Analysis of Errors in Written English Compositions of Senior Secondary School Students in Katsina State

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Abstract
The purpose of the study was to examine ways of improving students' performance in written English composition through errors analysis. This involves finding out the types of errors committed by students and the aspect of written English compositions, namely, content errors, organizational error, expressional error and mechanical errors, which students find most difficult. Four research questions were formulated in carrying out the study. Two hundred and fifty four students were drawn from six senior secondary schools in three out of seven educational zones in Katsina state were involved in the study. A written composition test was attempted all the students and their marked scripts were used for the analysis. A percentage frequency of four error types- content, organizational, expressional and mechanical errors were computed using observational checklist to determine whether possible difference in the errors committed by the students of senior secondary schools. Findings showed that mechanical errors proved to be the greatest difficulty to students, followed by organizational errors and expressional errors, the last was content errors. Some recommendations were there is significant expressional error commission by students in their written compositions. Students written compositions are characterized by mechanical errors.

Key Words: Written composition, Error difficulty, Analysis of data, Discussion.

Introduction

English language is the one of the core subjects in the secondary school curriculum. Its learning extends far beyond the ability to memorize sentences printed in English. The students should be able to think, form basic concepts, plan and write coherently in English. Unfortunately, the Nigerian School child is far below this expectation in mastering the skills of spoken and written English. This state of affair has become a serious cause of concern to educators, parents and teachers of English in particular. With the rapid increase in the number of student's Nigerian school system turns out yearly, the percentage of students who fail the English language continues to rise sharply. Banjo (2001:96) observes that there is a general

feeling of dissatisfaction with the level of proficiency in English among the products not only of secondary schools but also of tertiary institutions. It is disheartening to note that after most students have spent six years in the secondary school, they still fail to obtain a minimum of pass mark the English language. Most Nigerian students are unable to write intelligibly seems to suggest that for a correction to be effected on errors bedeviling students writing composition have to be analyzed in order to highlight these errors and device meaningful   strategy to teaching and learning. However, Error Analysis (EA), a technique of measuring progress of students in English learning by recording, classifying and explaining the errors made by individuals or groups of students since most students often detest the teacher's red marks on their papers and little or no learning takes place as a result of these marks. To support this, Ibrahim (2007:16) stresses that most of us have experienced the discouragement of starring in horror at a veritable forest of red marks and comments on pieces of writing over which had toiled in the belief that were achieving something worthwhile.

Becon (2010:123) states that "reading make the full man, and writing an exact man". Consequently upon this, one is motivated to identify the errors committed by students in written English compositions. With regards to error analysis, its An approach which elicits information on the area students find it most difficult in composition writing- structure, (patterns of combinations of words to form sentences) lexis, (word usage or choice of vocabulary) or mechanics, (spelling and punctuation). With error analysis approach the most difficult area based on the students actual writing will be highlighted to enable to teachers teach to the point of need. A lot of writing by students takes place in the secondary schools and for the students to perform well in the school subjects taught, especially the English language, an analytical study of errors in written compositions of the English Language of students is imperative for effective teaching and learning.

The concern of every Language teacher is mainly how to minimize errors committed by his students in their expression and help to write correctly and effectively. Pope in Kermode and Hollander (2010:78) has this couplet which states that: True ease in writing comes from art, not chance.This explains the need for error analysis which employs the techniques of eliciting information on the area students find most difficult in composition writing- structure, lexis, or mechanics. Furthermore, errors are very useful indicators of what students know; and what they do not know where they need practice; and what they are ready to go on to.

Having considered the relevance of errors analysis, the purpose of the study was to find out the types of errors committed by senior secondary school students in written compositions. Also, to find out the aspect of written English composition, contents, organizational, expressional and mechanical errors which the students find most difficult in order to enable teachers to teach to the point of need.

Based on the foregoing, the research questions for the study are as follows:

1. To what extent do students commit content errors in written compositions?
2. What is the degree of expressional errors committed by students in their written compositions?

3. What is the level of organizational errors in written compositions committed by students?
4. What are the mechanical errors in written English compositions of students?

Methodology

Senior co- educational secondary school (SS3) students in Malumfashi Educational Zone were used for the study. Senior secondary students were used because it is at that level that more emphasis is laid on essay writing and are on the verge of taking the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Then of course, SS3 students were used to find if their ages would influence their performance in written English compositions exhibited by them during the study. The populations of the research are students of senior secondary schools, data obtained from ministry of education indicates that there are 41,000 students enrolled in senior secondary schools. Six schools constituted the sample and the proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used in order to accommodate schools in each the three local government areas in Katsina state. Thus 254 SS3 students were used as a sample size. Since the research was design to analyze errors made by senior secondary students in written English composition, "Supposing you are among the best students that your school chooses to embark on a trip to neighboring state. Explain to your parents how the trip started and ended". Was given for free essay writing. The topic for the essay which was used as test formed the instrument for data collection. One mark was assigned to each error. It was given to fifty graduate teachers of English for face validation and all affirmed that the topic was appropriate. For reliability of instrument, the Test- Retest procedure was used, and it was given sample randomly composed of ten SS3 students. Their scripts were collected and marked using National Examination Council (NECO). marking scheme. Having conducted the pilot study, the result of the study was subjected to reliability test, using split-half method, the six questions were students to choose three, Here, the result of test given was divided into two and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation co-efficiency (r) was used to determine the reliability. This given stability of the items of the instrument at 0.72, indicating that the instrument is suitable for the study at hand. In this part, all the research questions were answered using percentage and frequency counts. The data collected from the scripts of students in their written compositions were analyzed and used in answering the research questions. Teachers of English Language should give emphases on how to teach writing compositions and how to avoid commission of errors. The frequency obtained using calculated errors from the student's scripts, every one error were calculated.

Research Question 1: What is the Extent to which Students of Senior Secondary Schools of Katsina State Commit Content Errors in their Written Compositions**?**

In responding to the above research question, scripts of the respondents were marked by the researcher and content errors were identified in their written essays and the rate of occurrence of each error was calculated from students' scripts. Each of these errors was further divided by

the total frequency and multiplied by one hundred to obtain the percentage of each class of error; as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Showing the Percentage of Content Errors

TYPOLOGY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Error in the arrangement of points	525	14.78
Error in the logicality of ideas	513	14.43
Error in the statement and development of idea	540	15.19
Error in the logicality of points raised	523	14.72
Error in subheading writing	527	14.84
Error in the relationship of point raised	465	13.08
Wrong use of address	460	12.96
Total	3553	100

Result from Table 1, it showed that error in the statement and development of idea has the highest percentage of 15.19%, followed by error in subheading writing with 14.84%, next is error in the logicality of points raised 14.72%, then error in the logicality of ideas with 14.43%, followed by error in the relationship of points raised with 13.08% and the least error is the wrong use of address with 12.96%. The above analysis established that students of senior secondary schools in Katsina state do commit content errors in their written compositions.

Research Question 2: What is the Degree to Which Students of Senior Secondary Schools of Katsina State Commit Expressional Error in their Written Compositions**?**

To answer the above question, percentage frequency count was also used; the frequencies of all errors in expression were summed. Each of these errors were further divided by the total frequency (4718) and multiplied by one hundred to obtain the percentage of each error, as shown in the Table 2.

Table 2: Table Showing the Percentage of Students' Expressional Errors.

Typology	Frequency	Percentage
Error in sentence structure	1655	35.08
Error in word choice and style	1373	29.10
Errors in use of figurative devices	1690	35.82
Total	4718	100

Table2 showed that errors in the use of figurative devices have the highest percentage of 35.82 %, followed by error in sentence structure 35.08 %, and then the least error is the error in word choice and style with 29.10%.The above analysis showed that students of senior secondary schools of Katsina state commit expressional error in their written compositions.

Research Question 3: What is the Level of Organizational Errors in their Written Compositions Committed by Students of Senior Secondary Schools of Katsina State**?**

In responding to the research question above, the frequencies of organizational errors were summed. Each of the errors was further divided by the total frequency (7411) and multiplied by one hundred to obtain the percentage of each error, as shown in the table below.

Table 3: Table Showing the Percentage of Organizational Errors in Students' Written Composition**.**

Typology	Frequency	Percentage
Error in the arrangement and ordering of sentence	1510	20.37
Error in paragraphs	725	9.78
Error in the unity of the paragraphs	708	9.56
Error in the coherence of word	1280	17.27
Error in opening, main body and conclusion	1280	17.27
Error in the use and proper arrangement of sentence	1908	25.75
Total	7411	100

From Table 3 the result showed the percentage of organizational errors in students' written compositions. Errors in the use of proper arrangement of sentence has the highest percentage of 25.75%, followed by errors in the arrangement and ordering of sentence with 20.37%, error in coherence of word and errors in opening, main body and conclusion with 17.27% and 17.27% respectively. Error in paragraph has 9.78%; then the least errors are the errors in the unity of paragraphs with 9.56%. From the above analysis, one can concur that students of Katsina State senior secondary schools commit organizational errors in their written compositions.

Research Question 4: What is the Level of Mechanical Errors in their Written Compositions Committed by Students of Senior Secondary Schools of Katsina State**?**

In responding to the above research question, the frequencies of mechanical errors were summed. Each of the errors was further divided by the total frequency (10044) and multiplied by one hundred to obtain the percentage of each error, as shown in the table below:

Table 4: Showing the Percentage of Mechanical Errors in Students' Composition

Typology	Frequency	Percentage
Error in capitalization	2827	28.15
Error in spelling	2612	26.00
Error in punctuation	2379	23.69
Omission of Articles	1020	10.16
Error in Amalgamation of word and splitting	1206	12.00
Total	10044	100

Table 4 showed that the most frequent error in students' composition is the error in capitalization with 28.15%, followed by error in spelling with 26.00%, then error in punctuation with 23.69%, followed by error in amalgamation of word and splitting with 12.00%; the least error in mechanical is the omission of articles with 10.16%. The above explanation showed that students of senior secondary schools of Katsina state commit mechanical errors in their written compositions. Analysis of data was done and the following statistical techniques were adopted.

Table 5: Showing the Frequencies and Percentage Differences of all Error Types

Class of Error	Frequency	Percentage
Content error	3553	13.22
Organizational error	5878	21.86
Expressional error	7411	27.56
Mechanical error	10044	37.36
Total	26886	100

Table 5 showed that mechanical error has the highest frequency and percentage of 10044 and 37.36%, followed by expressional error with 7411 and 27.56% organizational error with 5878 and 21.86%, and the least is error commission is content with 3553 and 13.22%. The analysis above established the fact that there is a significant commission of errors (content, organizational, expressional and mechanical) in the written composition of Katsina state senior secondary schools' students.

Discussion of Findings

The students' greatest problems are under mechanical errors with (37.36%), followed by expressional errors with (27.56%), organizational errors with(21.86%), the lowest percentage is content error with (13.22%) After the analysis of the data the results of the findings shows that the student's greatest problem are in the area of mechanical errors which includes: error in punctuation, error in spelling, error in capitalization, omission of articles and error in the amalgamation of word and splitting. This agrees with studies carried out by Bukar (2008). In

his findings, school of Health Management (SHM), got the highest percentage in both local and global errors as revealed by this 24%, 28%,26% and 22% in lexical, mechanical, morphological and syntactic errors respectively, while the lowest in global errors were College of Art Studies and College of Education and the least is the College of Science Studies. This agrees with Study carried out by Umar, (2009). 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%).These agrees with research carried out by Henry (2011). Errors are exhibited by learners as a result of negative attitudes toward the target language, continued lack of progress in the L2, a wide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture and lack of integrative and instrumental motivation for learning. Some of errors are: subject- verb concord and articles, tense error, error in spelling, inappropriate and wrong use of words. The same as agrees with Ahmad (2006). Examples of such errors are error in punctuations marks, errors in spelling and error in capitalization and omission of articles.

The psychologists like Naiman, (2008). 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 their internal structure from English language. Another possible reason for these errors could be traced to intra-lingual problems of English language. According to the theory of error analysis, the errors of the learners made are inherent within the language system. This is characterized by rule of learning. For example, the English verbs form their past tense with addition of morpheme –'ed' as in 'dance' – 'danced'.But are exceptions, for instance, the verb 'come' has its past tense as 'came'. This is also true of some plurals and homophones. Homophones are word with same pronunciation but different in spelling and meaning e .g buy, bye, bye, made, and maid. The ignorance of these exceptions and in consistency in the formation of words in the English language made students to commit errors in writing composition. In other words, the development of false hypothesis or faulty application of rules causes students to commit errors. The spelling errors for instance could be as a result of arbitrariness of English language. The written forms of our indigenous language are almost completely phonetic, this is because there is always one to one correspondence between letters and sounds in the writing forms of Nigerian languages; however, written compared with speaking is much more static.

Conclusion

In view of the findings of the study, it is evident that students are deficient in Content errors committed by the students of senior secondary school of Katsina State 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 analysis established that students of senior secondary schools of Katsina state often do commit organizational errors in their written compositions. Some of these errors in organization were errors in the arrangement and ordering of sentence, errors in paragraphs, errors in the unity of the paragraphs, errors in the coherence of word, error in opening, main body and conclusion, error in the use and proper arrangement of sentence. The analysis above supports the fact that expressional errors are abound in the essays of senior secondary schools of Katsina state. The errors harm the essays considerably. These errors include among others error in sentence structure, error in word choice and style, errors in the use of figurative devices. Students written compositions are characterized by mechanical errors which have the high degree of commission. These errors are therefore harmful to the students' essays. The errors of this type were error in capitalization, error in spelling, error in punctuation marks, omission of articles and error in amalgamation of word and splitting. The research therefore, called for designing methods of instruction to remedy them. It is hope that this study would contribute to the students' progress in English language written compositions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby given as a means of enhancing strictly learners writing ability and reducing commission of errors in line with research findings:

1.   The study found that, students commit significant content errors in their   written compositions. Based on the above, guided compositions should been encouraged by teachers of English Language in junior and senior secondary schools; this will reduce content error commission and help to widen students' experiences among.

2.   There are significant organizational errors committed by the students in their written compositions. Teachers should endeavor to give to of writing exercises regularly; ideally writing exercises should be given in order to avoid errors in order to curtail its occurrences in written compositions.

3.   There is significant expressional error commission by students in their written compositions. Hence, effort should be intensified by teachers of English language in developing exercises that would curtail the commission of expressional errors in the written compositions of secondary school students.

4.   Students' written compositions are characterized by mechanical errors. Thus, teachers should regularly assign students with prose passages with spelling errors and punctuation errors; which should be corrected in class as they occur. Then the culture of extensive reading should be inculcated in the mind of students as a means of building the vocabulary of the learners.

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