

# An analysis of the spelling errors in the written English of Kenyan pre-university students

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## Abstract

There has been a big outcry in the field of English language learning about the ‘falling levels of proficiency in English’ or ‘the falling standards of English’ among students, particularly at high school level. Students cannot spell nor can they write ‘error-free’ sentences, the complaints say. Errors of spelling rank first amongst all the different types of grammatical and lexical errors recognised from the language performance data from native English college-level students and from those for whom English is a second language. Much of such language data are either single samples obtained from a few students or small randomly chosen samples of test or examination scripts in English composition papers. This paper uses a corpus-based approach to describe the types of spelling errors in the written English of Kenyan pre-university students. It concludes that there are a variety of sources for the differences in the sound system of English and the first language of the students in the study. The paper goes on to advocate (i) the teaching of spelling, and (ii) the inclusion of a contrastive analysis approach in the pedagogy of the English language course for ESL students, and for the Kenyan students in particular.

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