

Exploring the Grammatical Difficulty Encountered Sudanese EFL Secondary School Students' in Writing composition

(A case Study of Secondary School Students, Dongola Locality, Northern State)

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Abstract:

This study aimed to explore the grammatical obstacles facing Sudanese secondary school Students' in writing composition. The study adopted descriptive method to carry out the study. Questionnaire and test were used as tools for data collection. The statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) was used to analysis the acquired data. The findings of the study revealed students have low abilities in using grammar correctly when writing composition in English, it also showed the unnecessary shifting of tenses from past to present and vice versa. The researcher highly recommends ELT teachers should exert their efforts to help students to understand grammar also students should be encouraged to practice writing composition neatly through.

Keywords: Composition, Writing, Grammatical Obstacles.

المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة الي استكشاف المعوقات النحوية التي تواجه طلاب المرحلة الثانوية السودانية في كتابة الإنشاء. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي. تم استخدام الاستبيان والاختبار كأداتين لجمع البيانات. تم استخدام الحزم الاحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) لتحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها. اظهرت نتائج الدراسة ان الطلاب لديهم قدرات منخفضة في استخدام القواعد بشكل صحيح في كتاباتهم, كما اوضحت الدراسة التحويل غير الضروري للأزمنة من الماضي الي الحاضر والعكس. يوصي الباحث بضرورة ان يبذل معلمي اللغة الانجليزية جهود لمساعدة الطلاب علي فهم القواعد, كما يجب تشجيع الطلاب علي التدرج علي الكتابة بدقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإنشاء, الكتابة, المعوقات النحوية.

Introduction

EFL students' face many problems in learning process, particularly in writing, because writing consists of all aspects and devices of language. It is known that the role of writing is important in communicating messages, views and ideas. Writing is not an easy skill even in learners' first language, so learners usually hesitate when writing a paragraph. Writing requires knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, organization of ideas and organization of paragraph body such as introduction, body and conclusion

there for learners expected to commit errors in some aspects of writing process.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher has come across some grammatical errors that committed by secondary school students in writing composition. The researcher noticed that one of the most frequent errors is related to grammar. The unnecessary switching between past, present and future. These errors might be attributed to interference of mother tongue, teaching techniques or other reasons. So the researcher tries to study this problem and identify its causes.

Objectives of the Study :

1. The reason behind the grammatical difficult that encountered students when they writing composition in English .
2. Identify the causes of difficulties facing secondary school students in writing composition.

Questions of the Study

1. To what extent do Sudanese secondary school students face grammatical difficulties in writing composition in English?
2. What are the causes of grammatical difficulties that face secondary school students in writing composition?

Hypotheses of the Study

1. Secondary school students face difficulties in using grammar correctly in writing composition.
2. There are some causes of grammatical difficulties that face secondary school students in writing composition.

The Significance of the Study

This study is useful for the teachers of English as a foreign language it helps them to identify writing composition difficulties that faced university students and find suitable treatment. It is also helpful for the researchers of ELT in general.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive analytical method to accomplish its objectives. This allows research instrument to be handled for the purpose of arriving at the desired results. The researcher used two instruments to collect data. The first tool is achievement test for the students and the other one a questionnaire for teachers.

Literature Review

The Nature of Writing Composition

English language have for skills listen, speaking, reading and writing each pair of them presents a category (listening and reading) are consider as receptive skills, while (speaking and writing) are productive skills. Writing composition must be done and practice, a lot of learnt and make use of it and it is rules, therefore the writer does not write for himself but writer for his reader, for that the writer must clearly state his idea to make himself understood. Raimes (1983) and Ardep (2010), discussed eight ways in which writing and speech different form each other:

- Speech is universal, every one may acquire native language, but not every one learns how to read and write.
- Spoken language has direct variation, the written language generally demands standard forms grammar, syntax and vocabulary.
- The speaker use pause and intonation while writer use punctuation marks only.
- Speakers speak to listener who are right here for writers' response is delayed or nonexistent.
- Speakers use their voices with (pitch, stress, gestures, and facial expression) to convey their idea, writers have to rely on words only to express their meaning.

The Purposes of Writing Composition

A good deal of writing in English classroom is undertaken as aid to learning, for instance learning new vocabulary, structure or to help students remember new items of language. In this context, the role of writing is different form its role in other subject, it allows students to see how there are progressing and to get feedback from their teacher, and it is also help teachers to monitor and diagnose problems.



Wigersky and Boerne, (2004) stated that getting an education mean help students to write composition successfully, not only in writing English but also in other classes as well as college, students are responsible to write composition, test, report and research papers. Even after graduation during looking for job they must be able to write request. After getting job they may continue writing in whatever they chose. Classroom writing should reflect the ultimate goal of enabling students to write whole texts which from connected, contextualized and appropriate pieces of communication.

Reasons for Teaching Writing Composition

Learning forging language is difficult without learning how to write composition. For many of secondary schools students writing will be the skill in which they not only fear to use it but also never attempt. However, the situation might not be very different in the mother tongue, expect those who use writing in professional capacity. Because, writing is acquire without great effort written work serves to provide the learner with some tangible confidence that they are making progress in the language. The practice of some form of writing enables to provide for different learning styles and need, some learner those who don't learn easily through oral practice faced more difficult when they allowed to write. Thus, exposure to foreign language through more than one medium is likely to be more effective than learning through signal medium. Writing also provides variety in classroom activity, serving also break from oral work and increases the amount of language contact through work, that can be best set of class

Facilitating Writing Composition

To help students to write composition effectively or at least with fewer problems many experts like Harmer, Ramies and Whit think that writer should go through stage which included controlled guided and free writing. Byme (1972) indicate that controlled writing which is an essential stage before free writing which is more difficult because of lack of content and form. Free writing clearly need to be practice with help of teacher. While Ramies (1983) explain controlled writing as a great deal of content and form supplied, according to him it is opposite of free writing which entails students to generate organize and express their own ideas, he also notes that students who reaching high and advance level of proficiency are students allowed trying some free composition in which they express their idea.

Qualities of Good Writing

Since writing is translating the sound of words into common graphic symbols, it subject to the requirements of good quality which includes the following: accuracy, clarity and naturalness.

Accuracy of writing means the use of correct styles of so symbols structure namely in terms of words formulation or morphological structure and syntax. If so, the writer's content or message will transmit the exact sound and meaning intended by the writer.

Clarity of writing means the use of the most clear way of writing to convey the intended and exact meanings and ideas expressed by speakers or writers as simple as possible to enable the ordinary recipient reader to get those intended meanings and hence understand them .



Naturalness of context merely means cohesion and coherence of writer's text, and it must follow the natural form of target language in order to enable the reader to get the ideal idea from that he reads.

What is Grammar

In linguistics, grammar is a set of structural rules governing the composition of clauses, phrases and words in any given language. The term refers also to the study of such rules, and this field include morphology, syntax and phonology often complemented by phonetics, semantics and pragmatics.

Grammatical Analysis

Roderick (1995) says that grammarians examine the language to find out what kind of language units speakers are organize in utterances, they try to work out what and how the units are combined, or structured and how these units and their combinations correspond to the content of the utterance. The units may be combinations of words or prosperities of some words. Grammarians also considered the relations of different kinds of units to each other and seek to determine the general grammatical principles that govern the structure and process of the language that enable language to be produced and understood. Grammar is then deals with the form and meaning and the way they are interconnected. The three major components of grammar are:

- a) syntax: the grammatical principle, units and relations involved in sentence structure.
- b) lexicon: the set of individual words, suffixes and prefixes.
- c) semantics: the meaning associated with the lexicon of a language and with units relations in sentence structure.

Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Writing

Language is a means of communication. By using a language, people can communicate to each other. Using language is not as simple as we think because there is a set of rules that must be followed, which is called grammar.

Grammar is a structure of language and it is important of the use of language process in both written and spoken forms. Without knowledge of the grammar, it would be difficult to learn language effectively. If learners possess good grammar system, they will be able to communicate their ideas, messages and feelings to their listeners and readers. Language without grammar would be disorganized and causes communicative problems especially in writing Therefore learners need to know the grammatical system of language.

On the other hand, learners cannot avoid errors because errors usually occur through learning process. Making errors is important in learning process.

Students' Grammatical Errors in Writing Composition

James (1999) states that grammar has traditionally been discussed in terms of morphology and syntax. The former handling word structure and the later handling structure larger than the word. Grammar is a tool by which messages are produced without it, learners cannot speak or write effectively. It also helps to make language more comprehensible. So, it should be taught for the sake of communication not for it is own sake. There are a lot of grammatical errors committed by students such as verb agreement, verbs tense , verb form, pronouns and punctuation.

Switching Tenses Unnecessarily

One of the more common seen in ESL/EFL writing is unnecessary switching between past, present and future tenses. Changing between verb tenses within a sentence can make it difficult for the readers to follow a piece of writing and should be avoided. An exception with this is when a time change must be shown. To ensure avoiding problem, students must keep the following in mind:

- a) in general, establish a primary tense and keep consistent to it at the sentence, paragraph and overall work level.
- b) only change tense when it is appropriate, e.g. when there is a time shift that must be shown.
- c) reread your writing and consider the what overall timeframe, is it in past, present or future.

Materials and Methods

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha ^a	N of Items
-1.000-	8

The statement is highly reliable.

The Analysis of the Questionnaire

Table (1): Students are unable to differentiate between past, present and past participle of the verbs.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	6	20%	20%	60%
Agree	12	40%	40%	
Neutral	4	13.3%	13.3%	13.3%
Disagree	8	26.7%	20.7%	26.7%
Strongly disagree	0	0%	0%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

The researcher adopted qualitative approach to collect data from the selected participants. These approach assisted in building a base on a complete understanding of the research problem. The study adopted the descriptive and analytical method to analyze and interpret data, this allows research instrument to be handled for the purpose of arriving at the desired results. The researcher used test as tool to collect data from students and questioner to collected data from the teachers.

Reliability.

According to Maree et as (2007) reliability has to do with the consistency or repeatability of a measure or instrument. High reliability obtain where and when the measurement or instrument give the same result if the research repeated on the same sample.

Table (1) represents the distribution of the respondents' views about the statement "students are unable to differentiate between past, present and past participle of the verbs". The result revealed that (60%) of the English Language teachers agreed that students are unable to differentiate between past, present and past participle of the verbs, whereas (26.7%) disagreed and (13.3%) of the teachers were neutral.

Table (2): Students find it difficult to differentiate between regular and irregular verbs.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	1	3.3%	3.3%	70%
Agree	20	66.7%	66.7%	
Neutral	2	6.7%	6.7%	6.7%
Disagree	6	20%	20%	23.3%
Strongly disagree	1	3.3%	3.3%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Table (2) above represents the distribution of the respondents' view about the statement "students find it difficult to differentiate between regular and irregular verbs". The result revealed that (70%) of English Language teachers agreed that secondary school students find it difficult to differentiate between regular and irregular verbs whereas (23.3%) disagreed and (6.7%) were neutrals.

Table (3): Students find it difficult to understand past continuous tense.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	4	13.3%	13.3%	43.3%
Agree	9	30%	30%	
Neutral	6	20%	20%	20%
Disagree	11	36.7%	36.7%	36.7%
Strongly disagree	0	0%	0%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Table (3) above represents the distribution of the respondents' view about the statement "students find it difficult to understand the past continuous tense." The results revealed that (43.3%) of English Language teachers agreed, whereas (36.7%) disagreed and (20%) were neutrals.

Table (4) Students face difficulty in understanding the past perfect.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	6	20%	20%	70%
Agree	15	50%	50%	
Neutral	6	20%	20%	20%
Disagree	2	6.7%	6.7%	10%
Strongly disagree	1	3.3%	3.3%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Table (4)above represents the distribution of the respondents' view about the statement "students face difficulty in understanding the past perfect." The result revealed that (70%) of English Language teachers agreed whereas (10%) disagreed and (20%) were neutrals.

Table (5): SPINE series books lacks activities on tenses.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	7	23.3%	23.3%	50%
Agree	8	26.7%	26.7%	
Neutral	2	6.7%	6.7%	6.7%
Disagree	10	33.3%	33.3%	43.3%
Strongly disagree	3	10%	10%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Table(5) above represents the respondents' view about the statement" SPINE series books lacks activities about tenses" . The result revealed that (50%) of English Language teachers agreed whereas (43.3%) disagreed and (6.7%) were neutrals.

Table (6): Some teachers focus on other components of language rather than tenses.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	2	6.7%	6.7%	63.4%
Agree	17	56.7%	56.7%	
Neutral	6	20%	20%	20%
Disagree	4	13.3%	13.3%	16.6%
Strongly disagree	1	3.3%	3.3%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Table (6) above represents the respondents' view about the statement " some teachers focus on other language components rather than tenses". The result revealed that (63.4%) of English Language teachers agreed whereas (16.6%) disagreed and (20%) were neutrals.

Table (7): L1 interference is one cause of tenses problem.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	2	6.7%	6.7%	50%
Agree	13	43.3%	43.3%	
Neutral	5	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%
Disagree	6	20%	20%	33.3%
Strongly disagree	4	13.3%	13.3%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Table (7) above represents the respondents' views about the statement "L1 interference is one cause of tenses problem". The results showed that (50%) of English Language teachers agreed whereas (33.3%) disagreed and (16.7%) were neutrals.

Table (8): Teachers can follow easy techniques to help students understand tenses.

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
Strongly agree	16	53.4%	53.4%	96.6%
Agree	13	43.3%	43.3%	
Neutral	0	0%	0%	0%
Disagree	1	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%
Strongly disagree	0	0%	0%	
Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Table (8) above represents the respondents' views about the statement "teachers can follow easy techniques to help students understand tenses." The result showed that (96.6%) teachers agreed whereas (3.3%) disagreed.

The Test Analysis:

There are thirty secondary school students did the test which was in a form of composition. They were asked to write a guided composition about **Journey** which they went on. The researcher provided the guides with 13 verbs in the present (as a criterion), so the students should use them correctly in a composition.

Table (9) above shows the results of the test. From the table the number of the students

Grade	Range	Number	Percent	Valid percent	Accumulative percent
excellent	13	3	10%	10%	30%
very good	10-12	2	6.7%	6.7%	
good	7-9	4	13.3%	13.3%	
failure	less than 7	21	70%	70%	70%
		30	100%	100%	100%

who attended the test was 30 students. The maximum mark was (13) and the pass mark was (7). Three of the students got the excellent mark (13) which represents (10%). Two of the students got very good mark from (12-10) which represents (6.7%). Four students got

good mark from (9-7) which represents 13.3% whereas (21) students failed and got less than (7) marks which represents (70%). In the light of the above data the results revealed that (30%) of the students passed the test, whereas (70%) of the students failed to use correct tense hence the hypothesis number one is accepted. Therefore secondary students really face problem in understanding tenses.

Summary of the Main Findings

In the light of the performance of the students in writing Composition test and teachers respondent to the questionnaire the following result were revealed:

- The general performance of the students in written an essay, revealed respondents' low abilities in using grammar correctly in their writing.
- The unnecessary shifting of tenses from past to present and vice versa.
- The interference of mother tongue cause confusion to the reader, and its effect to the whole meaning of an essay.
- students at secondary school handle difficulties in understanding and using tenses in writing composition.

Conclusion

The general performance of the students in written composition, revealed respondents' low abilities in using tenses correctly in their writing and the unnecessary shifting of tenses from past to present and vice versa. They ignore the confusion cause to the reader by shifting and its impact to the whole meaning of the composition. The result of ELT teachers to the questionnaire showed that participants generally agreed that secondary school students do face difficulty in understanding tenses.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the researcher recommend the followings:

- ELT tutor should exert their efforts to help students to understand grammar.
- Students should be encouraged to write neatly.
- English Language syllabus for secondary schools should be provided with variety of grammar tasks using the modern technology and avoiding traditional ones because 21st century students have different interests and needs.

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