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## Grammatical Errors in Written Composition of Junior Secondary School Students in Owan West Local Government Area of EDO State

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### Abstract

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 raised 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 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. Based on the data, simple percentage was used to analyze students' 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 use of present tense from past tense. Based on the findings it was recommended amongst others that qualified English teachers should be employed in the teaching of English Language in Junior secondary schools.

### Introduction

English is much more than the language of both the English man and the British people. It is the most recognized national language (Bock Muniz, 2007). It is used as a first, second or a foreign language. In fact, English is one of the most recognized world languages. It is regarded as a key which opens doors to scientific and technical knowledge and it is indispensable to economic and political development of vast areas of the world. Nigeria as a nation has adopted the English Language as its Lingua Franca (L<sup>2</sup>). According to Hunjo (2002), English Language apart from its status as Nigeria's Lingua Franca, it is the language of official communication, educational and political administration.

One major area where the importance of English Language cannot be overlooked is its provision of access to education. It is the medium of instruction through which learners acquire knowledge and skills. To the average Nigerian, therefore, proficiency in English Language skills especially in writing in today's diverse society is the key to world's proof of knowledge and universal culture. It is a gateway to success in the global economy. In an increasingly demanding world of literacy, the importance of ensuring students' proficiency in writing skills cannot be overemphasized. The ability to write well, hitherto a luxury is now a dire necessity (Gallagher 2006). Writing is vital to students' developing literacy skills. In light of this, teaching students to write well should be top priority of a worth while education system. According to Gallagher (2006), a school that "teaches its students the curriculum without concurrently teaching them how to write well is a school that has failed".

Grammar at the sentence level is fundamental for the writing of compositions in English Language. However, Celce-murcia (2006) posited that nearly ninety years consistently showed that the teaching of school grammar has little or no effect on students because majority of students in schools still find it difficult to write meaningful and simple sentences in a composition or essay. This view is supported by the findings of Darus & Subramamam (2009) who examined a corpus of 72 essays written by 72 Malaysian secondary school students, 37 male and 35 female form four Malaysian students. The instrument used for the study was participant written essays and marking software. All the errors in the essays were identified and classified into various categories. The result also showed most students' misunderstanding of the English writing rules. This finding is also in line with that of (Zainal, 1990; Ojetunde, 2013). Thus, writing a composition involves more than just producing words and sentence. To effectively produce a piece of writing, a writer should be able to write a connected series of words and sentences which are grammatically and logically linked so that a reader can easily understand the writer's intention.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the process of learning a second or foreign language students are bound to make error. Students might make mistakes because they have not mastered the language rules. An error could be a product of unawareness of a language rule; hence, researchers like Brown (2002); and Aronoff & Fudeman (2006) affirmed that making errors are unavoidable problems in foreign and second language acquisition. This is the crux of the study.

In Nigeria, results released by West African Examination Council (WAEC), every year reveal that students' performance in English Language is very poor, scholars have tried to find out the reason for this mass failure (Babatunde, 2002). However, not much has been done in the area of grammatical errors in written compositions. Therefore, this study seeks to find out the grammatical errors in written composition by junior secondary school students in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State.

Objective of the study is to:

1. Find out the common types of grammatical errors made by junior secondary school students in composition writing in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State.

**Research Question**

1. What are the common types of grammatical errors made by junior secondary school students in composition writing in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State?

**Research Method**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population composed all the 2196 junior secondary school students in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State. Sample size of 180 students was randomly selected from four private and public junior secondary schools (2 private and 2 public schools).

The instrument used to collect data for the study was the researcher developed essay topic titled “How I spent my Christmas Holiday”. The aim was to find out the grammatical errors in students written English.

The instrument was validated by two experts from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and one expert from the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. The test – retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Using the pearson product moment correlation co-efficient, a reliability value of 70 was obtained.

The essay topic given to the students was analyzed based on the content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy using simple percentage.

Research Question I: what are the common types of grammatical errors made by junior secondary school students in composition writing in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State?

Table 1: score of students in content

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
No of students	-	-	30	36	72	36	6					180
Total	-	-	30	36	72	36	6					180

From the analysis in table 1 above, errors in content are the most serious of the errors that may be found in the written essays of students. Students mostly write out of a given topic. The content of a written essay is supposed to reflect and develop the given topic.

Table 2: Score of Students in Organization

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
No of students	-	-	24	48	54	48	-	6				180
Total	-	-	24	48	54	48	-	6				180

Table 2 reveals that organization, which is the actual presentation of the topic was poor as students failed to write an organized essay. The essay test given to the students was suppose to be of 300 words but the study found that most of the students wrote 50 to 100 words, thereby

reducing their marks. Moreover, their essay was disjointed. A well organized essay is supposed to consist of at least 2-3 paragraphs.

Analysis of Self Expression in Written Essay.

Table 3: Scores of students in Expression

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total
No of students	-	-	-	30	30	48	24	48									180
Total	-	-	-	30	30	48	24	48									180

From the above table, it was observed that from the written essays of the students, most of them had difficulty in expressing themselves in words. Self expression is very important when writing an essay. A good range of vocabulary and grammar is expected of students when expressing themselves.

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total
No of students	-	-	24	24	18	24	18	48	24								180
Total	-	-	24	24	18	24	18	48	24								180

From the above table, it was discovered that the wrong use of tenses, spelling mistakes, punctuation error and capitalization errors was a problem to the students. The essay required students to write how their last Christmas holiday was spent. This obviously requires the use of the past tense which was the purpose of the topic “How I spent my Christmas Holiday”.

However, it was observed from the written essay of students, inability to differentiate the use of present tense from past tense. For instance, we have such structures like I spend, we play, sing, and walk around, we also drink, we go, we see etc.

Table 5: Grand score of students in written Essay

Score	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	Total
No of students	48	96	36	-	-	180
%	26.7%	53.3%	20%	-	-	100

From the above table, the analysis of the general essay written by selected junior secondary schools students in Owan West Local Government Area revealed that only 36 students which represent 20% scored between 21-30 marks which is the average, 96 students which represent 53.3% scored between 11-20 marks which is weak and 48 students represents 26.7% did poorly as their scores ranged from 0-10.

It is pertinent to state that the scripts were marked based on the following;

Content ..... 10 marks

Organization ..... 10 marks

Mechanical Accuracy	}	15 marks
Use of Tenses		
Spelling		
Punctuation		
Use of capital letters		
Expression ..... 15 marks		
Total .....50 marks		
Grading scale		
Poor: 0 – 10marks		
Weak: 11-20marks		
Average: 21-30marks		
Good: 31-40marks		
Excellent:41-50marks		

### Discussion

The findings of this study were based on the research question addressed at the beginning of the work and analyzed in tables. The result showed that students have problems in the area of content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy in essay writing; and the common sources of these problems manifest in spelling errors, punctuation errors, capitalization errors and inability to differentiate the use of present from past tense. The result of this study agrees with that of (Zainal, 1990; Darus and Subramanian, 2009; Ojetunde 2013). According to Zainal (2009) two classes of errors were identified in his study, the second class of error which has to do with syntactical errors is observed in this study, though the first class of error is minimal in this study. However, the study of Darus and Submanian is totally in line with this study because the six types of errors identified in their study are some of the errors found in this study, for example, (use of Tenses, spelling, punctuation, use of capital letters, inability to organize essay properly and poor content structure). Grammatical errors were very prominent in this study and this is line with the findings of (Ojetunde, 2013).

### Recommendations

Having identified the grammatical errors made by junior secondary school students; the following suggestions 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 a matter of compulsion engage their students in composition writing regularly. This can be done by giving them individual class room exercises, take home assignments and continuous assessment test.
4. Students with outstanding performance in composition writing should be recognized and duly rewarded in schools. This will help to encourage other students.

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