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**IMPROVING STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN COMPOSITION WRITING THROUGH ERROR ANALYSIS: THE EXAMPLES OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ISEYIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT, OYO STATE, NIGERIA**

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***Abstract***

*The paper explores the error analysis of the written compositions of secondary schools students with the aim of improving their linguistic performance. The researcher purposively selects four (4) public Junior secondary schools in Iseyin Local Government and randomly selects (samples) one hundred (100) students from the selected four (4) secondary schools. The data for this paper are collected using four different composition topics written by the students and the data analysis is done with emphasis on the students' spelling errors, wrong tenses, punctuation errors, and unstructured sentences. The composition questions are given to the students during English lesson in the selected schools. From the result of the investigation, it is very obvious that errors committed by the selected Junior secondary school students are tense errors, spelling errors, mis-use of punctuation marks, unstructured sentences and mother tongue interferences. Based on these findings, recommendations are made as to what teachers, parents, government, management and students could do to reduce the students' linguistic errors. The paper recommends that the idea of using mother tongue while teaching should stop. The teachers should be responsible for improving the spoken and the written English of the students. However, a well equipped language laboratory will be an advantage to secondary school students because it will help in the phonological aspect of English Language. With all these findings and*

*recommendations, it is therefore hoped that there will be a fantastic improvement in the written essays of students.*

**Keywords:** *Composition writing, English language, Spelling error, Secondary school, Error Analysis*

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### **Introduction**

The core aim of teaching composition is to expose and develop the students in writing skills in order to use English language as an effective means of communication. In another way, the essence of writing skills is to improve the students' ability to express themselves with clarity and coherence in a method that is appropriate to the audience, purpose, topic and situation. To the students of English language, composition is a vital tool that assists the students in some other subjects. Teachers always try their best to guide students in English composition by adopting errors to teach them, in order to come out in flying colour.

Schumpter (2001) in his discovery, explains that error analysis helps to improve the acquisition of correct language habits instead of the incorrect one. He also states that error is generally acknowledged as an act of wrong doing. It is also a positive phenomenon because it provides a way of evaluating instructional items, materials and techniques.

In addition, going by errors analysis in composition teaching, it can be discovered that the predominant errors are in grammar e.g subject, predicate and complement and complement, wrong preposition, wrong tense form, inappropriate use of article, misuse of preposition, misuse of relative pronoun, miswriting of capital letter, use of comma in place of full stop, replacing semi-colon where full stop is undeniably required, insertion of comma between sub-ordinate or conjunction, skipping of quotation marks etc.

It also assists the students to correct the errors they habitually make. It prevents the repetition of the errors and permits them to improve their performance. The teacher will give information about the success of his teaching composition. The teacher can also discover and record items and

skills which he has taught and which most students are using successfully. It will allow the students to learn from their own mistakes and make corrections.

### Literature Review

Composition can be defined as pieces of continuous writing. Olowe (2001) sees composition as one of the most important activities of literate community. It is also the use of language in written form. Composition writing is essentially a product of mentalinguistic process.

Ajayi (1998) views composition as a record of imagined situation. All the examining boards require English Language candidates to write a composition although the syllabus and questions paper of some boards refers to it as an essay or a piece of continuous writing. The actual name used makes no difference to kind of answer expected from the candidates. In the sense of the term used in English Language Examination composition, an essay and a piece of continuous writing are one and the same form. Burton (1996) agrees that composition is a sustained and continuous piece of writing on a subject in the examination sheet. He also stated that there are same feature that make composition writing different from any other form of communication though writing and speaking are related acts. They are similar in the sense that both aim at achieving the same goals while speech is primary writing in secondary. These characteristics are according to Burton:

- a. The materials used in the composition must be imagined by the writer although it sources is often and best found in personal experience.
- b. The wordings of the question write are free and personal response from the writer.
- c. The emphasis is one self expression and creativity and subject approach is required.

Composition writing has different kinds namely: **Narrative** essay which tells a story or gives accounts of events or occurrences. They are essay that relate to a sequence of events. They inform us of what has happed. **Descriptive** essay which are the ones that predominantly described a person, an event, a place, a condition, a situation or phenomenon.

**Expository** essay are essay that gives detailed and full explanation of the main branch of their subjects; while **argumentative** essays are essays that deals with argument for or against a proposition.

Writing involves and ensures that the message got by the readers, tallies with what we have in mind to pass across. To achieve this, we must make use of the right words, put the words together in proper order, arrange the sentence structure in logical and cohesive manner and obey the rules of punctuation and mechanics.

It can be observed that composition writing always form an integral aspect of language skills development. Adegbite (1996) in his findings says that we are aware that writing is an act and like others arts, it must be taught and learnt while we must stress that our emphasis should not be on merely knowing the grammar of the language, it's skill has to be appreciated and to master the act of writing a good essay. Mastering of the mechanics of language is needed. In the words of Olukpe (1999), he asserts that where students cannot express their native sensibilities effectively and intelligently to the native speaker of the language, we need causes in both functional grammar and statistics. It is only in that way we can expect other learners and other users of the language to command good quality of English language.

However, teaching composition requires some methods. Selman (2006) states the creative writing approach requires combine effort of both the teacher and learners. The teacher does not write only his note on a specific topic but also prepare for the lesson to be taught. The teachers are suppose to think about important instructional materials or aids and get them prepared. Creative writing approach has its spare, namely; pre-writing activities, writing and post writing activities.

### **Brief comment on Error Analysis**

Error analysis is a practical procedure in which students are exposed to real language situation in the target language by given them assignment, test, or making them perform specific task in the target language. Their errors in the process are observed, analysed and then used as realistic aids in identifying the learner's linguistic performance in the target language.

Olanipekun (2003) is of the opinion that errors are systematic deviation from the target language by non-native speaker. Duke (2002) in his discoveries says that a language learner unconsciously break the written rules of the target language as a result of fault learning. According to him, error analysis is a collection of materials corrected from learners' performance in different types of their composition.

Errors are at times categorized according to the area of grammar in which they feature, hence, we have,

- i. spelling errors
- ii. errors of tense
- iii. errors of syntax
- iv. errors of preposition
- v. errors of concord
- vi. errors of omission

The categorisation of errors is however widened by Tomlinson and Ellis (1990) in the following analysis:

- i. Gross Errors
- ii. Delicate Errors
- iii. Breakdown Errors
- iv. Persistence Errors
- v. Critical Errors
- vi. Transcend Error

Meanwhile, in many of the students' essay, one would see that the errors come in different ways. Richard (1998) identifies three causes of errors which are; language transfer (Interlingua), generalisation or faculty teaching materials and techniques. The fourth cause is in consistency in English alphabet.

Nevertheless, learner's errors could be reduced if they are exposed to the target language learning early enough.

Osunsanmi (2003) lends credence to above statement when he says that it is important for second language learners of English to begin to hear and speak English early.

The misuse of the laws guiding target language which often leads to intralingua errors can be minimized to the learners and followed up with constant practice and reinforcement. Learner should be encouraged to cultivate the habit of constant use of the dictionary when doubting the spelling, pronunciation or use of any word.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the field of English Language, students are encountering the problem of writing error free composition and most of the teachers are not capable of elaborating these problems of errors analysis to the students. The research work signifies the stages at which the students commit errors in composition writing and suitable solution to the errors in their composition writing. Schumpter (2001) in his discovery explains that error analysis helps to improve the acquisition of correct language habits instead of the incorrect one. He also states that error is generally acknowledged as an act of wrong doing. It is also a positive phenomenon because it provides a way of evaluating instructional items, materials and techniques. Therefore, this paper seeks to investigate the process of improving students' performance in composition writing through error analysis.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate the process of improving students' performance in composition writing through error analysis. Other specific purposes or secondary objectives of the study are:

- to highlight the common errors in writing English of students
- to improve students' efforts in constructing correct sentence and forming good paragraph
- to intensify learners' language proficiency and effective use of punctuations/ capitalisation where required

### **Research Question**

Some relevant questions to be examined in the course of the study are as follows:

- Can the students identify their error?
- Does errors analysis have effect on the students' composition writing?

- How can teacher make effective use of error analysis to teach composition to his students?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study employs a descriptive research design with emphasis on examining the process of improving students' performance in composition writing through error analysis.

### **Population and Sampling Techniques**

The targeted population considered for this study is the entire Junior secondary schools three (JSS3) in four (4) different schools in Iseyin Local Government, Oyo state. The sampled schools are:

1. Faramora Grammar school, Iseyin,
2. Anwaru College of Education,
3. Islamic Girls high School
4. Aseyin High School

Meanwhile, one hundred (100) students are randomly selected from the selected four (4) secondary schools.

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument for this work is essays written by the selected students.

The questions are as follow

- i. A journey I will never forget
- ii. My home town
- iii. My birthday party
- iv. How I will spend my next holiday

### **Method of Data Collection**

A lot of things are used as data collection, they are:

1. Punctuation: this includes the use of capital letter comma, full tops, apostrophe and paragraph.
2. Spellings: there are different spelling which are synonymous in meaning, such spellings are put into consideration. It is accepted in

the Nigerian Standard English. More so, the British and America spelling has been accepted in Nigeria.

3. Grammar: this include structure of sentences, tenses subject used agreement.

### Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of data is carried out classifying the types of error collected from the students' essays.

### Presentation of Data

This section will discuss fully, the types of error found in Junior secondary schools (JSS) year three written essays. The types of the error are as follow:

- i. Spelling errors
- ii. Wrong tenses: past tense instead of future tense, present tense in place of past tense
- iii. Unstructured sentences, omissions of verbs, nouns pronouns, conjunctions, articles, prepositions.
- iv. Misuse of punctuation, wrong use of capital letters, omission and wrong use of commas and full stop. In appropriate use of question mark starting a sentence with small letter, omission of paragraphs.

This study also finds out the number of error-free sentences in the written essays. The numbers of sentences in the written essays are also put into consideration. An illustration of spelling errors can be found below:

"I toed my parents about it"

Another example:

"I packed all the nessacarry things"

"My town is very larg, the name of our king is ganiyu alobalowo and his palace is find."

"when getting into holiday, I will not travel to anywhere..." these spelling errors may be as a result of ignorance of the correct spellings.

Spelling errors may also be due to L1 (first language interference), which shows in the way other students pronounce these words. An average Yoruba may mix letter "e" for "i" as in engineering for "engeneering",



spelling errors could also be as a result of poor pronunciation of English sounds, examples are we for will, is for his, nest for next, but for bought and so on. Instances of wrong tenses also occur very frequently in the students' written essays. These types of errors are below:

"I spend my holiday in Abeokuyta, I really love it because I see something that I don't see in my city". "when we get to Abeokuta, out car stop at Abeokuta, I am happy before...." "but when out car stop I feel sad..."

"my father give me (cake) I am very happy....."

"my birthday party was very beautiful, on that day I am prepare some of everything that people du king well I prepare it some people came to my birthday to happy to me..."

From the example cited above, it shows the wrong use of tense especially using present tense for past tense. This may be as a result of carelessness on the part of the students. It shows inability of the students to listen to themselves when they are writing.

Unstructured sentences as mentioned in this study consist of the omission and inappropriate use of verbs nouns, pronouns, conjunctions, articles and preposition.

Examples of all these wrong use of preposition are shown below:

Using

"on" instead of 'at'

'I was born on Iseyin Oyo State'

"in" instead of "on"

In the day of my birthday party"

"at" instead "to"

"...the way at home..."

Verb errors

I "do" another hair style

"the elders of our house are invited.."

"...brother that do marriage..."

"my mother have promise me"

"after three day rester home my mother..."

Omission of articles

"name of my hometown is..."

Omission of conjunction

“my brother will buy stationery like pens, books eraser ruler for me”

In appropriate use of conjunction

I invited my friends, neighbours but my families

Inappropriate use of noun

“there are many something in my town”

‘I am so happy on the day of my birthday me and my friend we collect photograph to photo us’

“the name of my home town king..”

Wrong use of verbs

“it was do me like me I go to study there”

“ I help my sister to s ell market”

“our vacation will began...”

Wrong use of pronoun

“when the driver collected her key...” everything she d ay in my town

omission of punctuation marks

Oja oba

Ojaagbe

“the name of ma town is Iseyin is the...”

OJa, Oba

Beginning of a sentence with small letters.

“my home town...” in the aspect of...”

Wrong use of capital letters

“Visit” “EveryThing”, “THE NAME of My ToWN...” “OGwAdo”

“i” ganiyu oloogunbi ajinese “beCasue”

## Data Presentation

Average and standard deviation for the above features

## Errors in Tenses

Table 1

Wrong tenses	No of students	X	Standard deviation
599	100	5.99	2.45

In table 1, it is observed that errors are committed greatly among students. It shows an average of six tense errors per students.

**Table 2**

Misuse Of Punctuation	No Of Students	X	Standard deviation
640	100	6.4	2.53

In table 2, it is obvious that students are poor in the use of punctuation in their written essays. An average of 6.4 misused of punctuation per student.

**Table 3**

Wrong spelling	No of students	X	Standard deviation
430	100	4.3	2.07

In table 3; it is neither encouraging because it shows an average of 4.3 spelling errors per student.

**Table 4**

Error-free	No of students	X	Standard deviation
210	100	2.1	1.45

Table 4 deals with error-free sentences. It is discovered that the number of students who have error-free sentences in their essay are average 2.1. This shows that there are very few students who have error-free sentences, while some students do not have error-free sentences in their essays.

**Table 5**

Unstructured	No of students	X	Standard deviation
560	100	5.6	2.37

Table 5 focuses on unstructured sentence which consist of error of omission of pronoun, noun, verb, conjunction, preposition article. A poor performance is also observed as it shows an average of 5.6 unstructured sentences committed per student.

**Table 6**

No of sentences in the essay	No of students	X	Standard deviation
770	100	7.7	2.78

Table 6 have to do with the number of sentences in the essays written by these students it shows that an average of 7.7 sentences were in the written essays of these students.

S/N	Wrong spelling	Correct spelling
1	Oye	Oyo
2.	Tradrtion	Tradition
3.	Ttittle	Title
4.	Nular	Ruler
5.	Othe	Other
6.	Ma	My
7.	Firden	Friend
8.	Marker	Market
9.	Ican	Icon
10.	Realease	Release
11.	Prominient	Prominent
12.	Dadd	Daddy
13.	Capita	Capital
14.	Largestis	Largest
15.	Ants	Aunty
16.	Zoon	Zoo
17	Feld	Field
18	Towon	Town
19	Gournilism	Journalism
20	Gou	You
21	Junely	July
22	Sillebieth	Celebrate
23	Mag	Many
24	Rising	Reason

### **Discussion of Findings**

The highest number of errors noticed here tense is the tense errors committed by these students in their essays.

A total number of 599 wrong tenses are the errors made by one hundred students, that is average of 5.99 tense errors per student.

This is followed by misuse of punctuation with a total of 640, that is, in one student's essay, there is average of 6.4 errors of punctuation and these mistakes are very common (high) and needs attention.

A total number of 560 errors of unstructured sentences (an average of 5.6 unstructured sentences per student) are committed. This shows that a low number of students can write sentences without any error. This includes subject-verb agreement which does not appear on the tables in the previous section but has been noticed in the students' essays.

Teachers are hereby advised to concentrate on "concord" that is "agreement between subject and verb". Spelling error has not also improved fully. It is not as rampant as the previous errors discussed before, but there is still need for improvement. Students will have at least three spelling errors in their essays. This normally happens when there is no difference in pronunciation of some words "seat and sit", "seek and sick", other and order. When these students want to choose these words, problem may occur because the students get confused and then spelling errors occur.

Mother tongue interference has also contributed immensely to the students' writing errors. An example is the substitution of alveolar sounds for fricative sounds; 'tin' for 'thing', 'tank' for 'thank', 'day' for 'they', this happens as a result of the fact that dental fricatives does not exist in Nigerian language. Nevertheless, some error-free sentences are also recorded.

A total number of 210 error-free sentences with an average of 2.1 per student are seen in their essays. This is quite interesting as it shows that the numbers of students who have error-free sentences in their essays are not up to three. It explains further that, almost all of the students' essays have errors while very few have error-free sentences. This is becoming very appalling and a quick attention is needed.

### **Conclusion**

It is very obvious that errors committed by the selected Junior Secondary school are tense errors, spelling errors, misuse of punctuation, unstructured sentences, low error-free sentences and mother tongue

interference. Relatively, this study has greatly worked to identify some errors usually committed by students while writing essays and has equally analyse the areas of their errors. It is therefore hoped that there will be a fantastic improvement on the written essay of students.

### Recommendation

The primary recommendation of this study is that English Language must be used as a language of instruction in the classroom. The idea of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the classes should be prevented. This will make the students familiar with the language. Students will also be able to understand the language when it is spoken.

A well equipped language laboratory will be an advantage to secondary school students because it will help in the phonological aspect of English language. It should also be noted that it is not only the English teacher that has a good command of English. Therefore, all teachers in schools should be responsible for improving the spoken and written English of the students.

Some schools have good advantage of the best teachers and best equipment in school. This should be called to order, as it is unfair on the students whose schools are lacking good teachers and equipment, after all they will jointly sit for the J.S.S Examination. The government is not left out in this exercise. Government should help to improve language teaching, educational administration be willing to help implementing good language policies. Facilities for teaching phonetics, linguistics, and applied linguistics should be provided where necessary. Textbooks, journals, magazines, articles that are current should exist in the library provided. Teacher should also be committed to solving students' problem(s) in the use of English; if the teachers detect students' problems, they might change their method of teaching to one that will aid and favour the students.

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