

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the test with the aid of tables to show the scores of individual students, scores obtained in relation to items, the frequency count and percentage of correct and incorrect choice of articles, answers given by students in relation to items pertaining to the different types of articles and also a description and analysis of the errors.

5.1 Overview of Results

The test was administered by the researcher with the help of a German language teacher (Teacher B) at the German Malaysian Institute (GMI) in November 2006. The test contained 50 fill-in-the-blank questions (where questions 41 – 50 were in the form of a cloze passage) and the students were given 30 minutes to answer all of them. The subjects used in this study were undergoing a German A-Level Preparatory Programme (GAPP) and there were 21 learners in the class, 16 of whom were males, while 5 were females. A copy of the test is attached in Appendix 1.

A tabulation of the students' scores is given in Table 5.1a on the next page. The scores obtained by the students ranged from 38% to 88%. The mean was 59.91% and only 10 students (47.62%) obtained scores higher than the mean. The majority of the students scored between 52% - 70% (13 students or 61.90% of the students). These results were not particularly good because these students had had at least 660 hours of German lessons and had sat for their *Zertifikat Deutsch* (German Certificate) Exams. The researcher expected better results as the grammatical items being tested were what they

had learnt before and most of the test items were taken from their textbooks and workbooks.

Table 5.1a: Scores Obtained by Students (in descending order)

Subject	Male (M) / Female (F)	Score %
10	M	88
11	M	86
19	F	74
5	F	72
20	F	70
12	M	68
14	M	62
3	M	62
18	M	60
2	M	60
1	M	56
13	M	56
7	M	54
9	M	54
15	M	54
17	F	54
8	M	52
4	F	48
6	M	48
16	M	46
21	M	38

Table 5.1b below is a tabulation of scores obtained in relation to the fifty (50) test items. The scores were arranged in descending order. From the fifty items, the calculation of the scores for seven (7) items (items 4, 7, 9, 12, 13, 22 and 29) were based on 20 respondents (not 21) as there was an omission of answer by a candidate for each item.

Table 5.1b: Scores Obtained in Relation to Test Items

%	Item(s)
100	7, 30, 38, 39, 46
95.24	1, 40, 45
95.0	4
90.48	18, 19, 21, 37, 49
85.71	5, 11, 27
80.95	33, 20
71.43	14, 47
66.67	36
61.90	2, 24
57.14	6, 10, 15, 26, 41
52.38	8, 34
47.62	50
42.86	23, 35
38.10	32, 44
35.0	12, 29
33.33	25, 42, 43
30.0	22
28.57	17, 48
23.81	16
20.0	13
19.05	3
14.29	31
5.0	9
4.76	28

As shown in Table 5.1b, it can be seen that only 5 out of the 50 grammar items tested were correctly answered by all the students. They are items 7, 30, 38, 39 and 46. Item 7 is a question pertaining to “zero article”, items 30 and 46 are questions pertaining to definite articles, whereas item 38 pertains to an indefinite article and 39 to the contracted form (preposition + definite article). For each of these items, as shown below, the original German sentence is followed by its English translation.

Item 7 Ich weiß nicht. Als ich in (-) Madrid gelebt habe, hat mir das Großstadtleben eigentlich sehr gut gefallen.

I don't know. As I was living in Madrid, I actually liked the life in a big city.

The 100% correct calculation for this item is based on the answers given by twenty respondents. The respondents gave the right answer to this item and it seems to indicate they remember the grammar rule that with most names of continents, countries or towns, the article will be omitted (discussed earlier in section 3.2.3(v)). One respondent had omitted to give any answer for this test item. This omission had not been counted as an error.

Item 30 Die Tasche gefällt mir nicht. Darum kaufe ich *sie* nicht.

I don't like the bag. Therefore I'm not buying it.

Every candidate of the test (21 of them) gave the right answer to this item and it seems to indicate that they remembered the gender form of 'Tasche'. But even if they had forgotten the gender form, or even if they did not remember that 90% of the nouns ending with 'e' are feminine nouns, the pronoun 'sie' in the second sentence would have given the students an indication of the gender of the noun and cued them to the correct definite article die.

Item 46 die ganze Familie

.... the whole family

The students knew that 'Familie' is a feminine noun and based on the context of the sentence, the definite article die is used. This indicated that the students did remember the rule concerning feminine nouns mentioned above.

Item 38 Können Sie mir noch ein Glas Mineralwasser bringen?

Can you please bring me another glass of mineral water?

Item 39 Ich gehe jetzt ins Kino.

I'm going to the cinema now.

The phrases *‘ein Glas Mineralwasser’* and *‘ins Kino gehen’* in items 38 and 39 were found in the students’ textbooks and workbooks. This could be due to the fact that the students did a lot of practice exercises when they were taught Chapter 3 *Themen Neu/Aktuell 1* (for item 38) and Chapters 4, 7 and 8 (for item 39) of the same book as verified by their teacher during the interview. This could explain why they all answered items 38 and 39 correctly. The subjects also did relatively well for items 1, 40 and 45 (95.24%), item 4 (95%), and items 18, 19, 21, 37 and 49 (90.48%).

The students encountered most difficulty with items 9 and 28 because as the scores showed, only 5% managed to answer correctly for item 9 and 4.76% for item 28. Item 9 is a question pertaining to the contracted form (preposition + definite article) and item 28 pertains to the “zero article”.

Item 9 Ich war gerade beim Chef.
 I was just at the boss’ office.

Like item 7, there was a candidate who omitted to answer this question. Based on the calculation of only 20 students, 95% of the students gave the wrong answer for this question. One of the probable reasons for this could be that the students did not know that this question required them to use the contracted form of the preposition *‘bei’* + the definite article *‘dem’* (because *‘Chef’* is a masculine noun and *‘bei’* always takes the dative case), *‘beim’*. 85.71% of the students gave various forms of the indefinite article as an answer (*‘einen’* – 55%, *‘ein’* – 30% and *‘einem’* – 5%), and another 5% gave *‘den’* as an answer (definite article which is used for a masculine noun in the singular in the accusative case or for a plural noun in the dative case). The high number of subjects who committed this error seems to indicate that the use of prepositions is a problematic area. This could be because the use of articles involves complex rules which make it hard for learners to master. For example, the English preposition *‘at’* (as in the abovementioned Item 9) has different prepositional forms in German depending on the

noun/phrase as shown by the examples given below (all taken from PONS, 2001: 42 - 43):

She's standing <u>at</u> the bar.	Sie steht <u>an</u> der Theke.
Our train leaves <u>at</u> 2.00.	Unser Zug fährt <u>um</u> 2.00 Uhr.
my number <u>at</u> the office	meine Nummer <u>im</u> Büro
to stay <u>at</u> home	<u>zu</u> Hause bleiben
<u>at</u> a time	<u>auf</u> einmal

Therefore it could be concluded that either the students have not learnt the grammar part thoroughly enough or they have not had enough practice before the exam or they have not fully grasped the concepts of German prepositions.

Item 28 pertains to zero article. Many subjects got this item wrong probably because of English Language influence, as most of the students have also acquired English as a second language in Malaysia, while German is probably their third or fourth language.

Item 28 Sie ist (-) Ärztin.
She is a (female) doctor.

85.71% of the students gave the correct form of the indefinite article (feminine noun in nominative case) 'eine' and 9.52% gave the correct form of the definite article 'die'. This shows that the students know that 'Ärztin' is a feminine noun because they have mastered the rule that nouns denoting a profession and ending with 'in' are feminine nouns (Chapter 3.1.1). The above two answers are correct if there is a contextual situation. But the students seem to have forgotten the rule that the article is omitted after *sein*, *werden*, *bleiben*, and *als*, and also before nouns denoting a profession or nationality (mentioned in Chapter 3.2.3 (ii)). It is likely that the students were influenced by English, where an indefinite article 'a' is a must for the sentence in English. This mistake is not caused by interference by their mother tongue, Malay. In Malay, there is no need for the use of a classifier (*penjodoh bilangan*) when forming

this type of sentences (Othman, 2000: 3). It is noted that the students had been learning English since primary school and all of them obtained either an A1 or A2 for their SPM English. Hence the error committed was due most probably to the negative transfer from English.

Item 31 Was essen Sie nicht? - Ich esse kein Gemüse.

What don't you eat? - I don't eat vegetables.

Only 14.29% of the students had the correct answer for item 31 (pertaining to the indefinite article in the negative / *Negativer Artikel*), 80.95% gave *keine* and 4.76% gave *die* as an answer. The score for this item seems to indicate that the majority of the students either did not know that '*Gemüse*' is an uncountable noun or they did not know that the gender for it is '*das*' (neuter) and not '*die*' (feminine). As 80.95% of the students gave '*keine*' as an answer, another possible reason for this error could be due to negative transfer or interference from English, where the plural form (vegetables) would be used, hence the answer '*keine*'. The knowledge that 90% of German nouns ending with 'e' are feminine could also be the reason that students gave '*keine*' as an answer. Only one student (4.76%) used the wrong article; instead of a *Negativer Artikel*, he used a definite article. This shows that the student has not mastered the use of '*nicht/kein*', words which are used to negate verbs/things in German.

The abovementioned three (3) items (items 9, 28 and 31) were discussed in details because these three items represent the worst performance, out of all the fifty test items. Items 3 and 13 seemed to have posed difficulties too as only 19.05% (for item 3) and 20% (for item 13) of the students managed to answer them correctly, and as for item 16, only 23.81% did so. Other items where the scores are less than 50% are items 22 (30%), items 17 and 48 (28.57%), items 25, 42 and 43 (33.33%), items 12 and 29 (35%), items 32 and 44 (38.10%), items 23 and 35 (42.86%) and item 50 (47.62%).

As can be seen from Table 5.1b, the scores for 38% of the test items (19 out of the 50 items) were below 50% (ranging from 4.76% to 47.62%). This is quite a high percentage taking into accounts that the students had had at least 660 hours of German lessons and all the grammar items pertaining to the use of German articles had been taught to them. This shows that the students do have a problem in the use of German articles. The following sections will discuss the errors in the use of articles made by the students in detail.

5.2 Choice of Articles

Table 5.2: Frequency of Correct and Incorrect Choice of Articles

Items	Total number of possible correct answers	Correct answers given by the subjects	Results (%)	Incorrect answers given by the subjects	Results (%)
<i>Negativer Artikel</i>	144	72	50.00	72	50.00
Preposition + Definite Articles (Contracted)	229	116	50.66	113	49.34
Zero Article	166	101	60.84	65	39.16
Definite Articles	336	226	67.26	110	32.74
Indefinite Articles	168	118	70.24	50	29.76
Total	1,043	633	60.69	410	39.31

This section will discuss the data on the subjects' choice of articles. It will first discuss the use of negative article, followed by preposition + definite articles (contracted), zero article, indefinite articles and lastly definite articles.

The table above (Table 5.2) shows the frequency of the correct and incorrect choice of articles. Out of the 1,043 possible answers of the five categories of items tested, the students gave 633 correct answers, or 60.69% correct choices of articles. The results

indicate that out of the five choices of articles: (i) *negativer Artikel*, (ii) preposition + definite articles (contracted), (iii) zero article, (iv) definite articles and (v) indefinite articles, the students had most difficulty with sentences that require *negativer Artikel*. 50.00% of the answers involving the use of the *negativer Artikel* were incorrect. Next is the category of the use of preposition + definite article (contracted), 49.34%, followed by zero article, 39.16%. The students seemed to have slightly less difficulty when it came to the use of definite and indefinite articles, where the incorrect answers were 32.74% and 29.76% respectively. Ignorance of the gender of the nouns, the case of the nouns, or the context of the sentence, due to the negative transfer from English, or even carelessness could have caused the students to make errors, thus giving the incorrect answers.

5.2.1 Negative Article (*Negativer Artikel*)

The items in the test relating to negative article were items 1, 12, 13, 29, 31, 33 and 36.

Table 5.2.1: Answers to Items Pertaining to ‘*Negativer Artikel*’

Item	1	33	36	12	29	13	31
% of correct answers	95.24 kein	80.95 keine	66.67 keine	35.00 keinen	35.00 kein	20.00 keinen	14.2 kein
% of incorrect answers	4.76 keine	4.76 kein 4.76 ein 4.76 (-) 4.76 die	14.29 kein 4.76 keinen 4.76 (-) 4.76 die 4.76 zwei	40.00 keine 5.00 kein 10.00 den 5.00 die 5.00 (-)	20.00 keine 20.00 keinen 5.00 den 10.00 das 5.00 ein 5.00 (-)	45.00kein 25.00 (-) 5.00 einen 5.00 den	80.95 keine 4.76 die

Based on the results shown in Table 5.2.1 above, more than half of the students had difficulty answering questions pertaining to *negativer Artikel* (the negative form of the indefinite articles). Only 14.2% of the students answered item 31 correctly, whereas 20.00% for item 13, 35.00 % for items 29 and 12 respectively. As mentioned before in section 5.1, the calculation for items 13, 29 and 12 are based on 20 respondents only.

Besides item 31 (which has been discussed earlier), the following *negativer Artikel* items are found in the test:

Item 13 Nein danke, ich mag keinen Wodka. Ich trinke fast nie Alkohol.

No thanks, I don't like vodka. I almost never drink alcohol.

For the above item, 'Nein danke' requires the use of *negativer Artikel* to negate and 'keinen' is the correct answer as Wodka is a masculine noun and it is an accusative object in the sentence. 20.00% of the students produced the correct answer and the majority of the students (45.00%) gave another form of the *negativer Artikel* (*kein*) as an answer. Unfortunately it did not agree with the noun. Most probably, the students did not remember the rule that alcoholic drinks are masculine nouns with the exception of beer / 'das Bier' (mentioned in section 3.1.2.1d), or the students forgot that they need to decline the *negativer Artikel* in the accusative case for masculine nouns. This error could also have been caused by the interference from their mother tongue or second language, where there is no declension for 'tidak', and 'no' or 'not'. Hence it could be a negative transfer from Malay or English. 25.00% thought the sentence requires no article. Another 5.00% chose the correct declension of the definite and indefinite article of the masculine noun in the singular in the accusative case (*den, einen*) respectively. The results reveal that 35.00% of the students (25% + 5% + 5%, i.e. those who gave all other incorrect answers, except 'kein' for this item) either have not fully mastered the use of *negativer Artikel* to negate a noun or they have problems understanding the meaning of the sentence when phrases like 'Nein danke' and 'fast nie' are used, which require a negative answer.

Item 29 Leider mag sie kein Obst.

Unfortunately, she doesn't like fruit.

35.00% of the students gave the correct answer 'kein' for the above item. 20.00% wrote 'keine' and most probably these students thought 'Obst' is either a feminine noun (as another word for 'fruit' in German is 'Frucht', which is a feminine noun) or they did not know that it exists only in the singular form, when they gave 'keine' as an answer. Another 20.00% might have thought it to be a masculine noun, therefore they wrote 'keinen' as an answer. The error could be caused by the students' ignorance of the grammar rule (wrong choice of article), or their incomplete application of the grammar rule, or wrong conceptualization of hypothesis, or even over generalization. 25.00% appeared to have problems using the *negativer Artikel* because 15.00% used the definite articles (5% 'den' and 10% 'das'), 5.00% used the indefinite article 'ein' and 5.00% thought the sentence did not require an article.

Item 12 Nein danke, um diese Uhrzeit trinke ich keinen Tee mehr, sonst kann ich nicht schlafen.

No thanks, around this time I don't drink tea anymore, otherwise I can't sleep.

Surprisingly, only 35.00% of the students gave the correct answer (*keinen*) for this item. 'Tee' is in the basic vocabulary list of any German language learner at elementary level, hence it would have been expected that these students would have known it as a masculine noun. 40.00% thought of it either as a feminine (most likely as the word ends with an 'e') or plural noun, when they gave 'keine' as an answer. 5.00% thought it was a neuter noun wrote 'kein'. 20.00% (10.00+ [2 x 5.00]) seemed to have problems using *negativer Artikel* because 10.00% used the masculine definite article in accusative 'den' and 5.00% wrote the definite article 'die' and 5.00% assumed the sentence required no article.

Item 36 Ich habe leider keine Geschwister.

I have unfortunately no siblings. / Unfortunately, I have no siblings.

The students fared fairly well for this item. 66.67% gave the correct answer, 'keine'. 14.29% thought that 'Geschwister' was a neuter noun (they wrote 'kein') and 4.76% thought it was a masculine noun and wrote 'keinen'. They did not remember that 'Geschwister' is one of those German nouns that only exist in the plural form (mentioned in section 3.1.3.1b 2). 14.28% (3 x 4.76) of the students had difficulty using the *negativer Artikel*. These students used the zero article, the feminine definite article (*die*) and 'zwei' (two) as answers. This reveals that these students might have problems understanding or mastering the function of the adverb 'leider' (unfortunately) in a sentence that requires them to give a negative answer (to negate). For those who answered 'zwei', it might have been due to rote learning in the classroom without understanding at all. It is typical in any German language class to encounter questions and answers as below:

Wie viele Geschwister haben Sie? / Haben Sie Geschwister?

How many siblings do you have? / Do you have siblings?

Ich habe zwei Geschwister. / Ja, ich habe fünf Geschwister.

I have two siblings. / Yes, I have five siblings.

It is also the same for item 33.

Item 33 Sie haben noch keine Kinder.

They still have no children.

The word 'noch' (still) functions as a particle in the sentence and a negation would be expected. 4.76% of the students gave the zero article and another 4.76% provided the definite article in the plural (*die*) as the answer. 4.76% wrote 'ein' (a neuter indefinite

article) and this shows that the student did not know that ‘*Kinder*’ is the plural form of ‘*Kind*’ (a neuter noun) and the use of the indefinite article would not be acceptable for plural nouns. Only 4.76% (or one student) wrote ‘*kein*’, the *negativer Artikel* for a singular neuter noun in the accusative. 80.95% used the correct form of the *negativer Artikel*, ‘*keine*’.

Item 1 Tut mir leid, aber ich habe kein Geld.

I’m sorry, but I have no money.

Item 1 is the only item in this category (*negativer Artikel*) where the students did very well. 95.24% gave the correct answer ‘*kein*’ (*negativer Artikel* for the neuter noun in accusative) and only 4.76% seemed to fail to remember that ‘*Geld*’ is a neuter noun and gave ‘*keine*’ (a *negativer Artikel* for a feminine noun or the plural form) as the answer. Another reason for this incorrect answer might be the influence of the phrase ‘*keine Zeit*’ (no time), hence, it became ‘*keine Geld*’.

5.2.2 Preposition + Definite Articles (Contracted)

Table 5.2.2 on the next page displays all the answers given by students in relation to items pertaining to the contracted form (preposition + definite articles) except for item 39, which is not included in this table because all the students gave the correct answer for it. As shown in the Table 5.2.2, the students had items 34, 24, 27 and 37 correct with the percentages ranging from 52.38% to 90.48%. As for items 9, 17, 22, 25, 42 and 43, the percentage of correct answers range from 4.76% to 33.33%.

Besides item 9 (discussed earlier in section 5.1), there are also a few other items under this category which revealed that students found it hard to master this grammar item. Below are three (3) examples where the students’ scores represent the worst

performance (items 17, 22 and 25) and an example that represents the best performance (item 37):

Item 17 Ich habe das vom Chef gehört. / Ich habe das beim Chef gehört.

I heard that from the boss. / I heard that at the boss'.

23.81% gave 'vom' and 4.76% wrote 'beim' as the answer for the above item. Both words are accepted as answers by German language teachers and native speakers. Based on the answers given, all the students showed that they knew 'Chef' is a masculine noun. But 61.91% of them did not know that the sentence required a preposition + definite article because 47.62% thought it did not require any article, while 14.29% gave 'einen' (indefinite masculine noun in the accusative) as the answer. This seems to indicate that the majority of the students have not mastered the use of this form. 4.76% chose 'zum' as the answer without fully realizing that the preposition 'zu' indicates movement (except for the expression 'zu Hause' / at home). The answer would have been correct if the verb 'gehen' (to go) was used instead of 'hören' ('to hear', or in this case 'habe gehört'). 4.76% also put forth 'am' as an answer. A possible explanation for this choice 'am' is the English interference 'at the', which the student might have thought was the equivalent in German.

Item 22 Ich habe mich beim Skifahren verletzt.

I injured myself at skiing.

For this item, the calculation is based on 20 students, not 21. 30.00% of the students gave the correct answer, 'beim', the preposition 'bei' + 'dem' (definite article for neuter nouns in the dative) in the contracted form. 35.00% of them did not know that this sentence required the use of the contracted form (preposition + definite article) because 10.00% gave 'die' and 'den' as their answers respectively, and another 5.00% each for definite article 'der' and indefinite article 'einem', whereas another 5.00% thought this question required no article. Another 35.00% of the students who gave incorrect

answers knew that this sentence required a preposition + definite article. These findings strongly indicate that the majority of the students do have problems with this item. Students who committed the error might not have had enough practice to consolidate what they had learnt earlier, or they found the rules hard to master due to their complexity, and because they are very different from Malay and English.

Item 25 Ich lege das Buch ins Regal. / Ich lege das Buch aufs Regal.
I put the book into the shelf. / I lay the book on the shelf.

Similar to item 17, two different answers for item 25 are acceptable. 19.05% wrote ‘*ins*’ and 14.29% wrote ‘*aufs*’. The preposition ‘*in*’ + ‘*das*’, the definite article for a neuter noun in singular, are contracted to form ‘*ins*’, which indicates the book is being put inside the shelf or into the shelf. The use of the preposition ‘*auf*’ + ‘*das*’ in the form of ‘*aufs*’ conveys that the book is being put on the shelf (perhaps on top). The rest of the students gave a variety of other prepositions that are not acceptable as answers. 9.52% (or two students) used the correct preposition ‘*auf*’ + definite article ‘*das*’, but this is an error because they are not contracted (the preposition and the definite article) as the sentence does not require the article to be emphasized or stressed (section 3.2.1.2 iv a). This error is caused by their incomplete application of the grammar rule.

Item 37 Ich gehe am Nachmittag ins Schwimmbad.
In the afternoon, I go to the swimming pool.

Although the students scored well for item 37, in which 90.48% gave the correct answer ‘*am*’, the findings revealed that there is still one student (4.76%) who did not know that this item required a preposition. This indicates that not all the students have mastered this particular form. It also shows that either rote learning in Chapter 7 *Themen neu / Aktuell 1* was not very successful or this particular student might not have had enough practice in this area. In Chapter 7 of the students’ *Themen Workbook*, phrases such as ‘*am Morgen, am Mittag, am Nachmittag, am Abend*’ and ‘*am Wochenende*’ can be found. These are basic phrases to be used when time or things

related to time are being referred to. Possibly there was interference from English, whereby the student translated the phrase ‘in the afternoon’ to “*in Nachmittag*”.

The findings for items 24, 42 and 43 have revealed similar problems (of not knowing that the items required a preposition + definite article in the contracted form) faced by some of the students. Based on the answers gathered, 3 students (14.29%) chose indefinite articles (‘*eine*’ and ‘*einer*’) as their answers for item 24, 9.52% gave the definite article ‘*der*’ for item 42 and 19.05% gave the definite articles ‘*die*’ and ‘*den*’ as answers for item 43.

5.2.3 Zero Article

All answers provided by students pertaining to questions on the zero article are found in Table 5.2.3. From the figures, it can be seen that the majority of the students (ranging from 57.14% to 95.24%) did relatively well for items 7, 4, 18, 20 and 26. In contrast, item 28 which was discussed earlier in detail in section 5.1, proved to be one of the most difficult as only one student (4.76%) managed to answer it correctly. Items 3 and 23 posed some difficulty for the students too as only 19.05% and 42.86% of them had the correct answer for each of the respective items.

Table 5.2.3: Answers to Items Pertaining to Zero Article

Item	7	4	18	20	26	23	3	28
% of correct answers	100.00 (-)	95.00 (-)	90.48 (-)	76.19 (-) 4.76 (keinen)	57.14 (-)	42.86 (-)	19.05 (-)	4.76 (-)
% of incorrect answers		5.00 das	4.76 der 4.76 an	14.29 kein 4.76 keinen 4.76 einen	19.05 die 19.05 der 4.76 dem	14.29 eine 4.76 ein 23.81 die 9.52 das 4.76 den	14.29 das 28.57 den 9.52 die 19.05 ein 4.76 einen 4.76 keinen	85.71 eine 9.52 die

Item 3 Er möchte (-) Fleisch kaufen.
He would like to buy meat.

For the item above, the majority of the students who made the error seemed to think that the sentence required a definite article, with 14.29% giving ‘*das*’ (neuter noun), 28.57% ‘*den*’ (a singular masculine noun in the accusative) and 9.52% ‘*die*’ (feminine noun) as an answer. Those who gave ‘*das*’ as the answer knew that ‘*Fleisch*’ is a neuter noun, but they seemed to have forgotten that when the article is used in a partitive sense (when implying some or any) or when it is used to denote an indefinite quantity, the article is omitted as in the above item. There were also others giving indefinite articles ‘*ein*’ (19.05%) and ‘*einen*’ (4.76%). ‘*Ein*’ is the article for a singular neuter noun and ‘*einen*’ is for a singular masculine noun in the accusative. 4.76% gave ‘*keinen*’, the *negativer Artikel* for the masculine noun in the accusative as the answer.

Item 23 Bei Lea habe ich gerade (-) Spaghetti gegessen.

I just ate spaghetti at Lea’s.

42.86% of the students gave the correct answer for this item. 14.29% wrote ‘*eine*’ (the indefinite article of a feminine noun) and 4.76% gave ‘*ein*’ (the indefinite article for a masculine or neuter noun in the nominative, or a neuter noun in the accusative). Students who chose ‘*eine*’ might have thought that ‘*Spaghetti*’ is a feminine noun. This indicates that the students might have forgotten that ‘*Spaghetti*’ is one of the nouns in German that exist only in the plural form (like ‘*Geschwister*’ in item 36), and hence the use of indefinite articles is not possible at all. 9.52% chose ‘*das*’ (the definite article for a neuter noun) and 4.76% gave ‘*den*’ (the definite masculine article in the accusative) as the answer. These findings reveal that the students not only have problems in determining the correct articles (from the five categories in Table 5.2 above) to choose, but also they seem to have problems with the agreement of the articles and the nouns. In German, knowing the gender of a noun plays an important role in determining the correct use of the articles.

Item 26 Dieses Hemd ist aus (-) Seide.

This shirt is (made) out of silk.

This sentence does not require an article because ‘*Seide*’ is an uncountable noun that is not defined (see section 3.2.3.i). Slightly more than half of the students (57.14%) knew or remembered that, and they put dash (-) as their answer. It appears that there were students who had remembered the rule, that 90% of the nouns ending with an ‘e’ are feminine nouns, and that ‘*Seide*’ is thus a feminine noun. Therefore, they (19.05%) gave ‘*die*’ the definite article for a feminine noun as their answer without knowing that ‘*Seide*’ is an uncountable noun which does not require an article. Another 19.05% thought ‘*Seide*’ is a masculine noun in the nominative case (therefore the answer ‘*der*’) and 4.76% thought it to be either a masculine or a neuter noun in the dative case, thus the answer ‘*dem*’. This student seemed to remember that the preposition ‘*aus*’ is always followed by the dative case.

Item 20 Haben Sie (-) Hunger?

Are you hungry? (Literally: Do you have hunger?)

The students fared better (76.19%) for this item compared to item 26. This sentence does not require an article because nouns in the accusative that form a unit with the verb do not take an article (also mentioned in section 3.2.3.iii). One student (4.76%) gave the correct form of the negation of ‘*Hunger*’ (‘*keinen*’), and this answer is accepted as correct, thus bringing the percentage of the correct answer to 80.95%. (Item 20 is still categorized as an item under the ‘Zero Article’ heading because all the four verifiers consulted by the researcher had only given dash (-) as the answer.) There was one student (4.76%) who thought this sentence required an indefinite article and gave the masculine noun in the accusative ‘*einen*’ (since ‘*Hunger*’ is a masculine noun). This was probably because the student may not have fully mastered the rule that an article is omitted if the noun forms a unit with the verb, in this case ‘*Hunger haben*’ (to have hunger or be hungry). 14.2% gave ‘*kein*’ as the answer.

Item 18 Kennen Sie (-) Alfred Brendel?

Do you know Alfred Brendel?

Although it is quite often, that in colloquial German or in a familiar context, a definite article is used before a name, the ‘*Sie*’ (the formal ‘you’) in item 18 indicates that it is a formal setting. A definite article in the accusative form (in this case ‘*den*’ as the name is for a male) is possible if the question is in a familiar context like “*Kennst du den Alfred Brendel?*”. The majority of the students seemed to remember this rule because 90.48% knew that this sentence did not require an article. One of the students might have had problems understanding the German formal and informal ‘you’ concept (‘*Sie*’ and ‘*du*’) and also the case system (nominative – subject and accusative – object) because he gave ‘*der*’ (the definite masculine article in the nominative) as the answer. Another student might have made the error because he did not understand the meaning of the verb ‘*kennen*’ (to know), thus the answer ‘*an*’ (to) was given. The student might possibly have confused it with the verb ‘*denken an*’ (to think of), so in English ‘to know of’ became ‘*kennen an*’.

Item 4 Macht nichts, ich lade dich ein, ich habe genug (-) Geld dabei.
 Never mind, I invite you, I have enough money with me.

‘Geld’ is a neuter noun and the gender is ‘*das*’. As discussed earlier (‘*Seide*’ in item 26), it is an uncountable noun, and therefore this sentence does not require any article. 95.00% of the students remembered this and gave a dash (-) as their answer. One of them could have forgotten the rule, thus giving the answer as ‘*das*’. The calculation of the percentage for this item is based on 20 candidates, not 21.

5.2.4 Indefinite Articles

Table 5.2.4: Answers to Items Pertaining to Indefinite Articles

Item	40	21	11	6	41	32	44
% of correct answers	95.24 einen	23.81 einen 66.67 ein	85.71 eine	57.14 einer	57.14 einem	38.10 einen	38.10 einen
% of incorrect answers	4.76 eine	4.76 eine 4.76 mir	4.76 einen 9.52 die	28.57 einem 9.52 eine 4.76 dem	4.76 einen 38.10 dem	4.76 ein 14.29 eine 28.57 (-) 4.76 das 4.76 der 4.76 ins	28.57 ein 4.76 einem 28.57 der

With the exception of item 38, where all the subjects answered correctly, answers given for the rest of the items pertaining to indefinite articles are shown in the table above (Table 5.2.4). The table indicates that the majority of the students (ranging from 57.14% to 95.24%) were able to answer items 41, 6, 11, 21 and 40 correctly. The students seemed to have problems with only two items (44 and 32) in this area, i.e. the indefinite articles.

Item 21 Kannst du bitte einen Liter Milch aus dem Supermarkt mitbringen?
Can you please bring a liter of milk from the supermarket?

With the exception of one student (4.76%) who gave ‘*mir*’ (a personal pronoun in the dative case) as an answer, the others knew that this sentence required an indefinite article. One student thought ‘*Liter*’ was a feminine noun because the incorrect answer given was ‘*eine*’. Another possible reason for this choice (*eine*) might be caused by the word ‘*Milch*’, which is a feminine noun. *Themen neu* books give the gender for ‘*Liter*’ as a masculine noun. But in dictionaries (Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch, 1998 and Oxford Colour German Dictionary Plus, 2004), ‘*Liter*’ can be a masculine or neuter noun. 23.81% of the students seemed to remember the rule that in most cases, nouns ending with ‘er’ are masculine. ‘*Liter*’ is a masculine noun and it is an accusative object in the above sentence. Therefore, the correct declension for it is ‘*einen*’. 66.67% of the

students who gave 'ein' as the answer, which is also a correct answer, since 'Liter' is also a neuter noun.

Item 44 Einen Hund haben wir auch,

We also have a dog....

For this item, slightly more than a quarter of the students did not know that this sentence required them to use the indefinite article. Although the rest of the students knew they needed an indefinite article, only 38.10% produced the correct form of the indefinite article, 'einen'. 28.57% gave 'ein' as answer because they knew that 'Hund' is a masculine noun. But the article needs to be declined to 'einen' because it is an accusative object in the sentence, not a nominative subject. The subjects might have been so influenced by the spoken form that they directly transferred it to the written form. In spoken German, it is quite common for a speaker to just omit the ending 'en'. Alternatively, they may have thought it to be a neuter noun. 4.76% might have thought that the blank required a dative object which causes the article to decline and become 'einem'. This error also indicates that some students might have problems with the sentence structure due to the influence of English and Malay. Unlike English or Malay where the structure is always Subject-Verb-Object in active sentences, in German, it is also possible to have the structure Object-Verb-Subject structure to form a grammatically correct sentence. For example:

Ich esse den Hamburger. I eat the hamburger. / 'Saya makan hamburger itu.'

Den Hamburger esse ich. The Hamburger eat I. / 'Hamburger itu makan saya.'

Both the German sentences have the same meaning and both are correct. But in English and Malay, it does not make any sense to put the 'hamburger' first as the subject of the sentence.

Item 32 Machst du jeden Abend einen Spaziergang?

Do you take a walk every evening?

Slightly more than half of the students knew this item required them to use an indefinite article. But only 38.10% gave the correct answer. This probably shows that the students might have forgotten what they have been taught or that they had not understood it during the lessons because the phrase ‘*einen Spaziergang machen*’ or ‘*spazieren gehen*’ (to take a walk / to go for a walk) can be found in Chapters 4, 6 and 7 of the *Themen* books.

5.2.5 Definite Articles

Table 5.2.5 on page 87 shows all the answers given by the students in relation to items pertaining to definite articles, except for items 30 and 46 (where 100% had the correct answer). The majority of the students (ranging from 52.38% - 95.24%) gave the right answer to the items in this category. However, for items 16, 48, 35 and 50, the students did not perform well, and their scores showed a range of between 23.81% and 47.62%.

Item 16 Wir müssen den Wohnblock leider abreißen.

We must unfortunately tear down the block of flats.

Out of the 16 items pertaining to definite articles, item 16 seems to be the most difficult because only 19.05% of the students had the correct answer provided by the four verifiers, ‘*den*’. One of the verifiers pointed out that ‘*einen*’ (the indefinite article for the masculine noun in the accusative case) is also an acceptable answer as there was no specific context given in the sentence. The researcher accepted ‘*einen*’ as an alternative answer (thus the total percentage of correct answers for this item is 23.81%), but decided to retain this item in the category of definite articles.

28.57% seemed to think that ‘*Wohnblock*’ is a neuter noun because they filled the blank with ‘*das*’ (definite article for a neuter noun) as answer, while 9.52% might have thought it to be a feminine noun, hence their answer ‘*die*’. Other answers given by the students included the indefinite article ‘*ein*’, preposition + article (‘*in den*’ and ‘*im*’).

One student thought this sentence required no article at all. The findings for this item indicate that quite a large number of the students are not too well versed with the use of the definite articles because they used the incorrect articles, regardless of the form (whether it is correctly declined).

Item 48 Das gefällt den Nachbarn neben uns gar nicht, die wollen lieber ihre Ruhe.

This does not please the neighbour next to us at all, they want rather their quietness.

More than 80% of the students knew that they needed to use a definite article to fill in the blank for this sentence. Unfortunately, only 28.57% produced the correct form of the definite article. The majority of the students must have got a hint from the verb ‘*wollen*’ that indicates that the subject ‘*Nachbarn*’ is a plural noun. Therefore, slightly more than half (57.14%) gave the definite article ‘*die*’ as the answer. But they might have forgotten that ‘*gefallen*’ (‘*gefällt*’ in this case) is a verb that needs a dative object (see section 3.1.4.3). The definite plural article in the dative is ‘*den*’. As for other answers provided by the other students, it appears that sometimes students tend to forget to read the instructions or they have forgotten what they have read, or they are just not aware of grammatical terminology. The answers given were the various declinations of the possessive pronoun ‘our’ (‘*unser*’) and had nothing to do at all with articles.

Item 35 In den letzten Jahren war ich oft krank.

In the last years, I was often ill.

Like item 48, item 35 also required a plural definite article in the dative case. The preposition ‘in’ here is + dative and ‘*Jahren*’ is the plural form of ‘*Jahr*’ (a neuter noun). Only 42.86% of the students had the correct answer. Slightly more than half of them gave the wrong form of the definite article. This indicates that the error made

could have been caused by the fact that they are rather weak in their command of vocabulary (they did not know ‘*Jahren*’ is a plural noun) or their grasp of temporal phrases like ‘*in der Nacht, im April, in den Ferien*’ is still rather weak.

Items 49 and 50 Die sitzen am liebsten vor dem Fernseher und gehen selten aus dem Haus.

They like most of all to sit before the television and rarely go out of the house.

As mentioned earlier in section 5.1, questions 41 to 50 were in the form of a cloze passage. Thus items 49 and 50 are discussed together because they are in the same sentence. The students fared much better for item 49 (90.48%) compared to item 50 (47.62%). For both items, based on the answers given by the students, the students appeared to know that definite articles are required to fill in the blanks. But the students seem to have forgotten the rule that when they have the preposition ‘*aus*’, the noun is always in the dative case. As for ‘*vor*’ in item 49, it shows the location, hence a dative definite article is required. These errors could have been generated due to the students’ ignorance of the grammar rule or their incomplete application of it.

5.3 Agreement between Article and Noun

5.3.1 Gender

As mentioned before, all nouns in German have a gender and they are grammatical gender and do not always follow their natural gender. ‘Woman’ (‘*Weib*’) and ‘girl’ (‘*Mädchen*’) are just two of the examples of German nouns that do not follow the usual natural gender because they are both neuter nouns (‘*das*’), whereas they are female in their natural gender. Other genders of German nouns are masculine (‘*der*’) and feminine (‘*die*’). Without knowing the gender of the noun, grammatical agreement between the article and the noun cannot be constructed.

Table 5.3.1: Correct and Incorrect Use of Articles in Relation to Gender

Item	% of given correct answers	% of given incorrect answers because of gender	% of given incorrect answers because of other reasons
31	14.29	80.95	4.76
16	23.81	47.62	28.57
12	35.00	45.00	20.00
13	20.00	45.00	35.00
29	35.00	40.00	25.00
6	57.14	28.57	14.29
44	38.10	28.57	33.33
2	61.9	19.05	19.05
32	38.10	19.05	42.85
36	66.67	19.05	14.28
5	85.71	9.52	4.77
49	90.48	9.52	0
1	95.24	4.76	0
40	95.24	4.76	0
21	90.48	4.76	4.76
11	85.71	4.76	9.53
14	71.43	4.76	23.81
10	57.14	4.76	38.1
15	57.14	4.76	38.1
50	47.62	4.76	47.62

The data in Table 5.3.1 is sorted in descending order of the percentage of given incorrect answers because of gender. Table 5.3.1 shows the percentage of errors made by students because of the disagreement in gender between the noun and the article. The percentage of the incorrect answers ranged from 4.76% (the lowest) to 80.95% (the highest). Item 31 is at the top of the list. When the researcher compares the percentage of the errors caused only by the non-agreement in gender between the noun and the

article with the percentage of the given correct answers of the students, items that have higher percentage of errors are items 31 (80.95%), 16 (47.62%), 12 (42.86%), 13 (42.86%) and 29 (38.10%). As for items 6 (28.57%) and 32 (19.05%), the percentage of errors is half of the percentage of the correct answers (57.14% and 38.10% respectively).

Out of the twenty (20) items listed above in Table 5.3.1, eight (8) of them have percentages of errors that are at least half or much higher than the percentage of the given correct answers. These findings indicate that the errors made by the students in choosing the correct articles to use could be largely due to the errors that they made in the agreement of the article and the noun. If they had known the gender of the nouns, the chances of making errors in choosing the right article might have been greatly reduced. Therefore it is of great importance for the students to learn the gender of a new noun at the same time as they learn the noun.

5.3.2 Case

Table 5.3.2 on the next page is organised based on descending order of the percentage of given incorrect answers because of case. It shows the comparison of the percentage of the correct and incorrect answers given by the students. The percentage of incorrect answers only takes into account of errors made due to the non-agreement of the noun (article) with the case. The findings show that six (6) out of the eleven (11) items have percentages of errors that are at least half or much higher than the percentage of the correct answers. They are items 48 (57.14%), 50 (47.62%), 8 (42.86%), 10 (33.33%), 44 (33.33%) and 35 (23.18%).

Table 5.3.2: Correct and Incorrect Use of Articles Pertaining to Case

Item	% of given correct answer	% of given incorrect answers because of case	% of given incorrect answers because of other reasons
48	28.57	57.14	14.29
50	47.62	47.62	0
8	52.38	42.86	4.76
10	57.14	33.33	9.53
44	38.10	33.33	28.57
35	42.86	23.81	33.33
47	71.43	19.05	9.52
2	61.90	19.05	19.05
14	71.43	19.05	9.52
15	57.14	19.05	23.81
6	57.14	9.52	33.34

One of the intricacies of the use of the German article is that it not only changes its form to agree with the nouns in gender, but also its case. There are four different cases in German. Below are the examples of a definite article for a masculine noun in the four different cases. (The other declinations for the feminine, neuter and plural nouns were described earlier in section 3.1.4.)

Nominative Der Junge ist groß.

The boy is tall.

Accusative Herr Sager ruft den Jungen an.

Mr Sager calls / phones the boy.

Dative Herr Sager gibt dem Jungen ein Buch.

Mr Sager gives the boy a book.

Genitive Die Schwester des Jungen ist sehr schön.

The sister of the boy is very beautiful.

As can be clearly seen from the examples given above, this complex case system is not found in English. In all the four cases, the definite article for English is still the same, 'the', while its German counterpart changes from 'der' in nominative case into 'den' in accusative case, then 'dem' in dative and lastly 'des' in genitive. Students seem to find this case system difficult to master because they still made errors although the choice of the articles (definite, indefinite, etc.) might have been the correct one.

5.4 Use of Article + Preposition in the Contracted Form

Table 5.4 on the following page is organised on the descending percentage of given incorrect answers to the use of the contracted form (article + preposition). It displays the comparison of the percentage of the correct and incorrect answers given by students pertaining to the use of the definite article + preposition in the contracted form.

When compared to the percentage of the correct answers given by students, five (5) out of the nine (9) items show that the percentage of the errors committed by the students have almost the same percentage, if not higher, than the percentage of the given answers. These findings indicate that students might have known which article to choose (definite, indefinite, *negativer Artikel*, etc.), but they still committed a large number of errors due to the fact that they might have not mastered the use of the contracted form.

Table 5.4: Correct and Incorrect Use of Article + Preposition in the Contracted Form

Item	% of given correct answer	% of given incorrect answers to the use of preposition	% of given incorrect answers because of other reasons
25	33.33	66.66	0
42	33.33	57.15	9.52
34	52.38	47.62	0
43	33.33	47.62	19.05
22	30.00	35.00	35.00
24	61.90	23.81	14.29
27	85.71	14.29	0
17	28.57	9.52	61.91
37	90.48	4.76	4.76

5.5 Pronouns and ‘Zero Article’

Table 5.5 on the next page is ordered according to the descending order of percentage of given incorrect answers. It gives the percentage of other errors committed by students that are not caused by the wrong choice of articles, or by the disagreement of the noun and articles, or by the use of the contracted form. The researcher decided to categorize all these errors under the heading “Pronouns and Zero Article” because the incorrect answers were mostly the various forms of the declension of the pronouns. On top of the list is item 48, where 14.28% (3 students) committed the error by using the pronoun instead of the definite article. It is the same for item 19, where 9.52% also committed the error due to the use of the pronoun, and items 5, 21 and 45, each 4.76%. In item 36, one student wrote ‘*zwei*’ (two).

Table 5.5: “Pronouns and Zero Artikel”

Item	% of given correct answer	% of given incorrect answers
48	28.57	14.28
19	90.48	9.52
5	85.71	4.76
21	90.48	4.76
36	66.67	4.76
45	95.24	4.76

5.6 Conclusion

The findings reveal that choosing the wrong type of article (*negativer Artikel*, preposition + definite article, zero article, definite or indefinite articles) is not the only reason why students were unable to provide the appropriate answer for a large number of the items in the test. Although quite a large number of the students appear to know which type of article to choose, due to the intricacies in the use of German articles, these students have difficulties in determining the correct form or declension of the article to use. A high percentage of the errors could have been prevented if there was an agreement in gender between the noun and the article, or the noun with the case. The considerable number of the wrong answers in the use of the contracted form also demonstrates that some students have problems with the use of German prepositions. A rather weak understanding of the use of adverbs such as ‘leider’ and particles like ‘noch’ and a weak command of the vocabulary also contribute to the higher chances of students committing errors. The influence of spoken German which very often omits the endings (such as ‘en’ from ‘keinen’ or ‘einen’) in an informal context, might have caused some students to use such form in writing.