Grammar Explanation

When to use the or no article with plural or non-count nouns

- With plural or non-count nouns, you can either use the or not use any article. It depends on what you are describing. You never use a or an.

- Use the with plural and non-count nouns when referring to particular things, people, or activities.
  - Example: Lack of education is one of the main causes of poverty.
    (The writer is referring to a particular group of causes of poverty – the main causes.)

- Use the with plural and non-count nouns when the reader already knows what you are referring to.
  - Example: In the research that I discussed earlier in this paper, the authors argue that there are many factors that lead to obesity.

- Do not use the if you are referring to a group of people or things in general.
  - Incorrect: The scientists believe that increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are responsible for global warming.
  - Corrected: Scientists believe that increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are responsible for global warming.

- Do not use the if you are referring to a thing, activity, or idea in general.
  - Incorrect: The education is important for getting a good job.
  - Corrected: Education is important for getting a good job.

- Do not use the with most countries, states, cities, streets, and names of languages. Some exceptions are countries with a countable noun in their name.
  - Example: Students in South Korea, Finland, and the Czech Republic scored higher in math tests than eighth graders in the United States. (Republic and States are countable nouns.)
  - Example: More than half of the residents of New York City speak a language other than English at home.

Excerpted from: Nouns and Articles: Exercise 6