

## ASSESSMENT OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MAIDUGURI METROPOLIS, BORNO STATE, NIGERIA.

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### ABSTRACT



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*This study was conducted to assess the Grammatical Errors of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno state, Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to identify the types of grammatical errors and their frequencies in student's English composition. Two research questions were raised and answered. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study comprises of 3918 students in three public schools in Maiduguri Metropolis. Krejcie's and Morgan Sampling table was used to sample 351 students. The instruments used for study was an adopted SSCE past question paper on English composition with some modification. Content analysis using simple frequency and percentages were used in answering the two research questions. Findings of the study reveals that there are four major types of Grammatical errors, in students written composition : tense errors, subj./verb errors, pronoun errors, and preposition errors. It's also revealed that tense errors are most frequent errors. Based on findings of the study, it was recommended that more emphasis should be given to the study of Grammar than literary studies, to adequately equip the teacher trainees to teach English language effectively. In addition, curriculum planners of English language should include assessment of Grammatical; errors in secondary school curriculum to enable teachers of English ascertain the learning progress for their students English and address student's language needs.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

English Language as a choice of medium of instruction in public schools – in secondary and higher instructions as well as the official language of Nigeria. English is used as a medium of instruction in many developing countries, especially in countries where the native population groups have different mother tongues. According to Danladi (2008), English language is the medium of instruction in our schools and a compulsory subject that must be passed at all levels of education in Nigeria. Highlighting the importance of English language in the educational system of Nigeria, Hamman-Tukur, Atsua and Grema (2013), opined that no student in Nigeria can proceed to tertiary institutions without a credit pass in English language. Furthermore, the federal ministry of Education (2007) considered English as "primus intersperse" one of the core subjects in the secondary school curriculum.

One of the important skills in learning English language is the writing skill. Writing is a means of communicating ideas and information. It is an accurate presentation of ideas to an audience (Hamman-Tukur, Atsua and Grema, (2013). In addition to this, Grammar is also important in writing composition. Grammar is the basic knowledge and skills for understanding and using the language naturally, and it also fundamental for writing English composition. However, Alufohai (2016) and Ojetunde (2013) Observed that the teaching of Grammar has less effect on secondary school students writing because majority of students still find it difficult to write meaningful and simple sentences in composition. Their findings showed most students misunderstanding of English grammar, with regards to their written compositions.

Furthermore, many students perform poorly in written composition in external examinations like the senior secondary certificate examination as evident in the work of Kolawale (1998) and Odeh (2012). This assertion was also supported by the WEAC chief Examiner's Report on English language paper two for 2017/2018 Examination, which revealed that candidate's weaknesses were attributed to the follow factors;

1. Poor understanding of the question.
2. Wrong use of punctuation marks and
3. Poor knowledge of the basic rules of grammar and rudiments of writing etc.

Language at all levels of learning is rule governed, and as in all kinds of learning process, language learning also involves committing errors. Committing errors in learning process is natural therefore, in the process of writing English composition, errors occur repeatedly in student's writing which cannot be recognized by the students. Grammatical error is a term used in order to tell inappropriate usage of grammar rules such as wrong verb tense (Nordquist, 2018). More so, Novita (2014) believed that grammatical error is the error which occurs when words are not properly combined. Therefore, every grammar rule which is not applied correctly is identified as a grammatical error. According to Alufohai (2016, P.62) grammar at the sentence level is fundamental for the writing of composition in English language. There are many rules in grammar, including articles, parts of speech, sentence pattern, and tense, etc. (Cook and Ricard, 1980) Cited in Muhsin (2016, P. 81). In a nutshell, mistakes and errors occur when the senior secondary students do not understand well about the English grammar. If the teacher does not realize about student's mistakes and errors, those mistakes and errors may occur repeatedly because they do not have the correction. Hence only the teacher or researcher can locate those errors. In this study, the researcher assessed senior secondary school students' errors of grammar in writing English composition, so as to identify types and frequency of grammatical errors mostly made by the secondary school students on grammar. As a teacher and learner of English, it is very important to know how many types of grammatical errors students commit in writing English composition, to help them understand writing skill well. This result of the analysis hopefully gives some contribution in attempting to decrease errors committed by the students and help them to improve writing skill in learning English. Assessment of Student's errors is a way of determining if curricular contents are appropriate and teaching and learning has taken place (Ulla, 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the process of learning English as second and foreign language, senior Secondary students are bound to commit errors. They commit errors because they have not mastered the language grammar. In this regards, result released by West African Examination council every year indicated that student's performance in English language is poor. A number of scholars, such as Zafer (2016), Mohammed (2013) and Ojentunde (2013) have tried to find out the reasons for this mass failure. However, not much has been done in the area of grammatical errors in written compositions. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the different types and frequencies of grammatical errors committed in writing English composition by senior secondary school students (SS11) in Maiduguri metropolis Borno state.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study was undertaken to achieve the following objectives:

- 1] Determine the type of grammatical errors committed in writing English composition by senior secondary school students in Maiduguri metropolis Borno state.
- 11] Determine the frequency of grammatical errors committed in writing English composition by senior secondary school students in Maiduguri metropolis.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the findings of this study will be of benefits to students, teachers of English language, curriculum designers and textbook writers. The outcome of this research will hopefully reveal types and frequencies of grammatical errors made by students in written compositions. This will help in providing an easy way for the students to know and identify the different types of errors they make and possible ways of overcoming them. The result of this study could be a guide which can be used by English teachers to improve teaching and learning of English language. For instance, it can be used in identifying which part of grammar teachers should emphasize more in their teaching process. It can also be used as a means of feedback to measure students understanding of grammar. Syllabus and curriculum designers might find it handy towards identifying the grammatical aspects to be emphasized in learning English at the secondary school level. Finally authors of texts on English language may find this study useful in writing and revising their publications on grammar to meet the needs of the secondary school students.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study is delimited to senior secondary students (SS 11) in three secondary schools in Maiduguri metropolitan area. Focus of the study is grammatical errors, in writing English composition, such as tense errors, subject/verb agreement errors, errors in the use of classes of words and the frequencies of such errors.

### **Literature Review**

Over the past few years, there has been large and growing amount of literatures on types and frequencies of errors Committed by second learners of a Language. In most of the studies, linguists argued that errors do occur in the process of second language, Stephen Coder (1970). The most contributor in errors analysis states that the study of Errors is a part of the investigation of the process of language learning.

In addition Ikrima I. (2020) carried out research on Analysis of Grammatical Errors on Students' personal letter writing. The objectives of the research are to know the types, the frequencies, the factors of an error analysis and to find out how to improve the grammatical errors made by students on the use of article, preposition, and pronoun in writing personal letter, of students of SMAN 3 Kabupaten Tangerang. The research used descriptive analysis method. There were 424 students as the population, and sample of this research consisted 70 students which are divided into two classes, and chosen by using random sampling. The data was analysed using simple statistical analysis. The researcher found that the most common errors made by the student is use of preposition with the total number 30 errors or 54.54%. The second rate is the use of article with the total number 22 errors or 40.00%. The last is the use of pronoun with the total number 3 errors or 5. 54%. The conclusion of this study is the students still made errors on the use of grammar in writing personal letter including the use of article, preposition, and pronoun.

Alufohai (2016) reported a study on grammatical errors in written composition of junior secondary school in Owan west local government Area of Edo state. The abysmal performance of students in English Language over the years is a major concern to this researcher. Thus, the study is geared towards investigating the grammatical errors in written composition in selected secondary schools in Owan West local government Area of Edo state. One research question was to give a direction to the problem under study. The descriptive (survey design) was used for the study. The population for the study was the 2196 public and private Junior Secondary School Students in Owan West Local government Area. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 180 students made up of 95 males and 85 females who were given an essay on the topic "How I spent my Christmas holiday". The written compositions were marked based on content, organization, mechanical accuracy and expression. Were marked based on content, organization, mechanical accuracy and expression. Based on the data, simple percentage was used to analyse student's performance. The result of the analysis revealed that students were unable to develop essential topic; most of the students were unable to organize their essay; most of the time students could not differentiate

between the uses of present tense from past tense. Qualified English teachers should be employed in the teaching of English Language in junior Secondary schools.

## METHODOLOGY

This study presents the method and procedure that were used in conducting the study, it was organized as follows: research design, population and sample, research instrument and method of data analysis.

### Research Design

This study employed descriptive survey design. Survey design is defined as the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions (Check, & Schutt, 2012). This type of research allows for a variety of method to recruit participants, collect data, and utilize various methods of instrumentation. In descriptive design, the behaviour of one or more groups of individuals, items or elements of interest are all observed at once or at the same time and the variables under study are not manipulated or controlled. The survey design is relevant to this study because it was used in collecting data (student's written composition) at the same time and the participants were not manipulated or controlled.

### Population and Sample of the Study

The target population for this study included all senior secondary (SS 11) students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State. Justification for the choice of SS 11 Student is because of class is more stable focused and the students are well acquainted with the importance English language as core requirement for pursuing their prospective career courses.

There are about 11,327 SS 11 Students in 17 public senior secondary schools in Maiduguri Metropolis simple random sampling was used to select three schools for this study. Out of the 3,918 population of the three schools selected, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) method of sampling (table) was used to sample 351 students.

### Research Instrument

The instrument used was Essay writing Achievement Test (EWAT). This is an adopted S.S.C.E. English Composition past question paper 111, with some modifications. The instrument was validated and standardized by the West African Examination Council.

### Method of Data Analysis

Data obtained (written test) from SS 11 students for this study were analysed using content analysis. Content analysis according to Amy Luo (2019) is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, theme, or concepts within some given quantitative data. Content analysis is of two types, conceptual: determines the existence and frequency of concepts in a text. Rational analysis develops the conceptual analysis further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text. Content analysis has five steps of data analysis. In analysing the data obtained the researcher was assisted by two teachers of English language in identifying and classifying the errors. The identified errors were counted based on their frequencies. In the classification level, the errors were tabulated and classified into the following categories: tense, pronoun errors, preposition errors, subject/verb agreement, wrong spellings of words and wrong punctuations.

### Data Analysis and Results

Research Question One: What are the types of grammatical errors committed by SS 11 students in their written English composition?

TABLE ONE: Classification of Grammatical Errors and frequency

Types of errors	Frequency	Percentage %
Tense	1006	43%

Subject/verb	732	31%
Pronoun	336	16%
Preposition	238	10%
Total	2312	100%

“How I spent my last holiday”. The topic required the use of simple past tense; however the analysis of the results indicated the student’s inability to differentiate the simple present tense from past tense and the present progressive from simple past, example of such incorrect usage of tense in sentence structures is observed in student’ written composition and is presented in table below.

Table two: Student’s Incorrect Sentences and Corrected Sentences

S/No	Student’s Incorrect Sentences	Corrected Sentences
1	I visit my family and friend	I visited my family and friends.
2	I stay in our family house	I stayed in our family house.
3	I miss them and we play all day long	I missed them and we played all day long.
4	When I finish the work is the time that my aunty too finish the story	When I finished the work, my aunty had also finished the story.

It was also observed from the table and figure of classification that subject/verb agreement is common grammatical errors in the analysed written composition with 31%. Subject/verb Agreement in this sense means that there should be a form of correspondence in person, number, gender, tense and case among the different components of the sentence. However, it is discovered that the students have problems in matching regular nouns with either singular or plural verbs as the context demands. Some of such grammatical errors identified were shown in the table below.

Table three: Student’s Incorrect Sentences and Corrected Sentences

S/No.	Student’s Incorrect Sentences	Corrected Sentences
1	Our leaders are male.	Our leaders are males.
2	I want for you to open mouth and tell Story.	I want you to tell us a story.
3	With this few point of mine.	With this few points of mine.
4	Am by name Halima.	My name is Halima.

The appropriate use of pronoun is very important in writing English composition, as well learning English language. The students are expected to used proper and common nouns as referent and later on use the appropriate pronouns to replace the nouns throughout their discussions. However, many of the students produce significant errors in this category, about 16% of the errors committed are pronouns errors, and samples of such errors are provided in the sentences below.

Table four: Student’s Incorrect Sentences and Corrected Sentences

S/No.	Student’s Incorrect Sentences	Corrected Sentences
1	My sister she come and open the door.	She came and opened the door.
2	My grandmother her sick about many things.	My grandmother was ill, she had fever, headache.
3	My aunty she is cooked the food.	My aunty/she cooked the food.
4	Uncle he is driving car.	My uncle/he was driving the car.

The errors of preposition arise mostly from the confusion of the selection of appropriate preposition and the irregularity of uses. This category comprised the omission, insertion and the wrong choice of preposition. The errors are dominated by the wrong selection of preposition and are about 10% of the total errors committed. Some of these errors are given in the table below.

Table five: Student’s Incorrect Sentences and Corrected Sentences

S/No	Student's Incorrect Sentences	Corrected Sentences
1	I stay there two weeks.	I stay there for two weeks.
2	My grandmother want me stay three weeks.	My grandmother wants me to stay for three weeks.
3	I am so happy in home.	I was so happy at home.

Table six: frequencies of errors in male and female students' writings

Types of errors	Frequencies of errors		Percentages of errors 100%	
	Males	females	males	females
Tense of a verb	615	304	47.02	30.30
Subject/verb	428	391	33.00	39.0
Pronouns	161	175	12.0	17.44
Prepositions	103	133	7.88	13.26
Total	1,307	1,003	100%	100%

The results from the above table indicated that the dominant grammatical errors found in SS11 students (males and females) written composition is tense errors which has the frequency of 1006 out of all 2312 errors with 47.02% for male students and 30.30% for female students. However, prepositions errors have the least frequency with errors of 238 errors and frequency of 7.88 for males and 13.26 for females' students.

### Summary of Findings

The following were the major findings of the study:

1. The findings of the study indicated that the grammatical errors prominent in students' English compositions are tense errors, subject/verb errors, and pronoun and preposition errors.
2. The study revealed that students committed more errors in the use of tenses as reflected in frequency of occurrence 1006 out 2312 of errors committed.
3. The study revealed that both male and female students tend to commit the same kind of errors to some extent.

### DISCUSSION

The objectives of the study are to determine the types of grammatical errors committed by students in writing English composition, and to determine the frequencies of grammatical errors committed, based on the research questions addressed at the beginning of this study and analysed in tables. The findings of the study revealed that students committed various grammatical errors in their written composition; these are tense errors 43%, subject/verb errors 31% and prepositions errors 10%, pronoun errors 16%. These errors were observed in student's inability to differentiate the use of past tense from present tense, misuse of pronouns and prepositions, and subject/verb agreement. In addition to this, errors in spellings, punctuation, and capitalization were also observed. The analysis also revealed that students committed more errors in the use of tenses as reflected in frequency of occurrence 1006 out of 2312 errors. The results of this study are in line with that of (Jahangir 2016, Sawalmeh 2013, Ojetunde 2013). According to Jahangir 2016, students clearly committed major errors in subject/verb agreement, tenses and articles. Ten common errors (verb errors, tense errors, singular/plural, subject/verb, and preposition) were also identified in the study of Sawaimah 2013, and this is in line with results of this study because the same types of grammatical errors are also identified in this study.

### SUMMARY

This study is an assessment on grammatical errors committed in English composition committed by senior secondary school students in Maiduguri metropolis Borno state. In the course of this study, two objectives were raise and answered, these objectives include: one; to determine the types of grammatical errors committed and two; to determine their frequencies. The reviewed literatures in the study are in line with the objectives of the study, the study was based on Coder's

(1970) "theory of error analysis". The basic assumption of this theory is that a great number of errors made by language learners are similar regardless of their mother tongue, such errors occur due to Interlingua interference or transfer. According to this theory any sentence uttered and subsequently transcribe can be analysed for errors. Therefore, this theory is relevant to this study in that it explains how errors can be studied in language learning. The study was unique in several ways, the population of the study is more robust compare to other studies reviewed, in addition, instrument used for data collection and tools for statistical analysis further distinguished the study. The study adopted survey research design. Three hundred and fifty-one (351) senior secondary school students were selected from three sampled public secondary schools were used for the study. The instrument used was an adopted S.S.C.E. English composition past question paper. Data was collected were analysed using content analysis and t-test of independent sample. Findings of the study revealed major grammatical errors in student's English composition are tense errors, subject/verb errors, pronoun errors and preposition errors. It also indicated that tense errors are the most frequent errors committed by students in their written composition. The results also indicated that there is significant difference in types and frequency of errors committed by male and female students in senior secondary schools in Maiduguri, Borno state.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study sought to determine the types and frequencies of grammatical errors committed by secondary school SS 11 students in English composition. The results revealed that in spite of years of teaching and learning English language from the primary school to the secondary school, the English composition of senior secondary students manifested a high degree of grammatical errors. Many of the errors were tense errors which stem from inter-lingua sources. Other errors include the wrong use of preposition, pronoun, and subject/verb agreement. The study supports the assumption that assessment of grammatical errors can provide knowledge about the students' language learning progress. Accordingly, assessment of grammatical errors is essential for English language teachers. Its enable teachers to understand students' errors and they build the educational techniques and methods to improve the level of their students and to help students avoid most of the grammatical errors.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to remedy the problem of grammatical errors in English, among secondary school students in Maiduguri Borno state of Nigeria, a fresh approach should be adopted in the training of the teachers who teach English at different level in the education sector. Considering the nature of the identified errors which include tense, subject/verb errors and inter-lingual errors, all students-teachers should be exposed to the basic knowledge of grammar and English composition in general. This is important in order to enable them apply the knowledge in the teaching of the English language, right from the primary and secondary levels of education. This will help the English language teacher to see how the learners' first language deviates from Standard English at the various levels of language description.

The issue of large classes at secondary school level of education should be address so that the English language can be taught functionally, because at the time of this research, it was discovered that Yerwa Government Girls School was merged with three secondary schools (GGSS Mafa, GGSS Kumshe, and GGSS Bama) with over six hundred SS 11 students. Moreover, Government College Maiduguri has over one thousand SS 11 students. The school is also merged with four other schools. This may be due to inadequate facilities and insurgency crisis. In addition, since almost all English language teachers in our secondary schools are second language learners of English, a system of continual professional development should be put in place to keep them abreast with current issues in the English language content, and methods of teaching it.

Given the importance of grammatical knowledge and use in effective communication, the use of non-specialists in the teaching of English language in the primary and secondary schools should

be avoided in order to equip learners adequately for communicative tasks in the English language in and outside the school. Furthermore, teachers of the English language should integrate remedial teaching in their scheme of work to ensure that all errors identified are remediated to enhance learning. Finally, the English language teacher educators should teach for mastery and not for the trainees to pass examinations to enable them master the logic and structure of the English language syllabus so as to be able to impact positively on the learners.

Having identified the grammatical errors committed in writing English composition by senior secondary school students in Maiduguri; the following Recommendations are made:

1. Since English language is a core subject in the nation's educational system, concerted effort should be taken in the appointment of qualified and well- motivated English language teachers.
2. Regular training programmes and re-training should be organized to sharpen the skills of English language teachers to ensure better performance which will automatically manifest in the academic achievement of their students
3. English teachers must as matter of compulsion engage their students in English composition writing regularly. This can be done by giving them individual class room exercises, take home assignments and continuous assessment test.
4. Teacher education curriculum for English language teachers should be reviewed to include the use of interactive/collaborative strategies to facilitate language use by learners.
5. Curriculum should include intensive study of grammar to enable teacher trainees specializing in the English language to have a good grasp of the nature and structure of English language and the child's mother tongue to effectively address their language needs.
6. More emphasis should be given to the study of grammar than literary studies to adequately equip the teacher trainees to teach English language effectively.

### **Suggestion for Further Studies**

1. Based on delimitation of this study, further research work is recommended on assessment of grammatical errors in English composition on a wider scope. It could be done by covering all the secondary schools in Borno state and beyond. The research would create room for more discoveries of challenges faced by students on areas of grammar and proffer possible remedy to the problem.
2. In addition, there is the need to compare spoken and written grammatical errors of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri metropolis.
3. The study could be conducted on larger group and at different educational institutions.

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