

Analysis of Content Errors in Written English Compositions Among Secondary School Students of North West Nigeria

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Abstract

This research was on Analysis of Content errors in Written English Compositions among Secondary School Students of North West Nigeria. The broad purpose of this study was, examine the extent to which students commit content errors in written compositions of senior secondary schools of North West Nigeria. Thus, this study was conducted in order to find out whether these errors were committed among the students; attempt was made to answer question, to critically address the research questions raised. Literatures related to the study also reviewed. The descriptive survey Research design was used for the study, while random sampling technique was used to select the 300 students used as samples in line with Morgan and Krecjie recommendations. The split-half and Spearman Rank Order was used in the analysis of data and qualitative analysis was also used by extract the students writing and analyses their error commission. The research question was answered using percentage frequency counts. This means that content error was responsible for the problems of error commission in writing composition of senior secondary schools of North West Nigeria, and that teaching methods had no bearing on error commission. Recommendations were offered as Students committed significant content errors in written compositions of senior secondary schools in North West Nigeria. Based on the above, guided Compositions should be encouraged in Junior and Senior Secondary Schools Students; this will reduce Content Error Commission and help to widen Students Experiences among.

Key Words: Written compositions, Content errors, Analysis of data, Discussion.

Introduction

Every normal human being, child or adult, has the innate ability to generate in a speech an infinite number of sentences in his mother tongue. Learners of English as a second language have to learn through continuous training to attain competence in both spoken and written

forms. For second language learners L2 to write in the target language, they need to spend time attending to formal trainings which allow them to acquire and master skills and conventions of writing (Dan'azumi, 2022). These conventions are so important to the extent that violating them renders writing dull and unintelligent not only to the taste of first language learners but even amongst L2 readers. In Nigeria, as a country where English is being used as L2, students of secondary school are faced with lots of challenges associated with writing in English. Parts of these challenges are a lack of mastery of language due to certain factors and disdained attitudes toward the language. Though English has become the language of the world of socio-cultural and educational value, in Nigeria, it is taught at all levels of education (primary, post-primary and tertiary institutions). It is also used as the medium of instruction right from primary four to six, and throughout secondary and higher institutions (FRN, 2014).

The influence of English language in Nigeria has been strong, hence all formal transactions of business, education, national, and international engagements are structured in the language. By implication, students at secondary level need to be proficient in the language to function effectively in the scheme of affairs of the nation. It is imperative to note that, in recent years, interest in writing has increased among second language learners (L2), and it is the skill of language that proves to be difficult and neglected skill of all the remaining three skills (listening, speaking and reading). Buttressing the point above, Schmitt (2014) states that writing remains one of the least well-understood, if not misunderstood skill in applied linguistics.

Writing is a skill that is hard to master as many different types of errors can occur during this process. Flynn and Stainthorp (2016) added that writing is a complex task which requires learners' cognitive skills to perform activities of degrees: digesting, organizing, and formulating ideas. What obtains in most senior secondary schools in Northwestern states of Nigeria as it relates to students writing is most appalling. It has been insinuated generally, that students' performance in writing with regards to the skills of writing example content, expression, organisational and mechanical writing skills had deteriorated. Many (English as a Second Language) learners encounter writing difficulties and one of the major one is linked to grammar (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017).

Cam and Tran (2017) found that lack of grammatical knowledge is responsible for students' deficiency in English. A recent study by Umar (2019) suggested that students found extremely difficult to write simple sentences not to even write compositions or letter to convey information or to drive home a point of understanding. The students lacked coherence in their writing, as they commit so many errors, mechanical, including lexical and structural errors.

The reason behind the difficulty of the skill has to do with the way students view the skill. Some regard writing as an orthography and written discourse. Schmitt (2014) further argues

that the difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but in translating these ideas into readable text using appropriate words. In supporting the above points Richards and Qamariah (2020) say “The skills involved in writing are highly complex, L2 writers have to pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organization as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choices, and so on.” so as to produce good essays.

This study has examined essays of students of senior secondary schools of the North West Zone of Nigeria to identify the common errors these students commit in their writings, and offer solutions to the menace. A writer performs the actions of picking up a pen and pencil (or using computer keyboard) and recording their thoughts. Over the years many calls from different scholars on the quality of compositions produced by senior secondary school students in Nigeria. Some of the scholars have directed attention to standard, while others put the blame on the process of teaching writing. The falling in standard has to do with the frequent errors in written composition. Though there have been a lot of factors attributed to the causes of these errors, Schmitt (2014) explains that L1 is predominant. He further argues that both L1 and L2 learners of English make similar overgeneralization errors such as *two mouses*. These errors have some consequences on students’ ability to write and communicate effectively, to the extent that they fail woefully in their examinations, both internally and externally. Thus, it is imperative for English language educators and educationists to do everything possible within their means to address this ugly situation through avenues that researches such as this would permit. Hence, this study has attempted to analytically assess errors in written compositions of senior secondary student’s schools of North West Nigeria. Though, lots of researches have been conducted. The study aims at tackling pedagogical issues of teaching grammar of English to second language learners in the North West Nigeria.

Research Question

The study formulates the following question:

1. To what extent do senior secondary schools students commit content errors in written compositions in Northwest Nigeria?

Methodology

The research design used in this study was descriptive survey research. Lofters and Weaver, (1999) are of the view that descriptive survey has proved useful in describing, predicting or explaining behavior of a particular population. The purpose of using descriptive survey is to give information by analyzing students’ written composition with the aim of finding out the errors that are more prevalent in students’ composition. The area of this study was made up of Secondary Schools in Northwest Nigeria. Northwest Nigeria is one of the six geographical zones of Nigeria representing both geographical and political region of the country. It comprises seven states – Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and

Zamfara. Geographically, the zone is almost entirely within the tropical west Sudanian savannah Eco region.

The population of this study was made up of Secondary Schools students in Northwest States. Data obtained from ministry of education in North Western states (2023) indicates that there are 862,801 students enrolled in secondary schools, numbering one thousand six hundred and forty-two schools spread across the seven states. The sample size for this study was three hundred (300) students were drawn from six (6) secondary schools in three out of seven (7) states of the zone. The three states are: Katsina, Kano, and Kaduna States. Morgan and Krejcie (1971) underscore that sample size is used as criteria for determine the size of the population

In this study, two instruments were used. They are essay test for measurement of errors from Comprehensive Secondary School, book 2 and observational check list for measurement of errors will be prepared by the researcher. The test items Essay Test for Measurement of Error (ETME) generated and the observation check list (OCME) were submitted to the researcher's supervisors and experts in English language for scrutiny, corrections, and suggestions. The identified errors was effected this give the instruments both content and face validity. More so, the ETME comes from A standardized English Language text book, which add some validity to the instrument. The research instrument was pilot tested in Government Unity Secondary School Malumfashi, Katsina State. The study involved 40 students who were administered the essay test instrument. At the end, the observation checklist measurement of error (OCME) was used to record errors committed by the students in their written compositions. Having conducted the pilot test, the result of the study was subjected to reliability test, using split-half method. Here, the result of the test given was divided into two and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficiency (r) was used to determine the reliability. This gives an internal consistency of the instrument at 0.72, indicating that the instrument is suitable for the study at hand.

The instruments were administered in line with the examination rules and regulations of each school. The student attempted the questions independently. The essay that the students were produce was used as the basic instrument of this study. Students' essays have been specifically chosen to obtain reliable information in relation to errors in ESL essays. The instrument was administered at the same time at each school; two hours was assigned for students to produce essays. Therefore, the researcher have collected the scripts marked were identified the possible errors that the students committed.

Content Analysis was used for analyses data of this study. For Content Analysis, students Essay writing was perused, Errors were identified and sorted out in terms of Content Errors. To obtain frequency of error commission each written composition were assessed using observational check list which identified all the different types of error and frequency of

commission. Each error type was recorded separately; and its frequency and percentages count. The frequency and percentages were used to respond the research questions. The use of frequency and percentages and informed by the fact that they allow for understanding levels or degree of Error commission without necessarily using stringent Statistical tools.

Research Question

To what extent do senior secondary school students commit content errors in written compositions in Northwest Nigeria?

Table 1: Analysis for content error

S/N	Typology	Percentage
1.	Error in the statement and development of ideas	(15%)
2.	Error in the logicality of ideas	(16%)
3.	Error in subheading writing	(18%)
4.	Error in the arrangement of points	(12%)
5.	Error in the logicality of points raised	(21%)
6.	Error in the relationship of points raised	(18%)
Total		100

The content has been analyzed for errors in various aspects such as idea development, logical coherence, subheading writing, and point arrangement. The percentages reflect the proportion of each type of error in the overall error count. The results show (15%) of errors in the statement and development of ideas. This suggests that (15%) of the errors are due to poorly stated or underdeveloped ideas. The (16%) error in the logicality of ideas indicates that (16%) of the errors stem from issues with the logical coherence of the ideas presented. For errors in subheading writing, the results show that (18%) of the errors are related to the writing of subheadings, possibly in terms of clarity, relevance, or format. Twelve per cent of the errors are due to the incorrect or ineffective arrangement of points within the content (error in the arrangement of points), whereas (21%) of the errors are due to the lack of logical coherence in the points raised (error in the logicality of points raised). The results further show that(18%) of the errors arise from issues with how the points relate to each other, possibly in terms of connection, flow, or relevance (error in the relationship of points raised)

Content Errors: This the type of error that occurs in student's compositions as a result of misunderstanding of what the composition should discuss. This error can therefore include the following:

(a) Error in the Statement and Development of Ideas. This refers to the fact that in essay writing there is an ardent need for the students to ensure that their sentences are free from errors. Each word most agrees with the other one next to it. At the same time, ideas need to be thoroughly thrashed out so as to depict a clear picture of the writer's intention.

Wrong Version

(a) "After that, I have to write and describe where you will see me when you come to our country (Nigeria). After airplane drop you at Aminu Kano international airport, you will find a taxi- driver carry you to main motor park or station, where you go there, you should ask them that you are looking for cars who will go or trable to Malumfashi."

The sentences above are wrong because the student does not give adequate description of his residence, and how to get there. The visitor may find it difficult to understand the description.

Correct Version:

(a) I want to describe to you how you can locate me when you visit our country. Upon arrival at Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano, you can take a taxi to the central motor-park. From there, you can take a bus to Malumfashi, after which you can ask a commercial motorcyclist to take you to Kafar-Fada, and then ask for gidan Galadima where you can find of me.

(b) Error in the Logicality of Ideas. This refers to the sequential arrangement of ideas, in essay writing. It is of paramount importance for the students to always put ideas one after the others to avoid tautology.

Wrong Version:

(a) "So After secondary school I will be going to the school of Nursing and Midwifery or university so as to read medicine."

(b) "Also after I have my certificate I will then go for in search of admission in to Ummaru Musa Yar'adua where I want read either medicine or pharmacy."

The sentences above are not well written; hence the ideas in the letter are not sequentially arranged.

Correct Version:

(a) If my plan of becoming a medical doctor fails; I will go for the second one –going to school of Nursing and Midwifery.

- (b) If I get a good SSCE result, I will seek admission to read Medicine or Pharmacy at the Ummaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina.
- (c) **Error in sub heading Writing:** The first letter of any word in a composition should start with a capital letter.

Wrong Version

- (a) “Crude oil In Nigeria Causing more harm than good.”
- (b) “DESCRIPTION of my LOCATION IN NIGERIA.”

The above sentences are wrong because the students started the sentences without using capital letters where ought to be used.

Correct Version:

- (a) Crude Oil in Nigeria Causing More Harm than Good.
- (b) Description of My Location in Nigeria.

(d) **Error in the Arrangement of Points:** This deals with the improper arrangement of points raised by the students in their written essays. The excerpts below are students' essays that show errors in arrangement in points. Thus, beneath the excerpt; the researcher provides the correct version of the points.

Wrong Version

- (a) “My aims of writing this letter to you is that I saw your last letter which you asked me about my plans after secondary school How are you and your study, hope fine if so thanks to almighty God.”

The sentences above are wrong because the student starts by narrating the rationales behind writing the letter. Instead, the student should start the informal letter with greetings.

Correct Version: How are you? How are you coping with your studies? I hope everything is fine. I received your letter last week in which you inquired about my plans

(e) **Error in the Logicality of Points raised.**

Wrong Version.

- (a) “I am resident of Funtua town, which is a local government in my country, I maintained the address of no 3 zaria road of Funtua metropolis. Funtua is among the 34 local

government in my state ie Katsina state which is located in Northern part of my country.”

(b) “As soon as you arrive Nigeria weither in Abuja or lagos airport, you have two options either to follow bus or to be agains on board directly to Katsina which initially stated to you that it located in Northern part of our country.”

Here the points raised by the student are not in any way related with each other.

Correct Version:

(a) I reside at No 3 Zaria Road, Funtua, headquarters of Funtua local government of Katsina State, in North western Nigeria.

(b) Upon arrival in Nigeria, either at the Abuja Airport or Lagos Airport, you may easily take another flight to Ummaru Musa Yar’adua Airport, in Katsina metropolis. However, if you do not have the money for this flight, you can take a taxi to main Motor Park at either Abuja or Lagos, and then take a bus to Katsina metropolis.

(a) after graduation.

(f) Error in the Relationship of Points Raised.

Wrong Version

(a) “As you have already know that I want became a medicine doctor, and my favourite subject is Science and now a days is only Science that you will be helping peoples.”

The points above have no relationship at all.

Correct Version:

(a) As I told you previously, I want to become a medical doctor. This is because I desire to be.

Discussion of Findings

After the analysis of the data the results of the findings shows that the student’s greatest problem are in the area of content errors which includes: error in the statement and development of ideas, error in the logicality of ideas, error in subheading writing, error in the arrangement of points, error in the logicality of points raised and error in the relationship of points raised. This agrees with studies carried out by Umar, (2019). The errors detected in the student’s composition fall in the following categories: mechanical accuracy, structural errors and lexical errors. Mechanical errors topped the highest with 425 frequencies followed by lexical errors with 342 frequencies while structural errors come least with 287 frequencies. In mechanics

percentage, errors in spelling has the highest percentage with (23.6%), followed by errors in punctuation with (22.6%) , then omission of articles with (15.5%), and the least is errors in word splitting with (13.6%).

In another development, it agrees with Espiritus (2013). The most common grammatical errors committed by the students are in the category of mechanics, they committed wrong spelling of words, the capitalization of letter, and lastly punctuations. The errors were committed in different types, examples, mechanical errors and lexical errors.

The errors could also be linked with interference of the first language especially in the area of tenses. The psychologists like Naiman,(1978). Predict that the nature of one's mother tongue will lead or hinder the learning of certain aspects the second language depending on the similarity in the characteristics of the two languages. In this case, most of the Nigerian languages differ in th eir internal structure from English language.

Conclusion

In view of the findings of this study, it is evident that students are deficient in

Content errors committed by the students of senior secondary school of North West Nigeria are significant. They were errors in the arrangement of points, errors in the logicality of ideas, errors in the statement and development of ideas, errors in the logicality of points raised, errors in subheading writing, errors in the relationship of points raised and wrong use of address. The research therefore, called for designing methods of instruction to remedy them. It implies that this research has given a lot of ways and strategies for teaching writing in order to alleviate the error commission by the students of secondary schools. It is hope that this study would contribute to the students' progress in English language written compositions.

Recommendations

The following recommendation were made:

1. Students should be guided by teachers to avoid committing significant content errors in their written compositions.
2. Teachers should encourage compositions in junior and senior secondary schools; this will reduce content error commission and help to widen students' experiences among.

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