the document (ibid, 2006). It was, thus, enabled the researcher to generate qualitative data which was explained and discussed qualitatively in assimilating with the other data obtained through questionnaire and interview in the analysis section. It, therefore, helped as a supporting tool to clearly show the linguistic errors that the students may commend in composing reports of their field works through English language. In addition, it was preferred to be employed because it was assumed to assist the researcher to cross-check and keep the consistency of data gained through the two main data collecting instruments.

### **3.5. Data Analysis Procedure**

In order to assess the problems, data gathered through questionnaire, interview and examination of documents were analyzed using the following procedures. Data from students through

questionnaires were analyzed in such a way that frequencies were counted for each agreeing and disagreeing statements. Then, the extent of agreement, disagreement and neutral responses was assorted and set in tables based on sequence of the questions. The counted frequencies were then converted into percentage responses and set in tables for which more interpretations, descriptions, discussions and explanations were given to each of them. Data from all sources were, however, presented and discussed jointly along certain successive thematic topics of the study.

The raw data gained from interview were recorded and then read and reread so as to have complete understanding of the responses. Simply put, it was accompanied with frequent listening to the tape recording. Then, it was discussed /explained qualitatively. The information gained from the examination of documents through checklists was also discussed qualitatively. Above all, asking appropriate questions through the two main data collecting tools was believed to make the analysis of data accurate and legible.

Overall, data from questionnaire, interview and document analysis were presented and analyzed jointly under succeeding key topics of the study. In this case, each response was analyzed thoroughly through qualitative approach. This means that there was more concern and succinct description and explanation of the data collected through all the data gathering tools using more words.

In short, the data obtained through questionnaire were presented in percentage in tables for which more discussions and explanations were given to each of them. During the analysis of data from questionnaire, however, the categories were lumped into three categories as: agree, undecided, and disagree so as to make the analysis clear and easier (Best and Kahn, 1999). This was purposively done to report the percentage responses by combining the two outside categories: 'strongly agree' and 'agree'; 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' into 'agree' and 'disagree', respectively. Finally, all the data obtained through questionnaire were integrated with the data gained through interview and document analysis and then analyzed jointly around subsequent key topics of the study in order to make the results consistent and create holistic picture of both quantitative and qualitative data. This procedure was also done in connecting the analysis with related theoretical or empirical literatures for the sake of more explanation or elaboration of the issue under the study.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As noted earlier in chapter one, the main purpose of this study was to assess problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language at Holeta ATVET College. This chapter, therefore, deals with the presentation, interpretation and discussion of data in light of this objective.

The chapter generally consists of the presentation of the analyzed quantitative data in percentage form in tables; with thorough interpretations and discussions of the results obtained through interview and document examination jointly under subsequent thematic topics of the study. In this study, data from different sources are, therefore, treated jointly around one or successive central topics so as to create holistic picture of both quantitative and qualitative data gained through these tools.

Presentation, interpretation and analysis of the data obtained through these different sources of the study were occurred at three levels that the first part deals with the problems students

encounter when they write practical reports through English language. The second part of the interpretations concerns with the factors that hinder students to use appropriate linguistic features in writing practical reports; whereas the third part of the analysis focuses on the strategies being used to overcome the problems. These procedures of data presentations, discussions and explanations were, therefore, jointly applied in integrating all the data along these three key topics of the study.

#### 4.1. Linguistic Problems Students Encounter in Writing Practical Reports

The following 9 items, as mentioned on page 31, were designed to seek the students' responses on their practical report writing problems through English language. The items were, therefore, designed to contain important English language ingredients/features that the students need to use in composing reports of their practical works. In his discussions and explanations of the data, however, the researcher attempted to compare and contrast responses of the students and teachers in incorporating them with the actual language entities used in the students' documents under the same topics of the study so as to come up with his overall understanding of the students' problems.

**Table 1:** Students' Responses to Their Linguistic Errors in Writing Practical Reports

| N    | Statement  | Responses |       |           |       |          |       | Total respondents |
|------|--|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|----------|-------|-------------------|
|      |  | Agree     |       | Undecided |       | Disagree |       |                   |
|      |  | f         | %     | f         | %     | f        | %     |                   |
| 1    | I found it difficult to choose different vocabularies to write practical reports.  | 150       | 83.33 | 15        | 8.33  | 15       | 8.33  | 180               |
| 2    | I do not know how to use appropriate grammar in writing practical reports through English language/I am poor in grammar usage. | 126       | 69.79 | 19        | 10.42 | 35       | 19.44 | 180               |
| 2.1. | Subject-verb-agreement challenges me when I write reports.   | 141       | 78.13 | 13        | 7.29  | 26       | 14.58 | 180               |
| 3    | Use of appropriate punctuations is challenging for me to write practical reports.  | 131       | 72.92 | 15        | 8.33  | 34       | 18.75 | 180               |
| 4    | Spelling errors are common when I write practical reports through English language.  | 139       | 77.08 | 17        | 9.38  | 24       | 13.54 | 180               |
| 5    | Capitalization of words is problematic and I always commit errors when I write practical reports.                              | 135       | 75.00 | 13        | 7.29  | 32       | 17.71 | 180               |
| 6    | I have difficulty to generate ideas through English in writing practical reports.  | 133       | 73.96 | 13        | 7.29  | 32       | 17.71 | 180               |
| 6.1. | I have difficulty to organize ideas through English language.  | 148       | 82.29 | 11        | 6.25  | 21       | 11.46 | 180               |

|      |   |     |       |    |      |    |       |     |
|------|---|-----|-------|----|------|----|-------|-----|
| 6.2. | Using appropriate cohesive devices/linking words to logically sequence my ideas are challenging one in writing reports. | 146 | 81.25 | 13 | 7.29 | 21 | 11.46 | 180 |
|------|---|-----|-------|----|------|----|-------|-----|

**Key: f= frequency**

As table 1 shows, a total of 83.33% of the respondents showed their agreement that they found it difficult to choose different vocabularies. This shows that the students face challenges, not only in choosing various vocabularies to write reports, but also in accurate word graphing when they tend to write practical reports of their field works through English language; whereas 8.33% of them expressed their neutral position and the same percent of the respondents disagreed towards the idea, respectively. In similar way, the students expressed their beliefs on the use of appropriate grammar that 69.79% of them agreed that they do not know how to use appropriate grammar in writing practical reports through English language. They were specifically requested about the use of structures, such as, subject-verb agreement in their report writing activities, too. And 78.13% of the students, thus, agreed towards the statement that they face challenges and commit errors of this structure when they write practical reports through the language; whereas 7.29% and 14.58% of them reported their responses in being neutral and disagreeing to the statement, correspondingly. This also shows that the students face problems and commit errors in grammar usage to write practical reports of their field or laboratory practices.

On the other way, these responses of the students can also be viewed from the students' cognitive and metacognitive awareness to their linguistic problems in writing practical reports. These linguistic related questions were, therefore, prepared for the students to enable them to elicit the factual information about their problems in writing reports. This was done that the students were supposed to have consciousness to their level which enable them to critically reflect, not only on their linguistic problems, but also on factors that may hamper them to use appropriate English language features in writing reports. This is because the idea of awareness to something is discussed by Ellis (2007:4) in such a way that "by the time one reaches school basic skills have [usually] been [developed] . . . there is an increased awareness [to all about his/her progresses, problems and accomplishments in learning activities]." This, therefore, shows that the students selected for this study were found at the stage where they could express about their linguistic errors that they may commit in writing reports using English language.

To seek further clarification about the students' difficulty to choose different vocabularies to write reports, and their inappropriate use of grammar, the researcher also involved teachers in hybrid one-on- one interview. Concerning the challenges to choose different vocabularies, all the interviewees underlined that the students cannot freely generate alternative ideas due to their serious word limitations. The fourth teacher specifically stated the seriousness of the vocabulary choosing problems in the following manner.

**Frankly speaking, our students are poor in English language vocabularies. They often lack the necessary vocabularies when they are ordered to be in real practical report writing activities. As a result, our students face difficulties to express their ideas accurately to write practical reports [due to these vocabulary limitations].**

This also indicates that the students have no profound English language vocabulary knowledge; because of this, they face serious problems and commit unnecessary errors when they tend to engage in authentic report writing activities. According to the teachers' viewpoints, lack of the necessary English language vocabularies is the main problem of the students in writing practical reports of their practical works.

In the same way, the teachers were also requested about the students' inappropriate grammar/structural usage in writing practical reports through English language. Regarding this, all the interviewees expressed their ideas that the students' use inappropriate English language grammar/structures. Out of the total interviewees, five of them stated their responses in similar way that reports are, for example, expected to be written in simple past tense form; however, our students write reports of their practical works in simple present tenses or sometimes in future tense forms, which are not appropriate way of expressing events conducted sometimes in the past. On similar issue, another teacher added that "it is common to observe improperly constructed sentences in most of the students' report writing activities through English language, for instance, structures such as subjects and verbs do not agree in number in most of their sentence constructions." This shows that the students are not competent in using appropriate English language structures to convey the intended message of their written texts.

On the whole, one can deduce in such a way that though the reports are expected to be produced in past tense form, most of the students use some other tenses that are not relevant to the time of occurrences of events to address the comprehensive meaning of their works. It is again possible to say that meaningful communication cannot take place in the absence of using appropriate tense in light with the time of occurrence of events.

In order to crosscheck and keep the consistency of the findings, the researcher also conducted document analysis. The researcher went through the documents produced by the students in applying internal inspection to the materials using checklists to check how well the necessary written language elements are effectively and efficiently used. Regarding linguistic errors that the students commit in relation to vocabulary and grammar, some paragraphs have been taken from the graduate class students' documents. The following sample paragraph is, then, taken from a document's conclusion and recommendation section prepared by one of the Animal Science department students as follows.

**This techniques of queen rearing systems is the new technology method for our farmer for this the farmer used traditional technique and system of bee keeping. Nowaday, I want to give more information and knowledge about method and technique for our farmer according to queen rearing techniques.**

As can be seen from the above sample paragraph, word choice and graphing is one of the problems observed in the document. Selection of different words to generate different ideas, thus, seems a serious problem, in addition to erroneous way of graphing, that the same word(s) is/are repeatedly used in the paragraph. The word 'technique', for instance, is repetitively used four times in the paragraph. Words of nearly the same meaning ('system' and 'method') are also used unnecessarily in the paragraph. This, therefore, indicates that the document has got vocabulary problems. The problem of word selection and arrangement to generate alternative ideas seems a big problem of the writer of the document. Overall, it is possible to say that any student with poor/limited word-building will face challenges to express his/her ideas freely and accurately. As can be seen from the sample paragraphs, most of the documents used for the study are not written with proper and necessary language elements to fulfill the required academic report writing. To specifically see the language elements one by one, again, that appropriate grammar /structures are not used in the documents. This can also be illustrated by taking some sentences /paragraphs/ developed by one of the Plant Science students as follows.

**Land preparation are to make the land ready to Receive the seed or planting materials. it include activates of ploughing or digging leveling at appropriate depth and soil particles but background of culture methods of the farmers was not used/Know/ at leveling suitable for the kind of planting materials.**

Much can also be said about the paragraph quoted above. For instance, the first line of the paragraph is constructed with inappropriate way of using English language elements that the subject and verb of the sentence are wrongly constructed/not agreed in number. The second sentence also starts with the same problem that the subject ‘it’ and the main verb ‘include’ do not agree in number to address the required meaning of the sentence. Similar problem can also be observed in line three of the paragraph that the employed words of the sentence are wrongly ordered; and the tense of the line is not the right tense to be used there in the paragraph, too. Hence, structural errors are clearly observed in the paragraph.

Erroneously used language elements.

Land preparation **are**  
it include

Accurate way of using language structures.

Land preparation **is**/land preparations **are**  
It includes

background of culture methods of farmers was not... cultural background of the farmers **is** not..

Here, it is possible to say that using inappropriate grammar/structures in writing pieces of texts results in unclear and distorted message to be addressed /communicated. In contrast, having the knowledge and skills of grammar/structure usage in writing texts plays an important role to address meaningful communication. It is also true that people may not pass the intended message properly unless they able to arrange words in their acceptable manner/order. For this reason, citing Ur (1988), Seyoum (2008) states that grammar is viewed as the central area of a language around which other language skills and components of a language such as meaning and function revolve. This, thus, indicates that grammar plays a key role in addressing meaningful and acceptable messages in writing communications. It, therefore, helps students be creative in their written communications and address their messages clearly and precisely.

On the whole, one can deduce from this joint data analysis that most of the students face challenges and commit errors in the use of essential English language ingredients such as vocabularies, appropriate grammar (tenses), and suitable subject-verb agreements in composing their practical reports through English language. In line with this, citing Krashen (1998), Getnet (2008) stated about the use of vocabularies in such a way that words are the basic unit of a language form without which one cannot express his/her ideas to communicate effectively. Similarly, Wallace (1982:134) wrote that “very little can be conveyed without grammar but nothing can be conveyed without vocabulary.” In writing activities, therefore, ranging words, even, from phrase to sentence level and graphing them properly requires knowledge of different vocabularies and their forms, respectively.

On the other hand, the students were asked whether or not they appropriately use the correct spelling, capitalizations of words and punctuations at the right places in their sentence construction during practical report writing activities through English language. As can be seen in the table above, most of the students reported that they face challenges and commit errors to use these language items at their right places while writing practical reports through English language. Specifically put, 72.92% of the respondents reported their views in agreeing towards the statement that the use of appropriate punctuations challenges them. With regard to spelling, 77.08% of the students expressed their ideas that spelling errors are common when they write practical reports through English language. Similarly, 75% of the respondents showed their agreement towards the statement that word capitalizations seriously challenges them in writing practical reports through English language.

On their part, the teachers gave detailed elaboration about the problems/ errors of these English language elements indicated above when they were involved in the individual interview. Though all the respondents put lack of vocabulary as the main problem of their students, they did not

appreciate the students' use of other English language elements in their practical report writings. All the teachers, thus, reported their ideas in such a way that the students always commit word capitalization errors, spelling errors and punctuation problems in writing reports through English.

Data from document analysis was also incorporated so as to compare and contrast it with the responses obtained through the main data gathering tools of this study, questionnaire and interview. It is, therefore, common to observe inappropriate word graphing or word writing problems in the students' documents that some phonological errors seem to occur due to unconscious pressure of first language word patterns. The following sample paragraph more illustrates the problems indicated above.

**Sowing maize on row or drilling is very important towards manajimant like weeding, adding fertilizer and possible to replace seed w/c is not jerminate. But don't all farmar agree on this because it taked time or need more labour from may method of planting of maize is more profitable as we see from this practical work.**

One can easily realize a number of problems/linguistic errors from the above incoherent paragraph that some words are erroneously written. Words such as 'manajimant,' 'jerminate,' 'w/c,' and taked are words inappropriately used in the text. There is clear punctuation error/problem in writing words.' This way of word graphing, thus, seems to depict the writer's being careless and incompetent to use the correct form of English words.

The other written English language elements such as spelling and capitalizations were also evaluated thoroughly in the documents. These language aspects are not effectively and appropriately used in the documents. From the above sample paragraphs, it is possible to say that spelling errors and inappropriate use of word capitalizations and punctuations are visible facts of the texts.

In the same manner, a document from the Natural Resources department was thoroughly analyzed to check the how use of these written English language elements. The following sample paragraph is, thus, taken from the conclusion and recommendation section of the document in order to see the how use of spelling, capitalizations and punctuations.

**Generally the task Was took Place the Method of knowing textural class of a given Soil by using simple method of textural class identification & the farmers are get Mor knowledge during the praktice and tray to du this task in depend upon the manual So that the farmers share knowledge within other farmers.**

The above paragraph has problems/linguistic errors that it is difficult to understand the intended meaning of the text. As can be seen, the problem arises from the misuse of language elements such as word capitalizations and punctuations in the paragraph. The words in the paragraph do not appear in correct sequence to be meaningful, too. Hence, these spelling errors clearly impede one to make comprehensive communication since it is a deviation from rules or norms of English language word graphing. Furthermore, spelling errors affect the interpretation of a word in the minds of the readers.

Similarly, capitalization of words and use of punctuations are the other problems observed in the documents. For instance, the first letters of words such as Was, Place, Method, Soil, Mor, and So are inappropriately capitalized at unneeded places in the text. In the same manner, the necessary punctuations are not used in the document. For example, a comma is needed after the word 'generally', at the beginning, to give pause to start with the next idea; and also in the middle just after the word 'identification.'



Overall, one can say that the students have serious problems to spell English words correctly and use appropriate word capitalizations and punctuations at their right places. Different scholars have forwarded different views on the issue. For example, Hailemariam (2011) argues on the idea that students sometimes become careless and commit errors when they tend to write through English language due to their limited knowledge of the language elements. This defective way of word using in writing seems to be caused by unconscious force of both first language (L1) and the target language (L2) interferences in the students' writing through English. In related study, Habash (1982) also asserted that spelling, word capitalization and punctuation errors, most of the time, occur in writing activities due to interferences of patterns from first language and other structures in the target language itself. According to this scholar, the first type of error occurs in writing when a user of second language carries over the habits of his/her first language into the second one; whereas, the second type of error is caused by the interference of some structures/forms from second language itself (ibid, 1982).

In another related study, Mihiretu and Melkamu (2011) stated that knowing to use appropriate spelling, punctuation, and word capitalization in writing activities, however, helps one to be effective in his/her written communication. This is to mean that a student has to know how to spell words, punctuate, and where to capitalize words in his/her writing activities in order to be effective in communication. It is therefore true that the use of correct spelling, punctuation and word capitalization brings good communication between a writer and his/her readers; whereas, wrong use of these elements comes with communication breakdowns between the two.

Table 1 above again shows, most of the students expressed their agreement that they have difficulty to produce and organize their ideas through English language. In other way, 73.96% of the students reported that they have trouble to produce ideas through English language in writing practical reports. In the same manner, 82.29% of the students indicated that they have serious problems to organize their ideas through English language due to their linguistic errors they often commit during their practical report writing activities. Connecting with these, the students were also inquired about the use of cohesive devices/linking words that help them logically sequence their ideas. As can be seen from table 1, 81.25% of the students reported that using appropriate cohesive devices/linking words to logically sequence their ideas is challenging one for them to write reports through English language; whereas merely 7.29% and 11.46% of them took the neutral position and disagreed towards the statement, respectively.

To get their views and experiences of teachers on the issue, the researcher engaged them in hybrid one-on-one discussion approach. One of the teachers underlined that “the students appeared to have many problems when writing in English, like not knowing how to create and organize their ideas because of their vocabulary limitation.” On similar issue, another teacher indicated that since idea generating and organizing are challenging to them, the students are not effective and successful in their practical report writing activities.

On the other hand, document analysis was also involved to verify issues of under discussion. Idea generating and organizing ability of the students, in using proper linguistic items to write practical reports, was the other point of focus during document analysis. These aspects of writing activities are considered as the most important features of written texts; because they are directly intertwined in one's linguistic capability to develop readable texts. It is assumed that if one is good in manipulating a target language's ingredients in writing, idea generating and organizing will, then, be considered effective and sufficient. In line with this, considering the accordance of language entities with the occurrence of events is a very crucial point to be considered in writing activities. In contrast to this, the documents used for internal evaluation were organized with fragmented ideas, which in turn resulted in distorted messages to understand. In other way, in most paragraphs of the documents, it is possible to say that most of the sentences are not related

to each other to form oneness among them. There are no coherences among sentences and paragraphs of the documents.

In addition to the sample paragraphs given above, it is possible to add more paragraph(s) from the documents to illustrate more the point of focus. Hence, the following sample paragraph is taken from the document entitled: **Sowing Bee Flora during Dry Season.**

**sowing bee flora is one of the most important system to overcome shortage of feed during dry season and to reduce the long run of honey bees for foraging nectar & pollen because of this everywhere who practice bee keeping should know the advantage of sowing of bee flora. Around the apiary site the bees become more strong and serve the environment.**

**finally sowing bee flora was the most adviseable and crucial. Then it increasing it produce flora as well as quality and quantity.**

As can be seen from the sample paragraph above, it is difficult to gain the intended meaning of the paragraph that the topic sentence and other supporting sentences of the paragraph are not clearly stated. The paragraph is, thus, ineffective that some words, particularly, cohesive devices, which enable one to keep logical flow of ideas in practical report writing, are not appropriately and adequately used in the text. It, therefore, challenges one to read and capture the intent of the paragraph by and large that moving from one idea to another in a linear manner is problematic/ challenging because of poor arrangement of words and inappropriate use of other language elements in the text. Using appropriate English language, with its all necessary elements, in practical report writing assures the orderly and clear representation of complex ideas so that readers have the best possible chance of understanding them.

The documents used for analysis, in general, are not self-explanatory that language elements are wrongly treated in each text of the materials that one cannot easily understand the meaning of the manuscripts. The overall analysis of the documents, therefore, reveals that faulty word order, word selection, and misspelling are the linguistic errors/problems observed in the documents. In addition, most of the sentences are not constructed properly that some structures, such as, subjects and verbs do not agree in number. It is also common to see shifts of first person to third or shifts from present tense to past or past to present tense in the sentences of the materials. In other words, there are no consistency of person and tense in the sentences of the documents. This can also be illustrated by taking a sample paragraph from one of the documents being evaluated.

**Generally the seed was collected and store in very well [storage] but is not considered by the farmers before colleting. Each farmers can growth in his Garden for consumption and reduced the purchasing cost of coffee from Market this means the farmer easily economize to achieve the goal Poverty reduction. As recommendation the writer of this report suggest that I advice them to increase Coffee production in the areas they should be managed from seed preparation until it will give production.**

In addition to the problems of spelling, word capitalizations, and use of punctuations, clear connections between ideas, sentences and paragraphs are also absent in the documents. The document analysis, again, shows that the third-person singular markers are not considered in most of the sentences; and it also reveals the erroneous use of word capitalizations and punctuations frequently. Lack of lexical variety or heavy reliance on word redundancy that does not add any new information to the text is the other serious problems of the documents.

Overall, it was found from all sources of the data that while carrying out their practical report writing through English language, the students face problems not only in appropriate

grammar/structures usage and choose of vocabularies, but also in using the correct spelling, word capitalizations and suitable punctuations. In short, data from all sources show that the students face serious problems and commend linguistic errors when they write practical reports of their field practices through English language. They mainly face serious challenges and commit errors in choosing and graphing different appropriate vocabularies/words to generate and organize their ideas in concurrent manner so as to make their written texts clear and precise.

#### 4.2. Factors Impede Students to Use Proper English Language Items in Writing Reports

There are 14 items, as indicated on page 42, generated for the questionnaire data gathering tool concerning the possible factors that might impede the students to use appropriate linguistic aspects in writing practical reports of their practical works. These items were, thus, designed to find out the potential factors that enforce students to commit errors in using English language items when they carry out their practical report writing.

**Table 2: Factors Hamper Students to Use Appropriate English Language Items in Writing Practical Reports**

| N    | Statement  | Responses |       |           |       |          |       | Total respondents |
|------|--|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|----------|-------|-------------------|
|      |  | Agree     |       | Undecided |       | Disagree |       |                   |
|      |  | f         | %     | f         | %     | f        | %     |                   |
| 1    | My first Language unconsciously interferes when I write practical reports in English language.   | 141       | 78.13 | 15        | 8.33  | 24       | 13.54 | 180               |
| 1.1. | First, I think in Afan Oromo/ Amharic and then write practical reports in English.   | 148       | 82.29 | 6         | 3.13  | 26       | 14.58 | 180               |
| 2    | I am poor in grammar usage because I used to over generalize some grammar rules to all when I write practical reports in English language. | 144       | 80.21 | 15        | 8.33  | 21       | 11.46 | 180               |
| 3    | When I write a practical report, I never follow the patterns of good written practical reports by others.                                  | 17        | 9.44  | 28        | 15.56 | 135      | 75.00 | 180               |
| 3.1. | I used to mimic the patterns/models of others given to us by our teachers to write practical reports.                                      | 137       | 76.04 | 21        | 11.46 | 22       | 12.22 | 180               |
| 4    | I am poor in using appropriate English language items when I write practical reports since there is no opportunity to practice with it.    | 135       | 75.00 | 17        | 9.38  | 28       | 15.63 | 180               |
| 4.1. | I take every opportunity to practice any writing activities in English.  | 4         | 2.22  | 8         | 4.44  | 169      | 93.89 | 180               |
| 4.2. | I have lack of writing habit in my free time   | 120       | 66.67 | 28        | 15.63 | 32       | 17.70 | 180               |
| 5    | I am careless when I write in English language; because I do not have knowledge of the language items in writing technical reports.        | 135       | 75.00 | 11        | 6.25  | 34       | 18.75 | 180               |
| 5.1. | Due to this, I have no motivation to write practical reports through English language.   | 129       | 71.88 | 19        | 10.42 | 32       | 17.71 | 180               |

|      |   |     |       |    |       |    |       |     |
|------|---|-----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|-----|
| 5.2. | I do have negative attitude towards writing practical reports through English language            | 126 | 69.79 | 13 | 7.29  | 41 | 22.92 | 180 |
| 5.3. | I lose confidence and interest when I write practical reports through English language.           | 124 | 68.75 | 36 | 19.79 | 20 | 11.11 | 180 |
| 6    | I am poor in writing reports due to my weak background(weak foundation) in English language usage | 143 | 79.17 | 18 | 10.00 | 19 | 10.42 | 180 |
| 7    | I do not have adequate writing skill in English language to write practical reports.              | 128 | 70.83 | 26 | 14.58 | 26 | 14.58 | 180 |

Key: f= frequency

Regarding factors that hamper students to use appropriate linguistic features in writing practical reports of their practical works was discussed as follows.

Prior to discuss about the factors, the researcher, however, attempted to view how one's cognitive and metacognitive awarenesses are developed to enable him to be conscious about his own problems. The issue of cognitive and metacognitive awareness was, in fact, discussed in proofing and/or disproving with related theoretical and empirical literatures as follows.

Though it seems difficult to think as those students can give causal explanations about their not knowing to use suitable linguistic features in writing practical reports, the researcher again has undertaken to incorporate the students' responses with that of their teachers so as to gain ample indications of the factors of the problems/linguistic errors they might commit in connecting with his own experience obtained during data analysis.

The students' may not have sufficient theoretical background to know the fundamental hindering factors that impede them to use appropriate English language features in writing practical reports. However, some authorities have different views that since the students are advanced and found at the college level, they are expected to have, at least, basic cognitive skills with which they can think and pre-suppose of their proper linguistic using problems (Ellis, 2007). Regarding this, Dror (2007) states about one's awareness in such a way that since any human being has, at least, cognitive skills, with which he/she can imagine where he/she is and where he/she needs to get to reach in terms of skills and knowledge, it helps one as a ladder to think at his higher level of thinking. Supporting this idea of higher thinking ability, (Ellis, 2000:4) again claimed in such a way that "even quite young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge." This is to mean that people, at their certain level, can have the higher level of thinking ability with which they can notice and distinguish their surroundings.

Citing O'Malley *et al.* (1985), Ellis (2007:6) again asserted the points in such a way that students with no metacognitive approach (the higher level of thinking) can be taken as students with no aim in their learning activities. This, in the other way, implies that any advanced students have the consciousness to review and/or recall back to their progresses, activities and, even, predict their future learning directions.

From this, therefore, one can argue in such a way that the HATVET College students, who are selected for this study, could have both cognitive and metacognitive awareness, just at their level of education, which enable them to express/explain factors of their linguistic problems in writing practical reports.

Having these concepts of cognitive and metacognitive awareness in mind, the researcher attempted to reason out the potential factors that hamper students to use appropriate linguistic

features in incorporating the students and teachers' ideas. In doing this, data from the students, as presented on page 42 in table 2, were discussed jointly, as following, in assimilating them with that of data obtained from teachers through one-on-one interview approach and document analysis.

Hence, table 2 shows that a total of 78.13% of the students expressed their agreement that their first language unconsciously interferes and influences them not to use appropriate linguistic features when they write practical reports through English language. In similar manner, the students agreed towards the statement that they first think in their mother tongue and then write in English. Clearly put, 82.29% of the respondents reported towards the statement that they first think in Afan Oromo or Amharic and then write in English language. This shows that the students are conscious about the factors of their inability to use proper language features in writing practical reports through English. This is because, Ellis (2007) has forwarded similar view on the idea that students, at their certain stage of education, can be encouraged to critically reflect on what they are doing with providing possible reasons of why they are doing it. From this, one can say that by the time the students get to the college, they begin mastering basic skills which enable them to analyze the what and the why problems of their report writing. Hence, the students have the ability to explain, not only their linguistic errors but also, the factors of their not using appropriate linguistic features in writing practical reports.

In order to find more explanation on the students' first language interferences, as one factor, the researcher also engaged some purposively selected teachers in one-on-one interview. Concerning this, three of the teachers expressed their feelings on the issue that the students' frequent and excessive use of their mother tongue in and outside classes is highly influenced them in interfering and affecting their writing activities through English language.

In contrast, another teacher expressed his ideas in such a way that "most of the students also try to over generalize some English language rules to others. For example, they often attempt to add '-ed' to all verbs to present them in past form in their report writing." Regarding the points outlined by those teachers involved in individual interview, scholars have similar viewpoints. For example, Habash (1982) confirmed that some second language users unknowingly attempt to drive some rules they have been exposed to; and then, develop hypothesis that correspond neither to their mother tongue nor to the target language under use. In a related study, Cummins (1992) discovered that students of second language users depend on their first language for how to communicate, how to think critically, and write as strategy in their learning activities. In similar way, Al-khresheh (2011) argues that second language users produce deviant or ill-formed words/sentences by erroneously applying their previous knowledge of L2 rules and structures to new situations of writing activities.

Overall, one can say that second language users tend to borrow patterns of L1 from their mother tongue to the target language in written communications. Similarly, it is possible to infer from the above raised points that English language users, as their second language, try to extend its patterns unconsciously by analogy. That is, students expand, for instance, the use of some grammatical rules of linguistic items beyond their accepted use. This is simply done by making words or structures in following a more regular pattern. Hence, overgeneralization seems to cover instances where writers (students) create deviant structures in English language elements usage in their written communication.

In order to triangulate and create the holistic picture of data obtained through questionnaire and interview, the researcher also applied thorough internal document analysis. Regarding L1 and L2 interferences, it is, thus, common to observe inappropriate word graphing or word writing problems in the students' documents that some errors seem to occur due to unconscious pressure of first language word patterns. Overgeneralization of rules to all is the other problems observed

in the documents that some structures/forms of English language are erroneously used to be applied for all in the texts.

On the other hand, the students expressed some possible reasons of why they become careless and lose interest and motivation to write practical reports through English language. According to the data in table 2, 75% of the students reported their views that they become careless and so commit linguistic errors when they write practical reports in English language because they do not have sufficient knowhow of the language usage in writing reports. As a result of this, 71.88% of them agreed towards the statement that they have no motivation and interest to write reports through English language.

On their part, the teachers gave in-depth elaboration on the students' lack of motivation and interest to write reports of their practical works when they were involved in individual interview. One of the teachers, therefore, stated his experiences in such a way that "I have observed that most of my students are not willing to write reports of their field/laboratory practices in English language. They do not have internal drive and concern to come with well developed written reports in English language." On similar issue, another teacher added that "when I order my students to write reports of their field works, they become careless and lose confidence, interest and motivation to write reports in English language; they rather want to practice on fields without reporting in written form."

The same was observed from the students' actual documents evaluated that some of the words and sentences seem to be constructed carelessly with no attention. For instance, words such as 'du', 'may', 'tray', 'jermenate', as illustrated on page 36, are seemed to be written unconsciously, to write them as 'do', 'my', 'try', and 'germinate'. Citing Norish, 1983, Edge; 1989; Michaelides, 1990, Hailemariam (2011), argues that students may sometimes become careless and lose interests and produce something different in their writing activities due to lack of knowledge of the target language. On the whole, one can say that second language users unknowingly commit various linguistic errors in their writing activities due to lack of confidence, motivation and interest, which in turn are resulted from lack of the knowhow of the target language itself.

The students were also asked about the opportunity to practice writing activities with English language to maximize their skill; and, thus, expressed their beliefs in such a way that there is no opportunity to practice with it. Clearly put, 75% of the students agreed towards the statements that they are poor in use of the language items and thus commit errors when they write practical reports since there is no chance to deliberately practice writing activities through the language in the college.

On the other way, the respondents were requested whether or not they use every opportunity to write any activities in English; and 93.89% of them, thus, showed their disagreement towards the statement that they do not use every opportunity to practice whatever writing activities through English language. In addition, a total of 66.67% of the respondents agreed; whereas 15.63% of them are neutral and 17.70% of them disagreed towards the statement that they lack habit of writing, even, at their free time.

As clearly indicated in table 2 above, the students are also poor in using appropriate grammar to express their ideas and beliefs. They expressed the reasons why they are poor in grammar usage and commit errors in their report writing in such a way that they used to over generalize some grammar rules to all. Al-khresheh (2011) argues that second language users produce deviant or ill-formed words/sentences by erroneously applying their previous knowledge of L2 rules and structures to the new situations.

The students were also requested to rate what attitude they do have towards writing reports through English language; and they (69.79% of them), thus, expressed their feelings that they have negative attitude towards the language to write reports through it. This in turn negatively affects their writing activities.

On similar points, the researcher engaged teachers in individual interview. Regarding these points of focus, four of the teachers have similar idea with the quantitative data obtained through questionnaire that the students have no ample opportunity to practice writing activities through English language. The same teachers also added that the students have negative attitude towards English language to write reports; and also poor habits of writing at their leisure time. One of the teachers, however, has different viewpoints, particularly, on the students' attitude towards English language. He stated his feelings in such a way that "even if the students are poor in English language, they want to learn and know more about it... if they get the chance of practicing writing activities in it."

On the whole, it is possible to say that though the students are not yet competent in English language to write reports, they may develop positive attitude towards the language if they get the chance of practicing writing activities through English language

The students were also inquired about their writing skills in general; and most of them (70.83%), then, expressed their agreement that they do not have adequate writing skills through English language. As a result, most of them used to mimic the patterns of others given to them by their own teachers. Clearly put, 76.04% of the students stated their agreement that they used to mimic (copy) some patterns/procedures from the other already written model reports given to them by their own teachers. Furthermore, the interview data supported the quantitative data that all the interviewees expressed their feelings, by and large, that the students do not have sufficient practical report writing skills through English language. On the same issue, one of the interviewees stressed about the insufficient practical report writing skills of the students in such a way that "for your surprise, the students' English language ability is totally found below the standard; [which], often make their writing skills poor."

The same was observed from the students' document analysis that most of the sentences and paragraphs indicate as the developers of the materials are being poor in their practical report writing skills.

At the end, the students' confidences of writing in English language had been called into attention; and were thus asked how they feel when they write reports of their practical works through the language. A total of 68.75% of the students, then, expressed their conformity to the statement that they lose confidence when they write reports through English language.

On the whole, much can be said from both quantitative and qualitative data obtained that the students face serious problems and commit linguistic errors in writing practical reports through English language. It is possible to finalize the points in such a way that the students' linguistic problems/errors can be attributed to their weak background and environmental influences. By the students poor background the researcher mean that it is directly related to the students' previous language ability at their lower and high school classes, the students' lack of motivation, confidence, positive attitude towards the language, and interest to write practical reports through English language; whereas, by environmental reasons he means that the students' frequent use of mother tongue and nil opportunities to practice writing activities through English language in and outside the classes at the college.

In short, data from those three sources indicate that the students' first and second language interferences, lack of knowhow of the language features, nil opportunity to practice writing

activities through English language at the college, lack of motivation, interest, confidence and positive attitude towards the language to write reports through it, and poor writing habits at their leisure time were identified as the main factors that impede students from using appropriate language features in writing practical reports. Regarding this, Hailemariam (2011) confirmed some hindering factors in such a way that students' weak foundation, absence of writing activities at schools and the students' lack of writing habits are common factors to commit linguistic errors in writing activities.

### 4.3. Strategies Being Used to Overcome the Students' Report Writing Problems

Items 1-5, below, were designed to assess strategies being used to overcome the students' practical report writing problems through English language. The items were, thus, designed to hold different strategies to be used to overcome practical report writing errors in using English language.

**Table 3:** Items Related to Strategies Being Used to Overcome Practical Report Writing Problems through English Language

| N | Statement   | Responses |       |           |       |          |       | Total respondents |
|---|---|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|----------|-------|-------------------|
|   |   | Agree     |       | Undecided |       | Disagree |       |                   |
|   |   | f         | %     | f         | %     | f        | %     |                   |
| 1 | I used to study formats and emulate (copy) models of good writing to replicate the similar one as a strategy.             | 150       | 83.33 | 6         | 3.13  | 24       | 13.54 | 180               |
| 2 | I use a collaborative writing strategy sometimes to plan, draft, and edit texts with friends.                             | 75        | 41.67 | 30        | 16.67 | 75       | 41.67 | 180               |
| 3 | I use extended writing (process writing) to practice more on how to write practical reports to overcome writing problems. | 4         | 2.08  | 18        | 10.00 | 158      | 87.50 | 180               |
| 4 | Since I cannot manipulate English language, I use my first language to write practical reports.                           | 19        | 10.42 | 33        | 18.33 | 128      | 70.83 | 180               |
| 5 | I use prewriting strategies to produce and clarify ideas before starting to write practical reports in English language.  | 17        | 9.38  | 24        | 13.54 | 139      | 77.08 | 180               |

**Key: f= frequency**

Table 3 deals with the strategies being used to overcome practical report writing problems through English language. Responses were, then, provided by the students that they use, at most, to follow models of good writing as a strategy; and then replicate the similar one in modifying to their own words. However, sometimes a collaborative writing strategy to plan, draft and edit texts with friends was also mentioned as the second strategy to reduce their English language problems/errors in writing practical reports. This can be expressed from the data in table 3 that 83.33% of the students reported their agreement towards the statement that they use to study and copy some patterns/forms of others or models of good writing reports as a strategy and replicate the similar one in re modifying to their own words. Some of them (41.67%), however, expressed their ideas that they sometimes use a collaborative writing strategy to plan, draft, and edit texts



with friends. The same percentage (41.67) of the respondents, yet, expressed their disagreement that they do not use a collaborative writing strategy to plan, draft and edit texts with friends.

To get their views and experiences on the issue, the researcher engaged the teachers in the hybrid one-on-one discussion approach. Four of them, thus, expressed similar ideas in such a way that they often give models of good written reports for their students so as to enable the students draw attention to relevant features and procedures of the reports; and, then, attempt to replicate in their own words. According to these teachers, they give written models to their students because their interest is on the written product of their practical works rather than on how they should approach the process of writing.

In contrast, two of the respondents agreed that they rather give report writing formats and titles for each of their students in allowing them to work together, where a better student is assigned, to enable them to generate, plan and edit their texts with their friends. The two teachers, however, reported the problem of allowing students to work in group that some group members tend to rely on a better writer of the group and copy from him/her and submit it as it is just his/her own work. Regarding the strategies outlined above by both the students and teachers involved in the study, scholars have different viewpoints. For example, Collins (2008) argued that study of good models provides students with opportunities to read, analyze and emulate some structures to replicate the similar one.

On the other hand, a collaborative writing strategy also uses instructional arrangements in which students work together to generate ideas, plan, draft and edit their texts to overcome their mutual writing errors they commit in writing technical reports through English (ibid). In a related study, Pawapatcharodom (2007), however, disagreed with the idea that effective writers often apply more strategies when they deal with writing activities; whereas, less effective writers apply limited strategies infrequently or inappropriately in their writing tasks. On the whole, one can say from these that using more strategies help encourage a writer and make his/her writing activities faster, easier, and effective. Hence, more writing strategies are important tools that students should deliberately use them to apply in their practical report writing activities so as to keep and make their written texts go smooth and come out in the way they are intended to be. The strategies being used by both teachers and students were, however, very limited that they are not sufficient to make the students' practical report writing effective and efficient.

The students were also asked whether or not they use extended writing strategy to practice more on how to write practical reports and improve their writing problems; and, thus, 87.50% of them stated their disagreement that they do not use extended writing (process writing) strategy to practice more on how to write practical reports to overcome their writing problems. Similarly, 77.08% of the students declared their disagreement that they do not use prewriting strategies to produce and clarify their ideas.; rather they use to study models of good writing and duplicate the similar one as a strategy to simplify the problems they commend.

On similar issue, the researcher again incorporated the teachers' viewpoints; and one of the teachers, thus, stated his feelings in such a way that "since our primary interest is on the end product/result of the students' practical work, we do not seek more writing strategies and let our students apply in their report writing activities." On their part, the other interviewed teachers also suggested that using more strategies could make the students' report writing effective and efficient; even though the main objective of their students to write reports is just to check whether or not their students understand the intent of the courses they have practiced at the real practical sessions. In this case, one can, again, say that though using more strategies such as, extended/process and pre-writing strategies, are believed to make the students' report writing effective and acceptable, they were not given attention by both teachers and students since their focus is merely on the final product of the students' work, rather than on how they approach to the report writing process through English language. Regarding this, different scholars have forwarded different viewpoints. For instance, Rivers (1981) argued that in process writing approach, students are believed to get ample opportunities to look at how to generate and

organize their ideas, how to express them logically, and how to draft and produce readable texts. In similar way, Hedge (1988), preferred and encouraged the process writing approach to be practiced more by writers/students in discouraging the product oriented writing approach, which aims at the end result of the given work; whereas Escholz (1980) pointed out that the product writing approach encourages students to use the same plan in a multitude of settings, applying the same formats regardless of content, thereby, help reduce time and energy consumption in the computing stage of the result.

## **5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section of the study deals with general overview, conclusions and recommendations of the study. Hence, summary of the nature and general experience of the study, conclusions drawn on the basis of the research findings, and recommendations that are assumed to be useful to alleviate the problems are presented in the section.

### **5.1. Summary**

It is true that report writing is one of the important technical skills to be exercised by College students that it is believed to provide them a permanent record of information and clear knowledge on the topics of assessments/practices. As noted earlier in the introductory section of this research work, the general objective of the study was to assess the linguistic errors /problems students encounter in writing practical reports through English language at Holeta ATVET College. In addition, the study had been designed to specifically address the three basic questions outlined in chapter one. In dealing with these basic research questions, therefore, relevant data were gathered through questionnaire, interview and document analysis in applying mixed research method approach. The quantitative data obtained from randomly selected students through questionnaire were interpreted and analyzed using frequency counting and percentage statistical tools; whereas, the other data gained through interview and document analysis were analyzed qualitatively. In order to create the holistic picture of both quantitative and qualitative data obtained through different sources, the researcher integrated and discussed them all jointly under key successive topics of the study. Based on the analysis made, summary of the findings is briefly organized as follows.

The findings of the study revealed that the students confront several problems in writing practical reports of their practical works through English language. Most of the students, thus, found it difficult to use all the essential features of written language to compose practical reports of their field/laboratory practices. It was also discovered that the students' linguistic errors in writing practical reports were mainly attributed to their weak/poor background/lack of prior knowledge on the language; and to some environmental factors. The findings again indicated that very local, limited and/or insufficient writing strategies were being used to overcome the students' report writing problems through English language.

### **5.2. Conclusions**

From the data presentations and discussions conducted above, the following conclusions have been made on the students' linguistic problems in report writing activities, factors that impede them to use proper English language features in writing practical reports, and strategies being used to overcome the problems. Hence, major findings and their implications have been drawn and set as follows.

The findings of the study revealed that the students encounter several problems and, thus, commit various linguistic errors in writing practical reports of their practical works through English language. It was found that while carrying out their report writing activities through English language, the students face serious problems, especially, in word selection and graphing, in using appropriate grammar/structures, spelling, capitalizations, punctuations, and in idea generating and organizing using appropriate linking words. This can be expressed in other way that the students commit serious linguistic errors when they use English language to write practical reports of their practical works.

As data from document analysis showed, most of the writing errors seem to be resulted from inadequate lexical awareness, misuse of words (faulty word order), poor construction of sentences, lack of subject and verb agreement, lack of consistency of tense and person in a given sentence, and over dependency on few words to express different ideas. The document analysis again showed that the third-person singular marker is frequently missed.

Long sentences with superfluous of synonymous words, lack of lexical variety or heavy reliance on a word redundancy that does not add any new information to the text were the other serious problems observed in the students' documents. It is true that the longer and more complex a sentence with extra words, the harder it is for readers to understand, even, any single portion of it. Hence, a sentence must have a sound structure to understand its intended meaning. This, therefore, implies that the students are not good at manipulating the essential written English language features when they write technical reports of their practical works.

Based on the findings, the students linguistic errors/problems could also be attributed to their weak back ground/lack of knowledge, first language interference and meddling of some patterns/rules/ of English language itself in word graphing, nil opportunity to practice writing activities in English at the college level, students' lack of motivation, interest and lose of confidence to write practical reports through English language,

It was again found that most of the students rely on given procedures and models of good written technical reports as strategy to write practical reports through English language in altering some of its patterns/structures to their own style; whereas some of them use a collaborative writing strategy in which a better student is assigned to help others in planning, drafting and editing texts before individually submitting to their teachers. These were some strategies being used by both teachers and students to overcome the students' practical report writing problems through English language.

Generally, the findings of the study demonstrated that the students face several challenges and commit linguistic errors in writing reports of their practical works through English language. All the factors of the problems that the students encounter in writing practical reports could be classified into two as the students' poor background and environmental reasons. The strategies being used were also very limited, local and insufficient to overcome the report writing problems through English language. This, in general, indicates that the students' current academic situation is negatively affected, which will also affect them in their future working environment.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

It is important for any advanced students to clearly know features of written English language; because the features help them address effective communications at the level of their readers' satisfaction. Since writing practical report is one genre of writing in colleges' learning activities, knowing how it is developed in using effective written aspects of English language facilitates it to be communicated clearly and precisely. Based on the above conclusions, the following

recommendations have been made so as to alleviate the students' linguistic errors in writing practical reports through English language.

- ❖ Since report writing is a technical writing skill that could be improved through ample practicing, the ATVET College students should have been given chance of learning the linguistic features of written English to effectively use them and pass on the intended meaning of their practical reports.
- ❖ Concerned government bodies should consider the factors that impede the ATVET college students to use appropriate English language features to write effective practical reports of their practical works and, hence, design English courses for the Students to equip them with the features.
- ❖ Teachers should also create encouraging report writing learning environments to motivate their students to enable them to develop effective and readable reports of their practical works.
- ❖ Since using more writing strategies helps make their writing activities effective, efficient, easier and faster, ATVET College students should often apply known writing strategies in their practical report writing activities.
- ❖ As the current study has given due attention only to the ATVET College students' writing problems through English language, the findings cannot be generalized to other aspects of the language. It seems, thus, very important to conduct similar studies focusing on the other areas of the language in some other new settings.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| AAU     | Addis Ababa University  |
| ATVET   | Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training                |
| COC     | Center of Competence  |
| EFL     | English as a Foreign Language   |
| ELL     | English Language Learning   |
| ELT     | English Language Teaching   |
| HATVETC | Holeta Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training College |
| HU      | Haramaya University   |
| L1      | First Language  |
| L2      | Second Language   |
| MoE     | Ministry of Education   |
| NC      | National Certificate  |
| TEFL    | Teaching English as a Foreign Language                                  |
| TVET    | Technical Vocational Education and Training                             |