

Grammar Error Analysis of Narrative Compositions of Learners in Senior Secondary School Grades: A Case Study of Selected Public Secondary Schools in Chingola District, Zambia

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Abstract

The study analysed grammar errors in narrative compositions of learners in senior grades (grades 10-12) in four selected public secondary schools in Chingola District of the Copperbelt Province, Zambia. The study relied on the Universal Grammar Theory of Noam Chomsky of 1960. The informants of the study were 60 (26 males and 34 females): 1 (one) from the District Education Board Secretary's office, 2 (two) Head teachers, 4 (four) Deputy Head teachers, 3 (three) Heads of Departments, 2 (two) Heads of Sections, 8 (eight) Subject Teachers and 40 learners. Purposive sampling was used to select participants positioned to give the needed information. Questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions, lesson observation and assessment of learners' narrative composition scripts were the methods of data collection used. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection were employed. Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 and Excel while qualitative data was analysed in a descriptive manner. The study revealed variations in the types of grammatical errors learners committed in narrative compositions in the four selected schools. The numbers and types of grammatical errors varied from school to school. Respondents further suggested to the investigation possible causes of grammatical errors learners made in narrative compositions. It was established that despite the variations as regards the types of grammatical errors learners made, some errors, namely spellings, tenses, punctuations, word order and paragraphing were common in all the four selected schools.

Keywords: Grammatical errors, narrative composition, syntax, sentence construction, English language

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1. Introduction

In acquiring the English language, learners need to master four macro language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Harmer in Cholipah (2014:1), listening and reading skills, which involve receiving messages, are categorised as receptive skills while speaking and writing skills, which involve language production, are considered to be productive. Grammar is one of the language aspects that play a significant role in the language learning process. Learners need to know/learn English grammar rules. This is because rules enable learners to produce sentences in English that are grammatically acceptable (to readers). However, there is no doubt that learners face challenges in mastery of grammar, (hence they make errors during their learning of structure. The English grammar system is somewhat different from that of the learner's Mother Tongue. The main problem faced by learners of the English language is grammatical errors (learning grammar rules), but they have difficulty in constructing grammatically correct English sentences. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 139) point out that an error is reserved for the systematic items of the second language rule system. But learners' errors are premised on the complex grammatical rules of a foreign language.

Despite learning English grammar, learners still commit errors. The problems of grammatical errors are believed to be as a result of mother tongue influence such as misspellings and lack of grammatical understanding (Bustomi, 2009; Purwanti, 2013; Pupitasari, 2013). Writing, as an activity, requires that learners have a good knowledge of grammar [rules] to produce grammatically correct sentences. Particularly, mastery of grammar is of utmost importance to writing skill as it helps learners produce correct sentences. Swan (1998) cited in Khairunisa, Nadrun and Rachmania (2018) describes grammar as the rule that stipulates how words are transformed to illustrate changed meaning and blend into sentences.

Grammatical rules are still a major problem that learners face in learning English. Mastering grammar [rules] is a major problem faced by learners in learning English. Some rules are so complex that learners in

senior grades still have difficulty mastering and applying them in their written work. English grammar is more complicated in comparison to the grammar of Zambian Languages. Some (most) learners often make grammar errors, especially in writing. The learners' written work seems to continue to be influenced [mostly] by their L1 when the learners apply grammar rules. Consequently, the persistent grammatical errors have adversely affected the candidates' performance in English language final examinations at Grade 12 level, especially in narrative compositions.

Based on the above, the study found that many learners of senior secondary grades in public secondary schools have challenges learning and applying grammatical rules in their writing. Learners construct wrong sentences and do not know how to correct them. But there are learning theories that prohibit making errors, e.g. A-L Method. Some linguists/educationists think that committing errors in learning a language is part and parcel of the learning process. Hence, the study sought to analyse learners' grammatical errors using error analysis in order to establish their competence in the foreign language. Error analysis is a very significant and important process to establish what aspects of grammar are difficult for learners. Through error analysis (EA), identifying grammatical errors that are made by learners becomes easier. The EA is a method used to document errors identified to appear in learners' language and determine whether those errors are systematic; and possibly explain the cause. On the other hand, an error is a form in learner language that is incorrect, implying that they are inconsistent with the rules of grammar.

Looking at the English language Syllabus, one would expect learners to have a high level of competence in the English language. Knowledge of grammar on the part of learners is key to writing narrative composition. They exhibit effective writing skills if they master grammar. In attempting to master writing skills, it is necessary for teachers to analyze errors learners make in narrative composition writing to find out how much they (learners) acquire in the learning process.

Teachers of English Language should have interest in errors made by learners as they are an important factor in the learning process. When learners make errors in their learning, the teacher has a duty to offer grammatical solutions. This will gradually remind them of what they learn.

Over the years, various stakeholders have expressed concerns regarding the quality of school leavers' writing skills. Moreover, the Chief Examiner's report on candidates' performance in the 2017 joint School Certificate of Education in English language paper 1, observed that "though a good number of candidates attempted narrative composition, their performance was unsatisfactory" (ECZ, 2017:4). The report further highlighted that inaccurate use of direct speech mainly had a negative impact on candidates' performance in narrative composition (ECZ, *ibid*; 5). The other grammatical errors highlighted were in the form of sentence construction, tenses, contractions, paragraphing, syllable division, punctuations, spellings and conjunctions. Therefore, it is no wonder that Grade 12 learners exit school with low level proficiency in narrative composition writing. The cause of learners' poor performance in narrative composition writing in senior grades is unknown. This prompted the present study on grammar error analysis of senior secondary school grades in narrative composition writing.

Another way in which learners can express themselves adequately in any subject is in writing. Unfortunately, learners in senior secondary school grades (10-12) lack the necessary writing skills in narrative compositions. One of the reasons for learners' poor performance could be the fact that they are taught in a second language. Nunan (2001:89) contends that proponents of Contrastive Analysis claim that where the first and second language rules are not the same, errors are likely to occur as a result of interference between the two languages. A pupil, without mistakes should communicate effectively and accurately (MoE, 1996).

2. Research Objectives

1. To examine the common types of grammatical errors made by learners of senior grades in narrative compositions in public secondary schools.
2. To determine the effectiveness of the strategies used by teachers when teaching narrative compositions in public secondary schools.
3. To establish the interest of teachers and learners towards narrative composition lessons in public secondary schools.

3. Literature Review

The study adopted Noam Chomsky's (1960) Universal Grammar theory which states that the human brain possesses a specific set of rules for language organization. The implication being that all languages have a common structural basis with a set of rules referred to as grammar. Chomsky contended that the ability to learn grammar is embedded in the brain. The development of language in any person is compellingly characterized by three factors namely: (1) the genetic endowment that determines the limits on the languages to be attained, hence making it possible for language acquisition; (2) external data that is changed to the experience that sorts out one or another language within a limited range; and (3) unspecified principles to faculty of language.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The Universal Grammar theory formed the theoretical framework upon which grammar error analysis of narrative compositions by learners in senior secondary school grades in selected public schools was based. The theory further guided the study in accessing data regarding the performance of learners in composition writing, in senior secondary school.

3.2 English Language and Career Development

Among today's world languages, English continues to be amongst the list of the most widely studied languages (Theodore, 1998). Zambia is a former British protectorate and part of the English-speaking world family. The English language still enjoys a prominent position even in Zambia today as confirmed by the Ministry of Education (1996) and by Snelson (1974) who both state that English is Zambia's national official language. In fact, all subjects in Zambia are taught and examined in English except for the case of Zambian languages and other foreign languages are taught in English. At the Joint School Certificate and General Certificate of Education level, the Examinations Council of Zambia does not recognize learners who do not have a pass grade in English Language on the certificate. ECZ (2014:18) confirms that:

“the first criterion for obtaining a School Certificate is that a candidate should pass six subjects including English Language with a credit or better in at least one of the subjects. The second alternative is for the candidate to pass in five subjects (including English Language) with credits or better in at least two subjects”.

Before learners leave secondary school, they are expected to develop a high level of proficiency in English to effectively communicate with the outside world. English is considered to be the gateway to success in the global economy.

3.3 Acquiring writing skills

According to Coe and Gutierrez (1981: 262-263), learners need to develop certain principles that can help them discover their writing difficulties, set their goals and evaluate their individual progress. The principles that learners need to develop are:

1. The change of process is the best way a learner can improve the quality of his or her written work.
2. Active learning is more important as opposed to passive learning in order to develop writing skill and achieve the set goals as required by the teacher.
3. Learners can also learn well from fellow learners.
4. There is need for problem identification that can in turn lead to successful problem solving.
5. Stating the goal precisely, employing the best strategy, maintaining a perfect time frame and the ability to verify the procedure can help to achieve the goal.

Since writing skills are needed in learning a language, the above principles are important. Manchon (1982) as cited in Lund (2015:2) confirmed that writing is used widely in language practice for learning a foreign language. In addition, there is no doubt that all forms of writing in a foreign language contribute to the development of language skills. Both learning-to-write and writing-to-learn exercises help learners to acquire foreign language skills.

3.4 Aspects of a Good Composition

The quality of the final product of any piece of writing continuously remains a source of concern for the readers. In this case, a composition is no exception. For any composition to communicate louder than the content words, it should be made up of the components required for it to have a good writing taste.

Aspects of a good composition are introduction, body and conclusion (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 2013). Dawson (2009) states that essay introductions should be good. He added that opening sentences in introductions should capture the interest of readers' and persuade their desire to continue reading. Such sentences should have a sense of originality. Additionally, Dawson and Yon (2008) posited that some writers in their work on narratives, use the flashback technique. However, the same scholars observed that most students write essays without using the above technique.

Characterization is the second aspect of a good narrative composition. Narratives should have characters that are realistic and convincing (Dawson, 2009). It should be emphasized to the learners that they should pay particular attention to every character in the narrative.

Essays that lack appropriate use of correct tenses derived from the topic are a common feature in students' essays (Dawson, 2006; Kihara et al., 2009; Calkins, 2010; ZIMSEC Report November, 2011; Lester, et al., 2011). Before attempting to write, learners should first of all make a decision with regards to the tense in which they are going to write their essay. For example, an essay topic in the past demands to be written in the past tense.

3.5 Methodologies used in teaching writing

Freeman (2000) claimed that Grammar Translation Method (GTM) focuses only on teaching and learning the rules. According to the GTM, learning a language goes with learning all grammatical rules. The method is more concerned with accuracy than fluency. Learners can only be accurate if they are exposed to grammatical items and learn them correctly. Before learners are introduced to examples of grammar, they must first learn its rules and definitions. This will help learners learn grammatical rules and improve their writing skill. Freeman in addition further found this method to be appropriate for beginners and large classes; and does not demand a lot of resources. In GTM, the teacher is the centre figure of the learning process and learners' participation is limited. It is still used in situations where understanding literary texts is the primary focus of foreign language study and there is little need for a speaking knowledge of the language (Freeman, 2000:11-16).

The most difficult skill to impart to learners by teachers of the English language, seems to be writing. This is because teachers find the skill complex in nature. There are many other factors that influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning writing. This study centred on the teacher and the learners as the two major factors.

3.6 Learners' Needs

Self-esteem and peer approval are very critical for secondary school learners. Learners at secondary school are in search of their personal identity so that they feel valued even during English lesson activities. Hence the teacher should attend to every pupil in order to maximize inclusiveness during the learning process of writing so that each individual succeeds. Harmer (2001: 39) adds that "Teenagers, if they are engaged, have a great capacity to learn, a great potential for creativity, and a passionate commitment to things which interest them." He calls upon teachers to "provoke student engagement" by using relevant and involving activities in their lessons.

Tasks in writing should have a reflection of reality and relevance. According to (Raimes, 1983: 83) the best way of teaching writing is to have a clear purpose and a specific audience. Such practical writing may include messages, notes, forms, invitations, various kinds of letters, instructions (e.g. recipes and giving directions), lists, daily notes, apology, complaint, writings expressing congratulations or sympathy, etc. Further, White and Arndt (1991: 5) add that students should be involved also in evaluating and revising their writing, taking responsibility for their written products from the early stage.

Byrne (1988: 27-29) holds that one of the primary needs of students is that they need to be taught how to write in Second Language (L2) and need to acquire ability to organise sentences into a coherent whole. Byrne further states that students need a great variety of activities; and Harmer (1991:54) similarly advises that learners be provided with controlled exposure and a great deal of practice of new language.

Harmer (2001: 39) states that students need the teacher's support and guidance, though at the same time teachers should provoke their intellectual activity by contrasting ideas and concepts that they have to resolve for themselves. Similarly, Byrne (1988: 49) makes an observation that students feel a great need to use language freely without the teacher intervening; they seek opportunities for free expressing and responding to situations "with their own thoughts and experience," Puchta and Schratz (as cited in Harmer, 2001: 39).

Adolescent learners' interest in the learning process can sometimes be actualized through fun. It is important for teachers to make use of certain characters in their writing class activities. Byrne (1988: 43-46, 64-69) introduces a few fun activities such as quizzes, questionnaires, puzzles, mystery stories, and other. Writing activities that include fun can be of great reward to learners. The art of writing, as it is perceived by many, **it?** is not a silent classroom activity.

However, communication activities should match the growing ability of the learners to express themselves through the written form. The teacher should therefore be aware of the fact that the more advanced the students are in written communication, the more challenging activities need to be presented (Byrne (1988: 60).

3.7 Activities of a Teacher

A teacher is regarded by a learner as a fountain of knowledge. He or She should have learners' needs in mind and follow the roadmap of the lesson in order to achieve the objectives. In order to follow the lesson roadmap easily, the teacher should first be engaged in good planning. Raimes (1983: 12-13) suggests that during planning a writing lesson, it is important to consider appropriate activities that will help learners acquire the desired writing skills. The teacher as a facilitator should have individual learners' abilities at heart. Raimes (1983: 13) also argues that one of the most troublesome problems writers face are "not about difficulty of finding right words and using correct grammar, but about difficulty of finding and expressing ideas in new language". Efforts of every pupil with either use of correct or wrong grammar should be appreciated because both situations will form a basis of learning writing skills.

Harmer (2001) and Byrne (1988) posit that the role of the teacher is quite a crucial and delicate factor in the process of learning writing. Generally, there are several roles the teacher can take on when teaching. Depending on circumstances and goals of particular activities, the teacher, as further described by Harmer (2001: 57-67), can act as a controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, observer, or language model,

teaching aid, and performer. In other words, the teacher should not only be professional but should also possess certain qualities that will create a conducive classroom environment for learning writing skills.

3.8 Errors and Mistakes

Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) define error analysis as “the study and analysis of errors made by second language learners.” They go further and point out that “a distinction is sometimes made between an error, which results from incomplete knowledge, and a mistake made by a learner when writing or speaking which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness or some other aspect of performance.” (ibid.) You can conclude that errors are more serious than mistakes. Ellis and Tomlinson (1990:259) however make the observation that “it is not always possible to distinguish between errors and mistakes.” They observe that “when a learner unconsciously breaks the unwritten rules of the target language as a result of faulty learning, he makes an error... When a learner makes a mistake, he breaks the rules of the language as a result of non-linguistics factors [such as being] careless, tired, sick, bored, writing very quickly or thinking ahead,” ... [They then conclude that] “mistakes are inevitable and frequently made by native speakers.”

According to Brown (2000), a “mistake” (in performance) refers to a performance error in that it is the learner’s failure to utilize a known system correctly, while an “error” (in competence) is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the inter-language competence of the learner. Corder (1967; cited in Karra, 2006) refers to mistakes as unsystematic errors and systematic ones as errors. In other words, a mistake is a conscious grammatical failure while an error is an unconscious grammatical failure. As is often said, “a slip of the tongue” is a mistake in speech (Boomer & Laver, 1968; Bears, 1992), in the same way, a mistake in writing can be referred to as a “slip of the pen”. Bears (1992) indicate that a mistake is an action that is quickly recognized and corrected. Both Corder (1967, 1971) and James (1998) reveal a criterion that helps us to do so: A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Errors are “systematic,” i.e., likely to happen regularly and not recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher would locate them (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

3.9 Grammatical Errors

The term grammatical error is used in prescriptive grammar to describe an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as misplaced modifier or an inappropriate verb tense states Garner (2012). Similarly, Hernandez (2011) states that grammatical errors involve faulty structures which may include wrong verbal tense, incorrect verbal forms and syntax problems. It is also referred to as error usage. Grammatical errors are usually a serious challenge to second language learners.

3.10 Causes of errors

According to Norrish (1987: 8) causes of errors may be classified into three types namely carelessness, first language interference, and translation. Below each of the three error types is discussed briefly.

- a. *Carelessness*: this cause is seriously connected with lack of the learner’s motivation. The majority of teachers are aware that learners should not always be blamed for loss of interest in lessons. The loss of interest could be triggered by the type of materials or style of presentation by the teacher.
- b. *First language interference*: Norrish observes that learning a language (mother tongue or foreign language) is a process of habit formation. When a person is engaged in the process of learning new habits, the old ones will have an influence on the new ones. Scholars refer to this cause of error as first language interference.
- c. *Translation*: This occurs when a learner makes use of the first language sentence or idiomatic expression word-for-word in the target language. Some scholars assert that this could be the greatest cause of errors among learners. It is not very different from the previous cause of error of first language interference.

Furthermore, Ellis and Tomlinson (1990:260) classify causes of errors as follows:

- a. Poor teaching of a language item.
- b. Faulty modelling of a language item by a teacher.
- c. Influence of learners’ first language or mother tongue. This could lead to:
 - Mistranslation from first language or mother tongue to target language and vice versa.
 - Assuming that the rules of the first language or mother tongue are applicable to the target language and vice versa.
- d. Exposure to common errors at school, at play, at home and from mass media.
- e. Attempts by a learner to use language items which have not been taught yet.
- f. Using items which have been ‘learned’ but ‘forgotten’ as a result of infrequent need to use them.
- g. Overgeneralisation

3.11 Errors Analysis

The concept of Error Analysis (EA) was first introduced by Lee in 1957, and it gained ground in the 1970s. Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) define error analysis as “the study and analysis of errors made by second language learners. Although the field of error analysis in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) was introduced in the 1970 by Corder and colleagues, error analysis was an alternative to contrastive analysis. According to Crystal (1992), error analysis in language teaching and learning is the study of the unacceptable forms produced by someone (in) learning a language, especially foreign language. Similarly, according to James (1998: 1), error analysis is the process of concluding the occurrence, nature, reasons and effect of unsuccessful language. Firstly, error analysis is very important to teachers. When teachers identify and analyse the errors, they will easily help second language learners to be aware of such errors and avoid repeating them (the same errors). Additionally, error analysis involves an explanation of how grammatical rules are violated and how best they can be corrected. Errors that are not analysed can pose a permanent challenge to the constructive input of the language learning process. Secondly, according to Norrish (1983: 80), error analysis can give a picture of the type of difficulty that learners are experiencing. If carried out on a large scale such as survey, it can be helpful in drawing up a curriculum.” For this reason, it is premised that error analysis can be of great help for the designers of syllabus because errors found in language learning can be data for them to determine which materials are important to be included and which ones need to be improved. EA has significantly contributed to Second Language Acquisition and second language writing. Therefore, errors made by learners in the process of learning the TL have always been a source of great concern to teachers and syllabus designers.

3.12 Error Analysis in Composition Writing

Writing is a challenging process in English Language because of the many rules involved in writing and the fact that the writing skill is introduced to learners later than speech. In other words, writing is prioritised second as a means of communication. Shaughnessy (1977) observes that “without sufficient understanding and practice of the grammatical and rhetorical conventions that writing calls for, one may make errors or deviations when one has to use the written form of communication”. From Shaughnessy’s observation, this is the reason why features of early language learnt has a lot of influence on a learner’s written work. Despite the fact that almost every person is exposed to spoken language at an early stage of life, later there is more demand especially in academic work for a learner to communicate more and accurately through writing. Examiners of compositions are not just interested in the length of written work (quantity) but rather more of correct grammar (quality). Therefore, learners should consider all forms of grammar in their composition writing.

3.13 Importance of Errors

Many educators and theorists in the field of error analysis have focused on the importance of second language learners' errors. Corder (1967) indicates that errors are significant in three different ways. Firstly, to the teachers, in that they tell them how far towards the goal the learners have advanced and consequently, what remains for them to learn. Secondly, they provide researchers with evidence of how language is learnt or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learners are employing in their discovery of the language. Thirdly, they are indispensable to learners themselves, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learners use in order to learn. Research has provided empirical evidence pointing to emphasis on learners' errors as an effective means of improving grammatical accuracy (White et al., 1991; Carroll and Swain, 1993). Indeed, as Carter (1997:35) posits that “Knowing more about how grammar works is to understand more about how grammar is used and misused”. It is important for learners to appreciate the benefits of errors which occur in their writing in order for them to adequately grasp and understand the nature of the errors made. When grammatical errors made by learners in narrative composition writing are identified, this will help teachers of English language handle the problem and indicate the points of weakness in English writing. Errors should also influence the teachers’ lesson designs and ultimate execution. As Ellis and Tomlinson (1990:259) observe, in situations where English is taught as a Second language, such as in Zambia, “errors will often be habitual and systematic as they often go uncorrected and in fact frequently reinforced by similar errors made by peers and mass media. Thus, when a pupil comes to secondary school, he brings with him language habits which he thinks are correct but which in actual fact are faulty.”

3.14 Studies on Grammar Error analysis in Composition Writing - Studies outside Africa

Tharakan (1998) did a study in India entitled “Common grammatical errors by secondary school students in written English”. The main tools and techniques used by the study were teacher-made diagnostic tests. The outcome of the study was that remedial practice within a limited time can help minimize the number of errors made by learners in written English. Tharakan’s focus was on arriving at the common grammatical errors and how such errors can be reduced. Tharakan’s research objective on common grammatical errors is similar to one of the objectives of the research. The scholar studied the common grammatical errors made generally by

secondary school students in written English in general while this study narrowed down specifically to look at grammar error analysis of senior grades in narrative composition writing.

Chen (2000) looked at “Error analysis of some features of English article usage”. The researcher mainly concentrated on error analysis on how features of the English article are used in sentences by students in Taiwan. He discovered that most college students in Taiwan had challenges in the use of tenses in English. Chen’s conclusion was that the Taiwanese language lacked an equivalent syntactical device. While Chen’s study mainly focused on the use of the English articles and tenses, the current study considered the other components of English grammar.

3.15 Studies in Africa

Farhat (1994) conducted research known as “The types of errors generated by Sudanese students but with a different order and frequency of occurrence: Articles errors 39.5%, tense errors 30.9%, copula errors 1.5%, adverb positioning errors 1.1% and adjective positioning errors 0.6%”. This objective of the research is similar to the current study in that it looked at a variety of grammar errors committed by students and then analysed them category by category. However, unlike this study, Farhat did not look at teachers’ and learners’ interest in narrative composition lessons.

3.16 Studies within Zambia

Within Zambia, Moonga (2012) did a study on “Written English errors made by Grade 11 learners in a multilingual context in narrative compositions in Kabwe and Monze Districts”. Her major aim was to arrive at the types and sources of errors among Grade 11 learners in their written English. This study looked at grammar error analysis of senior grades in narrative composition writing. In addition, studies focus on narrative compositions but the difference is that this particular study targeted all senior grades (Grade 10 – 12) with a view of providing grammatical remedies at least at an early stage before Grade 12.

Simbeye (2016) investigated “Error Analysis of Grade 12 Learners in Expository Compositions”. Among the researcher’s findings was that learners made errors because of their negative attitude towards composition writing lessons as compared to other language lessons. Similarly, her finding was that teachers of English Language also had a negative attitude towards teaching composition writing. Further, her findings from various classroom observations were that teachers do not really teach composition but just test it. Simbeye conducted a study on error analysis of Grade 12 learners in expository composition while our study will cater for all senior grades (Grades 10 – 12) in narrative composition.

4. Methodology

The study was a case study by research design and selected public secondary schools. The research made use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Leedy (2010) noted that mixed research design brings out a well-developed, integrated and comprehensive study. Creswell (2009) also observed that “the major premise for combining the methods should be that there is more insight to be gained from the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods than either form by itself”. Moreover, the design helped “uncover new meanings and understandings. It is an in-depth analysis of the problem in order to understand the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of human behaviour” (Brink & Wood, 1998:337; Banda, Mpolomoka, Mbono, and Sampa, 2017). The study employed purposively the sampling technique as the targeted respondents were well placed to provide data on grammar error analysis of senior grades in narrative composition writing. Furthermore, only sixteen (16) teachers of English and forty (40) learners were selected for the research. School administrators as internal standards officers and some staff from the District Education Board as external standards officers totalling 18 in number were also involved. Ormrod (2005:133) and Banda, et al (2017) rightly observe that purposive sampling technique ensures that participants with the needed information about the topic are selected. Seventy-four (74) participants were involved to ensure an in-depth investigation during the study. The four (4) public secondary schools were purposively selected based on the proximity of the schools to the researcher. Public secondary schools were selected bearing in mind that the performance of these schools have been generally below that of private secondary schools.

Questionnaires were administered to administrative staff at district level while semi-structured interview schedules were administered to administrative staff at school level. Focus group discussions were held with learners from each school. The groups comprised a minimum of ten (10) learners from Grades 10-12. The researchers also used direct observations during English narrative composition lessons. This too included a purposive reflection during the teaching process. The behaviour of teachers and learners, including events that are connected to notable challenges, and the situation during the lesson observations were also noted down.

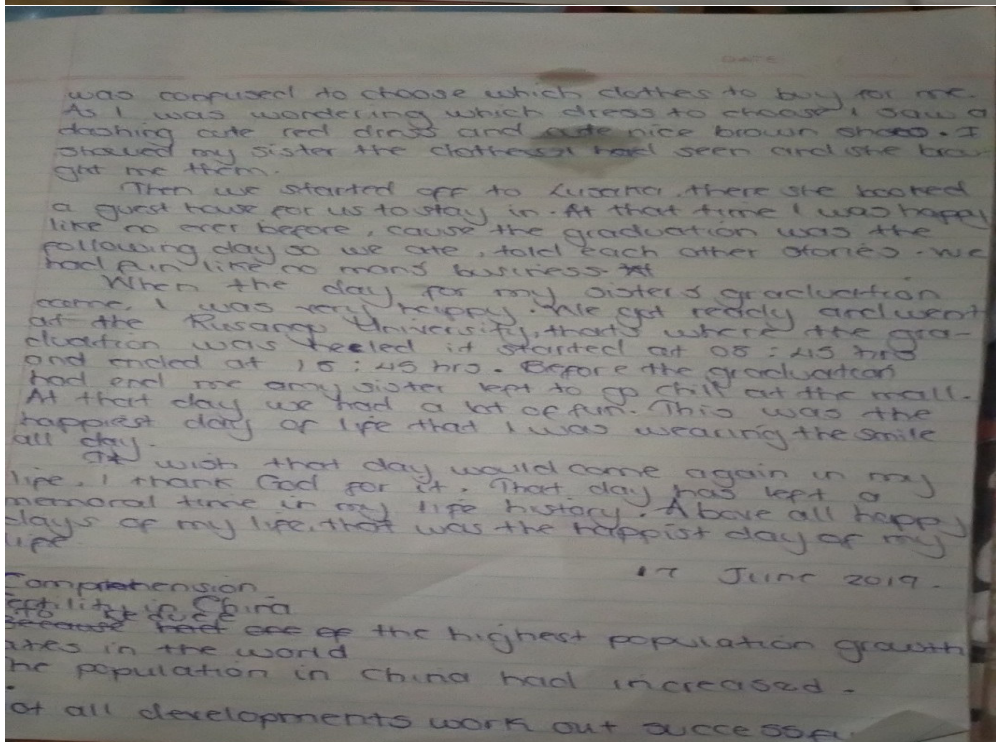
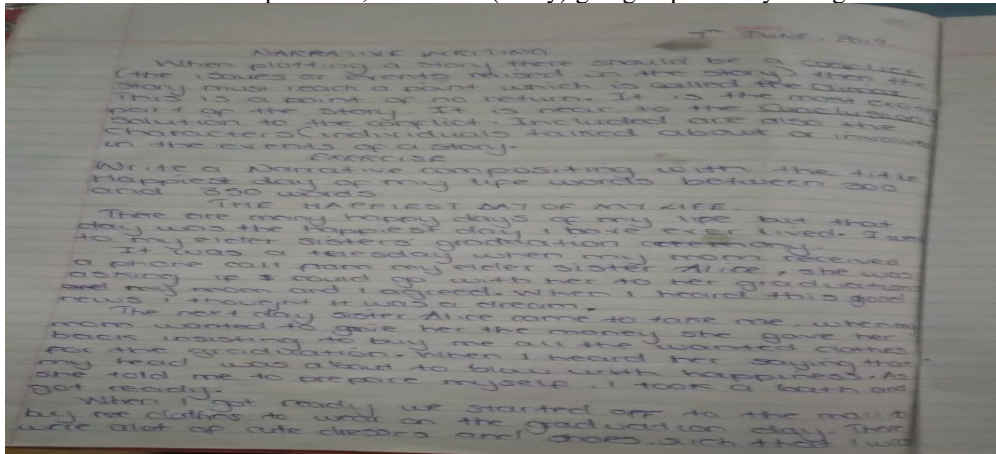
Quantitative data from the sample of respondents was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V16) and Excel (and) presented in tables, bar charts and pie charts with proportions shown in frequencies and percentages. The qualitative data was also analysed in a descriptive manner. Further, the study

analysed and discussed emerging factors of the collected data from the informants.

5. Findings and Discussion

The main objective of the study was to conduct grammar error analysis of senior grades in narrative compositions from selected public secondary schools in Chingola District of the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. A number of grammatical errors were common in all the four schools. The common grammatical errors in the four selected schools were spelling, tenses, punctuation marks, word order and paragraphing. The observation was that learners committed grammatical errors because teachers did not put much emphasis on grammar items during composition lessons. The study sampled grammar items namely spellings, tenses, punctuations, word order, prepositions, articles, genitives and capital letters.

It is noted that the strategies teachers use during narrative composition lessons were not very effective. In most cases, (the) teachers did not always mark (the) learners' compositions. In many cases/Often teachers took too long to mark (the) learners' work. When they did mark, they did not adequately identify and code the grammatical errors. Also, teachers marked learners' work without adequately identifying and coding learners' grammatical errors. One interesting finding of his study is that marking any work at all is very important feedback. The study further revealed that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities can significantly help sharpen teachers' pedagogical skills. There is need for teachers and learners to develop interest in narrative composition lessons so that learners' performance improves. Teachers, as facilitators, should motivate learners to develop interest in lessons. If learners in Chingola District secondary schools develop interest in narrative compositions, results are (likely) going to positively change.



Findings from the four Chingola Urban District schools, though located in two different areas, indicated, by the data collected, that not only were there variations but also similarities in grammatical errors committed. The similarities in grammatical errors across the four schools imply that learners have poor command of the English language as a result of their being too dependent on their first language to learn the target language effectively.

It is observable that, despite schools being staffed with qualified subject teachers, the majority of whom are degree holders, learners still commit many grammatical errors in narrative compositions. At Chaapwa Secondary School, pupils complained that the school administration at times allocated even examination classes to student teachers. Learners gave an example of a teacher who instead of saying “*stop making noise*”, said “*stop saying*”. Similarly, at Twaaya Secondary School, because of changing teachers, pupils said that one teacher taught them that the word “*despite*” is followed by a word in “*ing*” form while another teacher had taught them earlier on that “*despite*” is never followed by a word in “*ing*” form. The challenge here is that pupils take their teachers as role models in grammar; hence whatever a teacher says has a serious bearing on the pupils’ learning process. This is confirmed by Hunter (1974) who stated that the teacher is the most important variable in the classroom. Schools and the District Boards are making strides in putting in place deliberate programmes to improve learners’ grammar. Grammatical errors are as a result of a number of factors such as availability of text books and materials for grammar which schools rated those there just as ‘available’, teachers’ emphasis on grammar items during lessons, strategies/methods, teacher strategies in correcting learners’ grammatical errors, and the interest of both teachers and learners in narrative compositions. In some cases, the findings revealed that learners had more interest in narrative compositions than their teachers themselves. It is clear that, with all that the study has observed, there is need for grammar error analysis in schools.

6. Conclusion

Grammar remains important in written communication as it gives meaning to text, hence the significance of the area of grammar error analysis in research. The identified types of grammatical errors learners make in narrative compositions were caused by different factors. The factors ranged from learners to a lack of textbooks and or materials. Some grammatical errors were common in all the four schools. Grammatical errors most common to all the four schools included spellings, tenses, punctuations, word order and paragraphing. Learners committed these grammatical errors because teachers did not put much emphasis on the grammar items during lessons as per sampled grammar items.

The strategies teachers used during narrative composition lessons were not very effective. Teachers did not mark learners’ narrative compositions as regularly as they should. At times, teachers took too long to mark learners’ work. The teachers also marked learners’ work without adequately indicating and coding learners’ grammatical errors. Marking of learners’ narrative compositions is important as it forms the basis for feedback. It was further noted that Continued Professional Development (CPD) activities could significantly help sharpen teachers’ pedagogical skills.

There is need for teachers and learners to take keen interest in narrative composition lessons to improve learner performance. Teachers as facilitators, should motivate pupils in/during narrative composition lessons as this will improve results in schools of Chingola District.

7. Recommendations

Arising from the findings, the following recommendations are made:

7.1 Subject Teachers should?

- (a) encourage learners to read extensively in order to improve their grammar and vocabulary.
- (b) engage learners in group activities so that they identify the types of grammatical errors they commit in narrative compositions.
- (c) use effective strategies when marking learners’ narrative compositions by coding the identified grammatical errors.
- (d) adequately plan narrative composition lessons with emphasis on grammar items.
- (e) motivate learners to develop interest in narrative composition lessons.

7.2 Schools should:-

- (a) procure text books with more activities for narrative compositions with appropriate grammar exercises.
- (b) have more regular? Continued Professional Development (CPD) activities.
- (c) encourage learners to use English within and outside school in order to maximize their language skills.
- (d) promote clubs that are grammar related in order to improve learners’ oral and written communication abilities.
- (e) have libraries that are adequately equipped/stocked with modern grammar and vocabulary books.
- (f) Encourage extensive reading by establishing class libraries.

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