UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

AN ANALYSIS OF TENSE ERRORS IN STUDENTS' WRITTEN ESSAYS: A CASE STUDY OF DIABENE SECONDARY TECHNICAL SCHOOL.

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A DISSERTATION IN THE DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS, FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION, SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE) DEGREE.

AUGUST, 2018

DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Charles Kwasi, declare that this thesis with the exception of quotations and references contained in published work which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted either in part or whole for any other degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE…………………………………………….

DATE…………………………………………………….

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: DR. CHARLOTTE FOFO LOMOTEY

SIGNATURE…………………………………………

DATE…………………………………………………

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DEDICATION

I specially dedicate this study to my precious wife Miss. Philomina Kwaw and also to my children; Bernicella Bella and Lee Carlson for all their support, love and for being my source of inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

There is the general perception that the standard of English among students in Ghana at all levels of education is falling in recent times. Chief examiner's reports received from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) from 2005 to 2016 have regularly indicated that most students in the senior high school who fail in English lack in-depth knowledge of the rudiments of the English language. Students' lackadaisical attitude to the teaching and learning of the language may be a contributory factor. They think that English, like all other languages should not be learnt, but rather it should be spoken. This is of great concern to stakeholders of education in the country, as English is emerging as the lingua franca of the world and it is essential that students graduating from our secondary schools demonstrate solid knowledge of both formal and conversational properties of the English language. This study seeks to investigate the tense errors that students of Diabene Secondary Technical School make in essay writing in order to establish the actual problem areas for attention and redress. The researcher used qualitative method to analyse the data collected from the 115 essays written by the students and also the information obtained from teachers of English during his interaction with them. The findings of the study disclosed that students of Diabene Secondary Technical School have insufficient knowledge of the English language and therefore, they will not be able to communicate effectively and efficiently with other users of English and this will be a barrier to their interaction with other students and friends. It is hoped that if the recommendations in the study are carefully considered, standard of English will improve.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The chapter opens the introduction to this research. It includes the background to the study, statement of the problem, the objectives, research questions, limitations, significance of the study, and organisation of the study.

1.1 Background to the Study

English language is spoken in more than seventy countries all over the world (Svartvik 2001, p.9). According to Crystal (1995, p.106), the high prestige English language enjoys in the world has mainly two explanations. First, the British empire with its colonies in some parts of the world and Second, the united states as the leader of the field of economics. English has become a global language which is used in conference, science, film, music etc. In Ghana, the English language has an important role in many areas of the economy. Since English language has become an international medium of communication among the people on earth, the mastery of good English is deemed as having an edge and can bring a lot of advantages in many ways. Ramelan (1992, pp. 2-3) supports this assertion when he states that "English as an international language is used to communicate, to strengthen and to fasten relationship among all countries in the world in all fields, for example: in tourism, business, science and technology etc.". Considering the importance of English, people from various non-English speaking countries learn English. This suggests the reasons for making the teaching and learning of English compulsory at all levels of education and also as an official language of the republic.

In Ghana, English has assumed a central position in our national life. Dakubu (1988) further explains that the country is linguistically heterogeneous as there are more than forty five (45) different indigenous languages. To break the language barrier, English has become

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an effective medium of communication in our multilingual setting. Therefore, acquiring a high proficiency in English language in Ghana is essential. It is for this reason that senior high school students in particular and Ghanaians in general should be well equipped with the rules of the language so that they can function effectively and efficiently both in Ghana and around the world.

One important thing is the fact that grammar is an extremely important area in communicative proficiency. There is a slight distinction between grammatical errors in speech and writing. Incorrect use of grammar in speech is usually of less importance, because in speech, one can make oneself understood by adding gestures, body language, sounds etc. In contrast to speech, grammatical errors in writing may involve significant consequences, for example, the message can be misinterpreted or the writer will not be taken seriously. The reason why correctly used grammar is important in writing is mainly that the writer does not have the opportunity to correct the error, while in speech the speaker has a chance to correct the error immediately (Hedstrom, 2001, p.76).

In order to convey meaning in communication, both in written and oral communication, one needs to be fully equipped with enough mastery of grammar. Grammar is the silver lining of language, the harmony of language, as it is the one that makes language meaningful. For instance, if sentences are produced without correct grammar, it will not be understood by readers. Grammar is an inseparable component of language. For instance, Nunan (1999, p. 97) states that grammar is a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language. Basically, grammar is the glue that holds several parts of the language together so that it can produce meaning in communication. Someone is considered successful in learning a language when he is able to communicate with ease in both oral and written form. The learner's ability to construct well-structured and comprehensible sentences is a clear sign of good grammatical

competence. Richards (2006) states that grammatical competence refers to the knowledge we have in a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences.

Many students have difficulty grasping grammar, especially tense. Simple present tense is important as the basic rule for students to produce and use sentences to communicate in daily life. Many students often do not understand why some sentences use auxiliaries *is, am*, and *are* instead of auxiliaries *do* and *does*. Some students still use "John is walk to school" instead of saying "John walks to school". All these problems arise since the students do not understand the right rules of the tenses especially the simple present. The main cause is that English writing is linguistically different in many ways from the native language writing.

Several complaints by teachers, stakeholders and the authorities' at Diabene Secondary Technical School at various fora, and at staff meetings on the students' poor communicative skills, inform the researcher to take a critical look at the issue. Carefully delving into the students' exercise books and terminal exams scripts, it was realised that the students have difficulties in the English language writing with respect to tense. It is against this background that this study is undertaken to identify the types of tense errors students commit, why they commit these tense errors and make some suggestions on how to minimize students' tense errors in their writings.

Writing has always been considered an important skill in teaching and learning. For this reason, Rao (2007) stresses that writing is useful in two aspects: First, it motivates students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarize, analyse and criticize. Second, it strengthens students' learning, thinking and reflecting on the English language. Writing is also considered as the most difficult skill in language teaching and learning. This statement is affirmed by Widiate and Cahyono (2006) who state that writing is the most complex skill compared to the other three skills (listening, speaking and reading). Besides, the writing skill

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cannot be acquired in a short time. It requires the students to understand the spelling and punctuation, the sentence structures, the vocabulary, and the paragraph development.

Due to this, students still commit errors when they have to express themselves or describe something in English, especially about the structure. In this case, the firm foundation in grammar is one important aspect that should be comprehended in order to make a well structured writing. Written language without grammar would be disorganised and cause such problems like grammatical errors in writing. Thus, students should have sufficient knowledge in grammar otherwise they will commit errors in the writing process. The researcher hopes that this study contributes to learning English as a second language. From the explanations, the researcher is interested in analysing tense errors in written essay of students of Diabene Secondary Technical School.

This study is aimed at identifying tense errors in the written essays of students at Diabene Secondary Technical School. The analysis is dwelt on common grammatical (tense) errors in students writing. The explanation for each writing problem is discussed under the given circumstances and contexts in order to explain why and how these tense errors occur in writing. Writing is very important as one medium of communication that can help people to have good socialisation, express people's ideas, feelings, and opinions. Writing still remains a critical area of the school curriculum and an important part of students' lives after school. It is based on this assertion that some employers insist that employees possess well-developed communication skills, including writing skills.

Tense errors found in the writings of students of English are part of learning process. It is impossible for students to learn a second language without making mistakes or errors because in learning, committing error is common and acceptable. It is therefore important to note that in developing writing as a communicative skill, students should constantly be made aware that a particular topic in writing fit a particular situation and one should conform to a particular

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convention. The role of the language teacher, therefore, is to teach his students to master not only the language skills but also to master the standard language which is free from grammatical errors. The researcher hopes that this study gives contribution in learning English as a second language.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the researcher's point of view, Language learning is a process in which, learners benefit from mistakes by obtaining response to make new attempts that successfully lead them to achieve desired goals. In fact, errors provide the most valuable data for the teacher to measure the degree of achievement or failure in both learning and teaching, and they enable him to adjust his teaching accordingly. In the course of learning English as a second language students are bound to committing tense errors. Students might commit these tense errors because they have not mastered the rules of the English language. Some learners of English as a second language are unaware of the existence of a particular system or rule in English language, so they commit errors unconsciously.

Nunan (2001, pp. 87-92) argues that it is of utmost importance that students understand that committing errors while learning a language is a natural part of the language learning process, and that fact applies to each and every language learner, irrespective of age, gender or intelligence. He implies that even the most successful language learners commit errors while learning a language, and improve with time through considerable effort, when they eventually commit occasional errors. Therefore, if language learners are encouraged in this way, they can be hopeful and have confidence to continue and pursue their language learning. Based on the researcher's experience in teaching English language at senior high school level, he has observed that some students are unable to construct well-formed English sentences. Particularly, they make tense errors like *I have gone to Accra last month with my father*.

An error could be as result of ignorance of the rules of the language. Brown & Fudeman (2006) affirm that errors are unavoidable problems in foreign and second language acquisition. It has been a public outcry that senior high school students in Ghana are incapable of expressing themselves in a clear, correct and comprehensible manner in essay writing. This reflects in the abysmal performance of students in the core English Language at the end of the final examination. When studying English language tenses play vital role and one cannot deny the fact that it is one of the most difficult aspects in English. In this case, learners of English as a second language have to devote much time to comprehend and use it properly. It is in light of this that this study seeks to examine tense errors in students' essays at Diabene Secondary Technical School. Through a qualitative approach, 115 students wrote essays for marking. From their scripts, the various types of tense errors are categorised and analysed. From these, the causes of these errors are identified and discussed together with suggested measures for minimising their occurrence.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify tense errors in the written essays of students of Diabene Secondary Technical School.

2. To discuss the causes of such tense errors in respect to their categories.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are tense errors identified in the essays of students Diabene Secondary Technical School?

2. What are the causes of these tense errors?

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The study has two limitations: First, the limitation of time: The study was carried out and applied in the second term of 2017/2018 academic year. This means that certain problems that might have been encountered in either the first or third term could not be realized. Owing to time, the research could not be carried out for the entire school population which would have helped the researcher to solve, if not all, some of the problems relating to students' writings. Second, the limitation of place: The study was applied and carried out in Diabene Secondary Technical School. Considering the topic, a research on the whole school or all the senior high schools in the entire metropolis would have been appropriate. The research was solely limited to the classroom environment which means that some problems that can be attributed to the environment in which students come from cannot be discussed.

1.6 The Significance of the Study

This study contributes to improving teaching and learning of English language. It does this by identifying reasons behind the poor achievement of students in English language. When doing this, it is important to identify the students' level of achievement in their English language writing skills and the problems they encounter in the process of English as a Second Language learning. In this vein, Lightbown and Spada (2000, pp. 176-192) argue that when errors are persistent, especially when they are shared by almost all students in a class, it is useful for teachers to bring the problem to the students' attention.

According to Xie and Jiang (2007, p.13), errors can tell the teacher how far the learner has progressed and consequently, what remains for him or her to learn. They add that students' errors provide valuable feedback to teachers and syllabus designers. Error analysis helps teachers to identify in a systematic manner the specific and common language problems students have, so that they can focus more attention on these types of errors. The significance of this study is to inform educators and language material developers about the kind of tense

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errors that students make in their writing. It further shows the frequency of these tense errors. If teachers become conscious of likely problem areas that specific students face, they would be in a better position to put appropriate intervention strategies into place.

This study is also valuable to learners of English as a second language. Researchers such as Nunan (2005, p. 31) and Erdogan (2005, p. 263) reveal that learners' errors are systematic, rather than random, and many learners tend to commit the same kinds of errors during a certain stage of language learning. It is therefore the obligation of teachers to summarise these frequently appearing tense errors, and remind students of these errors as often as possible so that they can make greater effort to avoid them. The results of this study therefore serve as guidance to teachers on how to assist learners to become better writers in the English language.

The findings can be used as reference for those who would choose to conduct research in error analysis. As pointed by Linnarud (1993), a language teacher has the opportunity to be the best language researcher. As a teacher of English as a second language, this study further enhances my understanding of second language learning, especially, in the field of error analysis in the students' written work.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The rest of the study is organized as follows: Chapter 2 discusses the literature as well as a review of some studies related to the current research. Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the study. In this chapter, the design for the collection of the data, and how the data are analysed are discussed. Chapter 4 discusses the results of the study. The findings revealed that majority of students have difficulty in present tense, 162 out of 268 errors (60.4 %). These errors belong to six sub-categories namely, the present progressive (27.2 %) instead of simple present, simple past (44.4 %) instead of simple present, present perfect (8.0 %) instead of simple present, incorrect use of auxiliary (9.3 %), over use of verb (5 %), and omission of verb

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(6.1 %). The other most frequently occurring categories of tense errors were the past tense, 106 out of 268 errors (39.6 %). Chapter 5 presents the summary of the results, pedagogical implications, and suggestions for further studies. It is argued that errors provide feedback to teachers and so they should train and guide learners to apply the right strategies to become better English language users.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents some issues relating to writing and its importance at the senior high school. It also reviews literature on errors, the difference between error and mistake, and categories of errors. These categories of errors include interlingual errors, transfer of phonological elements, transfer of morphological elements, and intralingual errors. In addition to these categories of errors, the chapter discusses sources of tense errors and these include overgeneralisation, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, false concept hypothesized as well as context of learning. Tense and its types as well as a review of some studies on the use of tenses by students in essay writing are also discussed. The chapter also presents other studies on error analysis, and finally ends with a discussion of the significance and challenges of errors in language learning.

2.1 Writing

Writing is one of the four skills that should be learned by learners when they are learning a language. Writing is not only a system which completes communication but also the main tool for learners in language learning (Weigle, 2002). The four basic skills in English are writing, reading, listening and speaking. In order to master these basic skills, learners should also be competent in the grammar of the English language. Mastering grammar is much needed in learning the basic skills, especially in writing. Celce-Murcia (2001, p. 94) defines writing as the "ability to express one's idea in writing a second or foreign language and to do so with reasonable coherence and accuracy is a major achievement". It means in writing, one expresses ideas, opinions, feelings or experiences that somebody can read. The learner arranges his idea

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in the form of words, phrases, clauses and paragraphs so that his writing is understood and read clearly.

Good writing requires a commitment to the writing process. It also needs much editing and revising. So, to make good writing for readers, students should construct sentences so that the readers will not be confused with the ideas in the text. A good writing needs good grammar skills. To buttress this point, Villemaire and Villemaire (2005, p. 8) also state that "learning to write well needs good grammar skills". This explanation implies that when ideas are expressed in bad grammar, it will affect the meaning and the value of the text. Bram (1995, p. 32) also notes that "a good writing cannot only be seen as semantically but also grammatically correct". This implies that when a student writes a paragraph, he/she writes not only semantically well-formed but should also use correct grammar. Thus, writing is not a spontaneous activity, but it is learnt in formal instruction. In addition, it requires some conscious mental effort. Valette (1997, p. 4) also explains that "by writing frequently, it is not only mastering of elements of writing could improve but also the acquisition of new vocabulary and grammatical structures".

According to Richards and Schmidt (2002), writing is viewed as "the result of complex processes of planning, drafting, reviewing and revising and some approaches to the teaching of first and second language writing teach students to use these processes" (p. 184). In effect, writing is central to our personal experiences and social identities and we are often evaluated by its control (Hyland, 2002). Writing starts from a simple piece of writing and develops into a more complicated level at which elements of structure and vocabulary are involved. Davies-Pearse (2002, p. 101) classifies writing into low-level skills (handwriting or typing, spelling, constructing grammatical sentences, punctuating) and high-level cognitive skills (gathering ideas, organizing and sequencing, structuring, drafting, and editing). In addition, Rivers (1981, p. 294) also classifies writing activity into writing practice (grammatical exercise, the construction of simple dialogue, uncomplicated translation exercise, dictation, and the cloze

procedure) and expressive writing or composition (the writing of instruction, reports, resumes, concrete descriptions, or essential correspondence connected with everyday affair).

Writing first begins by using language expressively and imaginatively like writing diary or letters to friends and then the writer can practice writing critically until they are able to produce good writings. Reading from many sources, listening, watching television, and talking to others can also inspire good writings. Composition writing is taught extensively at the senior high school to enable students develop writing skills in order to cope with their academic work. More writing skills are required in examinations of students at the senior high level. Writing activities at the high school imply that students will have to write for examination purposes, as well as for social and economic purposes and that would also enable them to proceed to the tertiary level. Abdel (2010) also maintains that writing facilitates students' acquisition of the basic study skills needed for understanding what they study and expressing in their own words. Arguably, writing is a highly complex act that demands the analysis and synthesis of many levels of thinking. It motivates students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarise, analyse and to criticise.

Writing requires that you anticipate your readers' needs. Your ability to do so demonstrates your intellectual flexibility and maturity. It helps you move easily among facts, inferences and opinions without getting confused and without confusing your readers. School requirements demand high level of writing proficiency and a student who struggles with an unrecognized writing disability will find it increasingly difficult to express his knowledge on many subjects, as the writing process itself will stand firmly in the way of learning. Since most high school students find it difficult to write essays that are free from errors, teachers need to anticipate certain common types of errors. They are able to do this by analysing the written essays of students.

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2.2   Errors

Errors are the common occurrences which learners usually produce when they learn a language, especially a second language. English as the second language has its difficulties. It may cause students to produce errors in the process of learning in both the oral and the written forms. Triestari, Kamal, Nursel and Woan (2012) intimate that "errors in grammar can be found in sentences when the sentences are not in the correct structure formulation". Hence, students commit grammar errors if the sentence is not structurally correct. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 184) define an error as "the use of language in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as faulty or incomplete learning". In another instance, an error is seen to be a systematic error of competence, both covert and overt, that deviates from the norms of the target language (Eun-pyo, 2002, p. 1). Brown (2002) and Ellis (1996) differentiate between covert and overt errors. They define covert errors to be grammatically correct but not interpretable within the context of communication, whereas overt errors refer to obviously ungrammatical utterances.

Brown (2000, p. 217) defines an error as a "noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner". This view is supported by James (1998, p. 304) who confirms that errors are seen as the deviation which arises as a result of second language learning. In his opinion errors are normal and unavoidable. Therefore, they are regarded as a necessary part of language learning that could reveal learners' underlying knowledge of the language. Errors can be described in two terms: systematic and non-systematic errors. As Brown (2000, p. 218) and Richards (2015, p. 25) point out, systematic errors are the sort of errors we might expect from anyone learning English as a second language and also persisting or recurring within any group of learners.

Systematic errors seem to occur in cases in which learners reveal more consistency in producing the second language and when learners produce incorrect language because they do

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not know the correct form. Non-systematic errors are the failures to correctly utilize known systems, slips of the tongue or pen caused by psychological conditions such as intense excitement, or psychological factors such as tiredness, which change from moment to moment and from situation to situation (James, 2001). Such errors are unsystematic and are called 'mistakes'- performance errors that are either random guesses or slips. They can occur when learners produce incorrect language although they know the correct form. While the issue of errors in language learning is important, research in this area is still inconclusive. The definition of errors could still be looked at from various points of view. Errors are seen as "bad habits" that have been formed. The response is based on the stimulus. It is assumed that interference of the mother tongue (L1) is responsible for the errors made during the transition period of learning the target language.

In the cognitive approach, errors are seen as a clue to what is happening in the mind. They are seen as a natural phenomenon that must occur as learning a first or second language takes place before correct grammar rules are completely internalized. Teachers are relieved to find a more realistic attitude towards errors because the errors are no longer a reflection on their teaching methods, but are rather, indicators that learning is taking place. This means that errors are no longer "bad" but "good". The insight that errors are a natural and important part of the learning process itself, and do not all come from mother tongue interference, is very important. There is variation in learners' performance depending on the task. Learners may have more control over linguistic forms for certain tasks, while for others, they may be more susceptible to errors.

Gass and Selinker (2001, p.67) also define error as ''red flags'', meaning they are warning signals that provide evidence of the learner's knowledge of second language. Carson (2001, p. 191), suggests different reasons why errors occur. First, learners may translate from L1, or they may try out what they assume is a legitimate structure of the target language.

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Second, they tend to over-generalise the rules for stylistic features when acquiring new discourse structures. In addition, learners are often unsure of what they want to express, which would cause them to commit errors in any language. Finally, writers in second language (L2) might lack familiarity with new rhetorical structures and the organisation of ideas.

2.2.1 Error and mistake

It is good for a second language teacher to know exactly what errors his students commit and why they commit them. This will help him/her to adopt pragmatic or effective teaching strategies in order to handle students' errors. Every language has a set of rules for producing a well-rounded sentence. An abuse or violation of this set of rules may constitute an error. However, in order to analyse tense error in writing, it is important to establish a clear distinction between errors and mistakes. Brown (2007, p. 241) notes that "mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip, in that it is a failure to utilise a known system correctly". Mistakes, when attended to can be self-corrected. It implies that a learner who makes a mistake recognizes and rectifies it. This is supported by Khartri (2015, p. 6) who affirms that "many mistakes are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language and the inability to apply what they have learned". These assertions mean that a mistake is not an issue of knowledge, but it is an issue of its application; how one applies in writings.

According to Krisnawati (2013, p. 185) and Ellis (1997, p.17) errors "reflect gaps in learners' knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct. While, mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance; they occur because in particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he/she knows". This shows that a mistake is a fault which is made by the learner and he/she can make corrections, while an error is a fault which is made by the learner, and he/she is unable to make correction. Erdogan (2005, p. 263) also suggests two ways of distinction between an error and a mistake. The first one is to check the consistency

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of learner's writing. If he sometimes uses the correct form and sometimes the wrong one, it is a mistake. However, if he always uses it erroneously, it is an error. The second is to ask the learner to try to correct his own deviant utterance. Where he is unable to, the deviations are errors; where he is successful, they are mistakes.

Learners most of the time make mistakes in the process of second language acquisition. It is not strange when the learners commit the mistake either in speaking or writing since they are capable of correcting it. However, learning other language becomes difficult since the target language has different system from the native language. This difference sometimes allows the learners some room to commit errors, especially in the area of grammar of the English language. Gass (2013, p. 104) again states that "the speaker who makes a mistake is able to recognise it as a mistake and correct it if necessary". He describes an error as systematic and it is likely to occur repeatedly and is also likely not to be recognised by the learner as an error. In addition, Gonzales (2008, p. 281) maintains that mistakes are also called "errors of performance while errors are defined as errors of competence". Finally, Richards (2015, p. 25) holds the view that errors of performance refer to 'mistakes and errors refer to systematic errors which have relation to the knowledge of the learner. He also states that errors of performance are not systematic while errors of competence are systematic'.

2.2.2 Categories of errors

James (2013, p. 13) believes that there are errors that do not hinder communication and understanding the meaning of utterances (local errors) and errors that interfere with communication and disrupt the meaning of utterances (global errors). Local errors involve noun and verb inflections, the use of articles, prepositions, and auxiliaries. Global errors, for example, involve wrong word order in a sentence.

2.2.2.1 Interlingual errors

If learners make mistakes in the target language by the effect of mother tongue that is called as interlanguage. They are very frequent at the initial stages of L2 learning since the L1 is the only language system the learner knows and can draw on and therefore negative transfer takes place. Erdogan (2005, p. 263) defines interlanguage errors as being the "result of language transfer which is caused by the learners' first language". By the time the child goes to school he/she has already internalised the phonological, lexical and syntactic system of the mother tongue. Therefore, the child in learning a new language system, sometimes consciously or unconsciously transfers certain features of the mother tongue (L1) systems into the target language (L2). In other words, certain L2 errors can be traced to the L1 influence. It must be admitted that the degree of this interference depends on the learner's educational background and the stage of his/her interlanguage development. Some illustrations of L1 interference is found in the following sentences.

 (a) *My allowance has not come…* (**My allowance has not been paid).**

 (b) *I am going to come…….* (**I am going, but I will be back in a moment**).

Sentences (a) and (b) are deviations from English. These errors are reflective of the native language structures and are found in the target language acquisition. In Keshavarz's (1994, p. 102) taxonomy of the sources of errors, he observes that interlanguage errors result from the "transfer of phonological, grammatical, lexico-semantic, and stylistic elements of the learner's mother tongue to the learning of the target language". These sources of interlanguage errors by Keshavarz can be subdivided into different parts. The classification as follows gives an account of the vital sources of interlanguage errors.

2.2.2.1.1 Transfer of Phonological Elements

There are certain specific features of phonology to any individual language that may not be found in any two languages and even if they exist in a different language, they may take

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on new characteristics which make them peculiar in that language. Odlin (1990) opines that sounds produced in any two languages often possess different physical characteristics such as the manner in which the mouth is opened when producing a sound. The dental sounds in English for instance, cannot be produced by Nzema speakers because they do not exist in their language.

2.2.2.1.2 Transfer of Morphological Elements

This is another type of interlanguage transfer in foreign language learning. For instance, according to Fallahi (1991, p. 125) "when semantic interpretation of some nouns is collective in one language but their semantic interpretation of their equivalents in another language is sometimes collective and sometimes (these nouns) are count plurals". For example the word 'sheep' is singular in form but plural in number in English. However, it is singular in form and singular in number in the Nzema language. Therefore a native speaker of Nzema learning English as a second language may construct an ungrammatical sentence based on his knowledge in his mother tongue. For example:

(a) *The sheeps have destroyed the garden.*

From the illustration, an Nzema-speaking learner may add the plural marker '-s' to the word 'sheep' to make it plural by following the rule of adding the plural suffix to a singular noun to make it plural. He does not know that this word 'sheep' is plural by nature in English because it is a collective noun.

2.2.2.1.3 Intralingual errors

Yankson (1994, p. 2) explains intralingual errors as errors committed as a result of the learner's partial knowledge of the target language. Interferences from the students' own language is not the only reason for committing errors. Students may make mistakes in the target language since they do not know the target language very well. They have difficulties in using it. Some errors are not mother tongue induced. For instance, the students used two tense

markers at the same time in one sentence since they have not mastered the language yet. When they write "*He is comes here*", it is because the singularity of the third person requires ''is'' in present continuous, and '-s' at the end of a verb in simple present tense. Intralingual errors occur as result of learners attempt to build up concepts and hypothesis about the target language from their limited experience. Intralingual errors occur as a result of ignorance of the construction rules of the target language, the formation of false hypothesis, ignorance of selection restriction rules and incomplete application of the target language rules.

2.3 Sources/causes of errors

Although most linguists believe that establishing the sources of learner's errors is a very important endeavour, they are unable to come to an agreement on how to conveniently classify them. Many researchers have tried to differentiate between sources of errors. Richards & Schmidt (2002, p. 186) cite four causes of errors by learners, namely, over-generalisation, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and false concept hypothesised. Each of the causes is discussed as follows:

2.3.1 Over-generalisation

In the view of Richards & Schmidt (2002, p. 186), over-generalisation occurs "when the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language". It generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two target language structures. For instance, in *He can plays* where English allows *He can play* and *'He plays*, the learners over-generalise the rule of suffix '–s' that is only used after the third person in simple present tense. Again, the errors are the products of the learner's own inductive generalisation based on his partial exposure to the linguistic data of the target language. The learner, faced with a complex linguistic system, sometimes with no codified rules governing a particular area of grammar, will hypothesize, analogise, and sometimes over-generalise, thereby producing incorrect forms of the target language. For example;

1. *cattles*……………… (cattle)

2. *childrens*……………. (children)

3. *womens*……………… (women)

4. *furnitures*………….. (furniture)

5. *sugars*…………….. (sugar)

From the illustrations, the child learns that in forming the plural forms of nouns, -s or –es is added to the singular form, so as an active learner, he/she continues to form plural nouns in the same way. These types of errors are inevitable because language learning is a creative developmental process.

2.3.2 Ignorance of rule restrictions

James (1998, p.63) states that ignorance is specific in the sense that one is normally said to be ignorant of the structure; the learner of the second language does not obey the structure of the target language. In this type of error, the learner fails to observe the restrictions of the existing structures. Some of the rule restrictions may be accounted for in terms of analogy and may result from the role learning of rules.

Ignorance of rule restrictions involves the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply. An example is '*He made me to sleep*' through extension of the pattern found with the majority of verbs that take infinitival complements. Here, the student ignores the restriction on the *made*, that it is followed by *to* and a verb.

2.3.3 Incomplete application of rules

This cause of error involves a failure to fully develop a structure. Thus, it occurs when the learner fails to apply the rules completely due to the stimulus sentence. The learners of English as a second language have been observed to use declarative word order questions. For example;

(a) *I know where was he.*

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(b) *you like to dance*?'

In sentence (a), the learner fails to use indicative word order 'I know where he was. Similarly, in sentence (b) the learner used the wrong question order in place of interrogative word order 'do *you like to dance*?'

2.3.4 False concept hypothesized

This is sometimes called semantic error because it may be derived from faulty comprehension in the target language. For example, the use of 'was' as marker of past tense as in (a) *one day it was happened*. The form may be understood to be the corresponding marker of the present tense; (b) *he is speaks Nzema*. Sometimes in a narrative text the continuous form of the simple present tense instead of simple past is used. These are sometimes due to poor gradation of teaching items. If the leaners do not begin with a good foundation in the target language, they will develop false concepts in the language.

2.3.5 Context of learning

This refers to the setting where a language is learnt, e.g. a classroom or a social situation, and also to the teacher and materials used in the lessons. All these factors can cause induced errors (James 1998, p. 191). This means that students often make errors because of a misleading explanation from the teacher, faulty presentation of a structure or word in a textbook, or even because of a memorized pattern that is not contextualized. The regular marker is used in place of an irregular one.

1 drinked………………………… (drink)

2 costed ……………………….. (cost)

3 beated …… ………………… (beat)

4 goed…………………………… (go)

5 comed……………………….. (come)

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From the illustrations, the child learns that in forming the past tense forms of verbs, -d or –ed is added to the infinitive form, so as an active learner, he/she continues to form past tense in the same way.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, lexicon may be viewed as the central element in the social system of communication. In the words of psycholinguists, the lexicon may be described as the driving speech production and standing "at the heart" of listening comprehension. The lexicon is believed to open distinct vistas to the process of acquisition of a language as a whole. James (1998, p.150) defines the semantic errors as, "'conceptual' errors, where learners use forms that exist in the target language but these forms do not represent the meanings they wish to express".

2.4 Tense

Grammar is generally thought to be a set of rules specifying the correct ordering of words at the sentence level. Hidayah (2013, p.2) views grammar as the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence. It means that grammar is used as the guidance of writing for students to make the correct sentences and to convey the message properly in a particular written form. Grammar is known to be dominantly related to tense. To produce a sentence in English either written or spoken, tense has a very important role because it expresses an action which happened based on time. On another note, Jabbari (2014, p.245) explains that tense refers to the grammatical changes made to the form of a verb, as opposed to time, which refers to the semantic functions such changes signal. In English, each sentence should have tense. Tenses are not the same with time. Declerck, Reed, and Cappelle (2006) argue that 'time is an extra linguistic category'. It stands alone, independently.

All tenses have the progressive and non-progressive forms (Declerck, et al., 2006). So, when writing in English, people need to consider when the activities happen and which tenses

they would use. The activity in the past takes past tense whereas present activity also takes present tense. Tense means the form of a verb that shows the time of its action or state of being or set of such forms indicating a particular time. In other words, tense is the inflected form in the declension of verb that indicates the time such as past, present or future. It does not matter whatever the tense means. If someone wants to talk about tense he/she may not escape from grammar because tense is part of structure.

2.4.1 Simple Present Tense

Simple present tense is the tense for description, definition, and statements of general truths. Azar (2006, p.53) states that simple present tense expresses habits. Students' errors on this tense include the form of verb, use of adjective and adverb, the lack of vocabulary or even in making affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences. Simple present tense is formed by using infinitive without 'to' and when the third person singular subject is present, a suffix –es or –s is added to the verb. The present tense also expresses an action or a state of being in the present. Azar (1999, p. 27), points out that there are two functions of using simple present tense. First, simple present tense is used to express habitual activity or event. Second, simple present tense is also applied to inform something factually. Simple present tense is one of the tenses which have a function to tell a fact or a habitual activity. Again, Azar (1995) notes that the simple present tense expresses events, perceptions, feelings, or states that occur or exist always, usually, habitually; they exist now, have existed in the past, and probably will exist in the future. Azar (1999, p. 27), again argues that "the simple present says that something was true in the past, is true in the present, and will be true in the future". It also expresses general statements of fact and timeless truths. Besides, he also explains that simple present can be used to express habitual or everyday activities. Examples and functions of simple present tense (Azar 1999, p.13) are illustrated as follows.

1 To express general statements of fact and timeless truths.

1. *Water consists of hydrogen and oxygen*

2. *The average person breathes 21,600 times a day.*

3. *The world is round.*

2 To express habitual or everyday activities

4. *I study for two hours every night.*

5. *I get up at seven every morning.*

(f) *He always eats a sandwich for lunch*

The use of simple present to express general statements of fact or timeless truths can be seen in examples (1), (2) and (3).The fact that water consists of hydrogen and oxygen is a timeless truth. In the past, present, or even in the future, water will always consist of hydrogen and oxygen. It is just the same with examples (2) and (3). It tells about a fact or can be defined as a timeless truth. Besides, the use of simple present to express habitual or everyday activities can be seen in the examples (d), (e) and (f).These examples show that someone usually studies for two hours, gets up at seven, and eats lunch with a sandwich. The subject does the activities. O'Dawyer (2006, p. 118) concurs with Azar (1999, p. 27) and also maintains that the function of simple present is to express action or event which occurs now or shows habitual or timeless truths. Each tense of English has its pattern including simple present tense.

Learners should be aware that there are several forms of tenses. The form of sentences can be positive, negative, or interrogative. Simple present tense also has its pattern of positive, negative, and question form of sentences. The form of the main verb may be different depending on the subject chosen. The use of the subject in every sentence determines the form of the main verb. Murthy (2003) suggests that when a verb is used to show that an action takes place at present, it is known as the present tense. In this case, verb in simple present form is influenced by pronouns. Pronouns can be singular and plural. In pronouns, especially the third

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person singular (*he, she, and it*) adds the suffix –s to the verb and the other pronouns (*I, you, we, and they*) do not.

The general pattern of simple present tense is *Subject + V1*. The V1 adds –s / -es if the subject is the third person. Therefore, the verb *walk* adds –s becoming *walks* because the subject is the third person. Then, if it comes to an interrogative sentence, the auxiliary *do* is used for the first or second person of the subjects and if the subject is third person, the auxiliary which is used is *does*. Another pattern of simple present tense is *Subject + to be*. There are two kinds of *to be* in simple present tense. They are *is* and *are*. The use of *is* and *are* is determined by the subject of the sentence. For example:

(1) *He **is** hungry*

2) *They **are** hungry*

(3) *I **am** hungry*

As seen from the examples, the third person subjects' use the auxiliary *is*. Then, the subject *they, we* and *you* use *are*. Besides, subject I uses *am*. That is the rule of how to use "to be" in simple present tense according to the subjects of the sentence. The present tense of the verb is formed with simple form of a verb for first person, and third person plural subject except for third person singular; the verb ends in –s / -es, (Soemarto, 1994). The adverbs of frequency or adverbial phrases that are often used in the simple present tense are *always, often, usually, everyday, sometime, never, occasionally, seldom, twice a week* etc.

In the present tense, there is the spelling of third person singular forms as mentioned by Swan (2005). The –s /-es form is used after a singular name, noun, or one of the pronouns; he/she/it. There are some characteristics in making the -s/ -es form in the simple present tense. -es is added to verbs ending in 'o' or in a letter or combination of letters which represent a sibilant sound such as *s, sh, ch, x,* or *z*. For example:

Kiss------------------------------kisses

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Go----------------------------------goes

Wash-------------------------------washes

Lash---------------------------------lashes

Watch--------------------------------watches

And for verbs ending in 'y' preceded by a consonant, the 'y' is changed to i and -es is added.

For example:

Study----------------------------- studies

Hurry-------------------------------hurries

Cry----------------------------------cries

Worry--------------------------------worries

Aitken (1992, p.18) also explains that simple present tense is helpful to express actions which are always, repeatedly, or generally true, or actions at the moment of speaking (with no reference to past or future). According to Aitken (1992, p.19), the simple present tense has the following uses:

(1) It is used to denote truths. For example: *The sun rises in the east*.

(2) It is used for giving instructions, directions, or demonstrations, often with the impersonal you: e.g. *Sweep the room and then lay the bed*.

(3) It is often used as a narrative device, for dramatic effect in certain situations. For instance, it is used in commentaries, especially those about activities where the actions are swift:

e.g *He passes the ball to Joe, he swerves, aims and put the ball into the net*.

(4) It can be used to describe feelings and senses, especially sudden ones, over which the speaker has no control: e.g. *I feel sick*.

(5) With a future time marker the tense gives a time table future. It is usually used for schedules, especially transport: e.g. *the aircraft takes off at eight*.

(6) After when, to form a time clause. This usually occurs with the main verb in the present:

e.g. *I catch bus when it rains*.

The other uses of simple present tense based on Thomson and Martinet (1995, p.159) are as follows:

(a) It is used in conditional sentences type 1:

e.g *If I see Jane, I will punish her*.

(b) Simple present tense must be used instead of the present continuous with verbs which cannot be used in continuous form. For instance, love, see, believe, etc. so that we can only say *I love you* but not *I am loving you*.

(c) It is often used with adverbs, or adverb phrases such as always, never, occasionally, often, sometimes, usually, every week, etc. : e.g. *I always walk to school*.

2.4.2 Simple Past Tense

The simple past tense is used to talk about activities or situations that began and ends at a particular time in the past. If a sentence contains *when* and has the simple past in both clauses, the *when* clause occurs first. For example: *when I drove my car, the old man crossed the way*. The first clause called time clause tells us that the activity began first. A time clause can come in front of a main clause or follow a main clause. The second clause called main clause while its role as a second activity happened after the previous one did. First: *I drove my car. Then: The old man crossed the way*.

2.4.2.1 Forms of the simple past tense

Leech (1989, p. 340) states that when we use a past tense main verb and no auxiliary verb, the form of the verb is called past tense. The form of the verb in the simple past tense in English language includes regular and irregular verbs.

2.4.2.2 Regular Verb

Thomson and Martinet (1995) state that the form of a regular verb can be divided as follows: In the infinitive forms "-ed'' is added to form the simple past tense in regular verbs. The following are examples: Talk/talk<u>ed</u>, clean/clean<u>ed</u>, and watch/watch<u>ed</u>. In verbs ending "e'' '- d' is added to form the simple past as in close/close<u>d</u>, love/love<u>d</u>, smile/smile<u>d</u>. The past form of the regular verb can be marked with specific suffixes. There are three spellings for the regular simple past in the affirmative statements: -d, -ed, and –ied. If the verb ends in two consonants, -ed is added to form the past as in help/help<u>ed</u>, learn/learn<u>ed</u>. If the verb ends in two vowels + a consonant, -ed is added to form the past as in rain/rain<u>ed</u>, heat/heat<u>ed</u>. If the verb has one syllable and ends in one vowel + one consonant, the consonant is doubled to make the –ed form as in stop/stopped, plan/planned.

If the first syllable of a two syllable verb is stressed, the consonant is not doubled as in visit/visited, offer/offered. If the second syllable of a two syllable verb is stressed, the consonant is doubled as in prefer/preferred, admit/admitted. If the verbs end in a vowel + y, the 'y' is not changed as in play/played, enjoy/enjoyed. If the verb ends in a consonant + y, the 'y' is changed to 'i' to make the –ed form as in study/studied. There are some exceptions in forming the past of the regular verb form. All verbs that end w or x, the suffix –ed is added without doubling the final letter as in borrow/borrowed, fix/fixed.

2.4.2.3 Irregular Verbs

In British English usage, many verbs ending in –n, or l add –t rather than –ed for the past tense and past participle as in learnt, burnt, spelt, dwelt. Irregular verbs fall into several categories when it comes to forming the past tense and past participle. One category of these irregular verbs concerns those verbs which have the same form as the infinitive form in the past tense and past participle forms. For example:

Infinitive form: *bet, burst, cast, cut, cost, hit, hurt, shut*.

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Past tense: *bet, burst, cast, cut, cost, hit, hurt, shut*.

Past participle: *bet, burst, cast, cut, cost, hit, hurt, shut*.

Another category includes those irregular verbs that have two past tenses and two participles, the past tense having the same form as the past participle. The following are examples:

Infinitive form: *burn, dream, dwell, smell, speed*.

Past tense*: burned/burnt, dreamed/dreamt, dwelled/dwelt, smelled/smelt, speeded/sped.*

Past participle*: burned/burnt, dreamed/dreamt, dwelled/dwelt, smelled/smelt speeded/sped*.

Another category includes those irregular verbs which have past tenses that never end in –ed and which have the same form as that of the past participles. Examples are illustrated below.

Infinitive form: *bend, build, dig, fight, find, leave, hold, make,* and *hear*.

Past tense: *bent, built, dug, fought, found, left, held, made*, and *heard*.

Past participle: *bent, built, dug, fought, found, left, held, made*, and *heard*.

One other category includes irregular verbs which have regular past tense forms ending in –ed or –d and two possible past participles, one of which is regular and the same as the past tense. Examples are.

Infinitive form: *prove, mow, sew, show, sow*, and *swell*.

Past tense: *proved, mowed, sewed, showed, sowed*, and *swelled*.

Past participle: *proved/proven, mowed/mown, sewed/sewn, showed/shown, sowed/sown*, and *swelled/swollen*. In addition to these categories, are irregular verbs which have different past tenses and past participles from each other and different from infinitive form. Examples are illustrated below.

Infinitive form: *bear, begin, bite, eat, drive*, and *drink*.

Past tense: *bore, began, bit, ate, drove*, and *drank*.

Past participle: *borne, begun, bitten, eaten, driven*, and *drun*k.

2.4.2.4 The Use of Simple Past Tense

The simple past tense is a verb form that is used to express an action which happened or took place at a particular time in the past as in (a)"*Philo was there yester*day; (b) *He was in Accra last week*''. It is also used to express repeated, habitual actions in the past as in

(1) "*They worked night shift*

(2) *People drank very little alcohol in those days*''.

Thomson and Martinet (1995) state that the simple past tense is the tense usually used for:

(a) An action completed in the past at a definite time. It is therefore used for a past action when the time is given as in "*I met him yesterday*''. It is also used when the time is asked about as in (I) "*When did you see your book*?'' Also, it is used when the action clearly took place at a definite time even though this time is not mentioned as in (ii) "*The boy was five minutes late; (iii) How did you get your present job*?''.

(b)The simple past tense is used for action whose time is not given but which occupied a period now terminated, or occupied at a moment in a period and now terminated. The simple past tense also indicates that an activity began and ended a situation at a particular time in the past as in (1) "*I walked to work yesterday;(2) He lived in Elubo for four years, but now he is living in Takoradi*''. If a sentence contains 'when' and has the simple past in both clauses, the action in the 'when clause' happens first as in (I) "*I stood under a shed when it began to rain; (ii) When she heard a strange noise, she got up to investigate*''. The simple past tense is also used for a past habit as in (1) "*The man never drank alcohol*''. It is also used in conditional sentences as in (2) "*She would invite me if she had a problem*''.

(c) "Used to'' Indicating past habit. "Used to" is the past tense of a defective verb and is followed by bare infinitive. "Used to '' is used to express a discontinued habit or past

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situations which contrast with the present as in (I) '*Bella used to eat rice and beans, now she eats yam with egg stew*'.

2.4.3 Present perfect

According to Azar (1999), there are three functions of the present perfect tense. It expresses an idea of something which happened or even never happened before now, and does not have specified time in the past, repetition of an activity before now, and to express a situation that began in the past and still continues to the present. The functions of present perfect tense including examples of sentences which use present perfect tenses are illustrated below.

To express an idea that something happened or even never happened before now.

Examples:

(a)They have moved into a new apartment.

(b) I have never seen a man.

(c) I have already seen that video
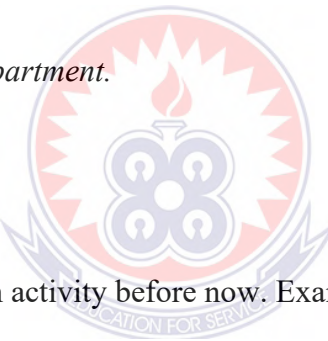
To express repetition of an activity before now. Examples are:

(d)We have had two assignments so far this term.

(e)I have met many people since I came here this year.

(f) I have travelled by air many times.

To express a situation that began in the past and continues to the present. Examples are:

(g)I have been here since morning.

(h) We have been here for three days.

(i) I have had this same pair of trousers for two years.

O'Dawyer (2006, p.118) states that present perfect tense expresses an activity or event completed in the past but with some relationship to the present. Present perfect tense has relation to both past and present time. He also explains that although the activity is started in

the past, it still has some relationship to the present time. The verb formation of the present perfect tense is Have/Has + Past participle. Generally, present perfect tense has the same rule as the simple present tense. The word "have" will change into 'has' if the subject is the third person, while if the subject is the first or second person, the verb formation uses 'have'.

If the past participle uses 'to be' (is, am, are), the formation would be Subject +Have/Has + been + (O/C). Basically, the rules of using simple present and present perfect tense are just the same. The differences are in the functions and in the pattern of verb formation.

2.5 Related Studies

Some studies on tense errors have been conducted by many researchers to find the causes of errors in students written essays. A study conducted by Indarti (1998) showed that the students still made errors in the use of tenses. The reason was that the students were not familiar with English structure such as the form of verb, because they did not find such rules in Indonesian. Norhayati (2002) also conducted a research to find out the most common grammatical errors in sentences by Form 4 Malay students at a selected school in Klang. To achieve this objective, she gave 40 students an essay writing task and analysed. After analyzing the scripts, the sequence of their errors was as follows: verb tenses (36.6%), subject-verb agreement (26.6%), articles (18.6%), pronouns (10.4%), preposition (5.8%) and conjunction (2.0 %). Based on this finding, she concluded that most of the students had difficulties with the verb tenses.

In a similar effort, Rohayu (2001) also carried out a research to assess the students' performance in the use of the past tense from a selected school. It was found out that the learners face many problems and a lot of difficulties to master the language. It was concluded that most of the time, the students had problems in English grammar, especially in the use of English tenses. Again, Faridatul (2004) also carried out a study on the use of auxiliary verb in simple present tense to find out errors made by second year students of a public university. In

her study, she described grammatical errors, the dominant sources of errors made by the students in using auxiliary verb in simple present tense and the efforts made by the English teacher to overcome the errors.

Further study was also conducted by Husnu (2004) to find out the errors in the use of auxiliary 'to be' in the present tense made by students. The result of her study showed that most of the students in mastering auxiliary 'to be' in the present tense have difficulties and the sources of difficulties of the mastery of the auxiliary 'to be' in the present tense belong to intralingual errors was caused by ignorance of hypothesized and incomplete application of rule. Moreover, Alfim (2011) conducted a similar study to find out the grammatical errors in English composition made by the second year students of MTS N1 Tanon, Sragen. Her study focused on grammatical errors in the use of simple past tense and simple perfect tense in English composition. The result of her study revealed that the students were still making a lot of errors in writing English composition.

Pomeyie (2007) also looks at "The problems of tense usage in the written English of students in senior high schools". According to her, tense is a very important aspect of English language. Her study confirmed that indeed students in senior high schools have serious problems with tenses and surprisingly many teachers are not aware about it, so to get out of this problem, she suggests that students should have a firm knowledge of the rules. Darko (2009), examining the impact of the process approach to the teaching and writing of composition in senior high school, bitterly laments that in spite of the crucial nature of writing, most students have difficulty writing because they seem to believe that it is a difficult process. He supports his claim with the chief examiner's reports on Senior High School English language papers from 2001 to 2006, which confirmed misuse of tenses. He holds the view that the process approach to writing should be experimented on pilot basis as the starting point in the writing programme in some Senior High Schools.

Dakubu (1997) also conducted some research studies on language learning in Africa in general. He insists that there is a complex chemistry that takes place when several languages come into contact, as well as the competition that is associated with the struggle for status and prestige. In the Ghanaian context, this competition is between native languages and English Language. Dakubu (1997, p. 2) concludes by noting that "although one cannot deny that English has had a measure of influence on the indigenous languages, the latter have had a much greater influence on English learning". She concludes that this influence has produced an English Language that is distinctively Ghanaian in flavour. The present study is dealing with error analysis on tense in essay writing made by students of Diabene Secondary Technical School. The revelations of the various studies have confirmed that indeed the standard of English of the senior high school students has fallen considerably and therefore proper investigation and recommendations be given so that eventually standards will improve once more.

2.6 Error Analysis

In learning and using a foreign language, one of the most inhibiting factors is the fear of making mistakes or errors. The making of errors is a sign that students have not yet mastered the rules of the language being learnt. To solve this problem, error analysis is one of the approaches widely adopted by linguists. Error analysis examines errors made by second language (L2) learners. Cook (1993, p. 22) defines error analysis as "a methodology for dealing with data, rather than a theory of acquisition". Errors here are addressed to sentences that are grammatically incorrect. Van Patten and Benati (2015, p. 4) also explain that error analysis is "a kind of research which focuses on identifying, describing and explaining errors of L2 learners". Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 184) on the other hand also define error analysis as "the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners". Richards and Schmidt (2002) in agreement, point out that error analysis may be carried out in order to identify

strategies which learners use in language learning; try to identify the causes of learners' errors; obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

James (2001, p. 62) in his view opines that error analysis compares "learner English" with English itself and judges how learners are "ignorant" about the grammatical and semantic rules of the target language. Hasyim (2002, p. 43) also observes that error analysis may be carried out in order to; find out how well someone knows a language, find out how a person learns a language, and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. Crystal (1999, p. 108) also proposes that error analysis is "a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language".

According to Sanal (2007, p. 597), error analysis is "a study to identify, to describe and systematically to explain the learners' errors by using any of the principles and techniques provided by linguistics". It can be said that error analysis as a process is based on analysis of students' errors. Nunan (2005, p.31) also explains that error analysis involves "studying samples of students' written language to identify grammatical errors they make". This analysis is to be the basis for providing feedback to the students, or tabulating the errors. People who learn a foreign language will encounter a lot of problems with its structure, vocabulary, sound system and even culture. In any language teaching or learning situation especially in teaching English, problems or errors are unavoidably present. Learners find difficulties in learning the target language since the rules of the target language are different from those of the mother tongue. It is important to discuss error analysis for teaching English as second language.

2.7 Significance of Error Analysis

The study of errors is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications

as to the learning process. Kwok (1998, p.12) asserts that "language errors provide important information about the progress, or language system of the learner". Error analysis is not only beneficial to teachers, syllabus designers, curriculum planners and textbook writers by showing them a student's progress, but it is also significant to researchers and to the learners. It shows researchers what strategies learners use to learn a second language and also indicates the type of errors learners make and why. Error analysis is conducted in order to use what is learnt and apply it to improve language competence.

English language teachers should know error analysis because this analysis becomes the key to understanding the process of foreign language acquisition. They should know how the target language is learned or acquired, what strategy or procedure the learners employ in order to master the target language. The study of error analysis shows the teachers some problems confronting the students. It presents further information to the teacher about the process of acquiring a foreign language made by the students. In conclusion, error analysis helps linguists realise that although errors sometimes obstruct communication, they often facilitate second language learning and play a significant role in training teachers and helping them identify and classify learners' errors, as well as helping to construct correction techniques.

2.8 Challenges of Error Analysis

Error analysis has its setbacks in the learning of second language acquisition. Most of the English teachers are non-native speakers. They speak it as a second language because it is not their first language. Therefore, there is the likelihood of teachers of English as second language using some wrong aspects of the English language. In error analysis, the acknowledgement of error depends remarkably upon the analyst, making a correct interpretation of the context. With error analysis, it can be difficult to decide what an error is and what is not. This happens in most cases when it is task dependent. An error in one situation may not be an error in another. For instance, vocabulary tests are generally geared to a

particular set of items. Using another word with the same meaning might get the student marks for ingenuity, but will be a wrong answer.

According to Xie and Jiang (2007, p.13), there is a danger in too much attention to learners' errors. For example, in the classroom the teacher tends to become so pre-occupied with noticing errors that the correct utterance in the second language will go unnoticed. Coello & Coello (2009) claim that errors can be identified through what the learner produces in the course of using the language, (speaking and writing) and not through reception (listening and reading), of something which has been produced by another person. Xie and Jiang (2007) are of the view that the absence of error does not necessarily reflect native-like competence since learners may be avoiding the very structure that possesses difficulty for them. They point out that error analysis can keep us too closely focused on specific languages rather than viewing universal aspects of language. However, these setbacks are outweighed by the merits. Error analysis is an important aspect of language learning for English as second language learners and is the approach adopted in the present study.

2.9   Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some issues of writing and its importance to students. It has also discussed errors, a clear distinction between an error and a mistake, that is, the two important words that form the basis of this study. It has also given an insight into some categories, and sources/causes of errors. It has also laid emphasis of the discussion to the tense and its types in students writing. Again, surveying the related literature proved that there are many answers as to why learners of English commit tense errors in their essay writing. In addition, there is also the review of some research works that have been conducted in the area of error analysis in recent times. Finally, the chapter also examined some significance of errors in language learning and enumerated some setbacks in error analysis. The next chapter describes the procedure of data collection as well as the instruments used in gathering the data.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the study. It outlines the research design, data sources, population and sampling, sampling technique and instruments for data collection. The methodology also involves the description of participants, collection of data and analysis of data that formed the basis for the study on the tense errors in the written essays of students in Diabene Secondary Technical School. It also describes the nature of the data and what methods and procedures were used to collect and process them to arrive at the conclusion of this study. This study is descriptive in nature and the analysis employs mainly qualitative measures.

3.1 Research Design

Parahoo (1997, p. 142) describes a research design as a plan that describes how, and where data are to be collected and analysed. Owu-Ewie (2012) also observes that a research design provides the most valid and accurate answers possible to the research question(s) stated. The research design adopted in the present study is a descriptive qualitative approach which involves descriptive methods. This descriptive qualitative research answers the problems of tense errors commonly found in students' writing. This research can be named as a descriptive research because the data are described using words that tell the condition. According to Ary (2010, p. 524), qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the human participants in natural settings. The design for the study describes the procedure employed in carrying out the research and the conditions under which the data was obtained.

As the main purpose of this study seeks to identify tense errors in students essay writing, this part discusses the plan and the set-up of the work. It also highlights the techniques of data collection that were employed. Research designs provide the most valid and accurate answers possible to the research question stated. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) also state that qualitative research provides a deeper analysis and allows for a richer and an indepth understanding of how people make meaning of their situation or interpret phenomena. The researcher employed different sources of data to identify tense errors in students essay writing and that necessitated the scope of data expansion to a greater proportion of the population of the school.

3.2 Sources of Data

Sugiyono (2009, p.308) states that there are primary and secondary data sources. Primary data is the direct data source that is given for the research. In this present study, there are two kinds of primary data source such as written essay and interview. The first one is the written essays that were taken by the researcher from SHS 2 and SHS 3 classes that consist of five programmes thus; General Arts, General Science, Business, Technical and the Home Economics students in the 2017/ 2018 academic year. The total number of students was 115. The second one is the result of interview that was used by the researcher in order to identify the factors that influence the grammatical errors on the use of tenses made by students in their writing.

The researcher used students and teachers of the English language department of Diabene Secondary Technical School for the study. The researcher used only a section of Form Two and Three students for the study. He did not use all the students because of time and financial constraints available in carrying out the study. The researcher excluded the First year students because they had not done a lot of academic work in the school. They had spent only just a term.

3.3 Population and sample

Population is a set (or collection) of all elements possessing one or more attributes of interest (Arikunto, 1996, p. 125). He further states that the sample is a part of population that will be examined. Creswell (2013) also maintains that population refers to the group of interest to the researcher, the group to which he/she would like the results of the study to be generalizable. A good sample is the one that becomes the representative of the population. Mouton (1996) defines a sample as elements selected with the intention of finding out something about the total population from which they are taken.

The sample included in this study consists of 60 female and male 55 students of Diabene Secondary Technical School. The female dominance in this research is as a result of the fact that they form the majority of the student population in the school in respect of the 2010 National Population and Housing Census. Diabene Secondary Technical School is chosen for the study because that is where the researcher teaches and having taught English Language at the secondary school for the past ten years, the choice of students is informed by the personal experience of the researcher as he marks students' scripts, assignments and exercises. The researcher is convinced that the problem of tense error in students essay is common in the school.

Table 3.3.1 and table 3.3.2 illustrate the distribution of gender of students and the distribution of courses of students respectively.

Table 3.3.1 Distribution of gender of students.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	60	52
Male	55	48
Total	115	100

Table 3.3.2.Distribution of courses of students.

COURSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
General Arts (Form 3)	28	24.30
Technical (Form 3)	26	22.60
General Science (Form 2)	13	11.30
Business (Form 2)	11	9.60
Home Economics (Form 2)	37	32.20
Total	115	100

3.4 Sample Technique

The process of taking the sample from the population is crucial in a research. Ideally a sample is taken randomly to avoid having a biased sample in the sense that no member of the population has more chances than any other member. Polit, Beck and Hungler (2001) again confirm that in sampling, a portion that represents the whole population is selected. Time and resources are saved by selecting a sample to be studied rather than attempting to study the entire population. The researcher used purposive sampling for the study. Parahoo (1997, p. 232) explains a purposive sampling as a method of sampling where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide the necessary data. The researcher used a purposive sampling to select Form two and three students for the study.

3.5 Instruments for collecting data

According to Saleh (2001) the term instrument means equipment for collecting the data. Based on this statement, instrument plays a vital role in conducting a research that is for gathering the data accurately. An instrument is a tool designed to measure knowledge, attitude and skills. Parahoo (1997) argues that a research instrument is a systematically prepared form or document purposely designed through compilation of questions to elicit responses from respondents with the aim of collecting data. The researcher used written essays and interview to gather information for the study. These instruments are discussed below.

3.5.1   The written essays

The written essay is the major instrument of this study because the analysis of the students' written tense errors is the central objective of this study. The researcher did not conduct any special examination for the purpose of this study. The test was given to the students. The reason was to cover different categories of students with different academic background. The writing test was in the form of an open essay question where students were given guidance on how much to write (at least 450 words). The time limit set for the essay was 50 minutes, which was in line with the West African Senior High School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) guidelines. The purpose of the essay was to identify the types of tense errors students commit and group them. The researcher followed the West African Examination Council's marking scheme in the scoring. The breakdown of the marks is given as Content (10marks), Organisation (10 marks), Expression (20 marks) and Mechanical Accuracy (10 marks).

3.5.2   Interview

The second instrument the researcher employed was interview with the students and the four (4) teachers. Esterberg (Sugiyono 2009, p. 17) points out that "interview is a meeting of two persons to exchange information and idea through questions and responses, resulting in

communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic". In addition, Sugiyono (2009, p.318) mentions as follows: "interviewing provides the researcher a means to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants interpret a situation or phenomenon". An interview is a unique research tool where information is gathered during verbal conversation with individuals. It has a direct bearing on the research objectives as it provides access to knowledge on exactly what is inside a person. This helps the interviewer or the researcher to know the level of maturity of knowledge a person has attained without relying on another person's information.

Owu-Ewie (2012) stresses that there are three forms of interviews: structured (standardized), semi-structured (semi-standardized) and unstructured. A structured interview is the type of interview in which specific questions are asked and the order of the questions are predicted and written down by the researcher before the interview starts. A semi-structured interview, according to Patton (2002, p. 453), is the type where the researcher specifies issues and topics to be covered in an outline form and decides the sequence and wording in the course of the interview. An unstructured interview on the other hand has no predetermined questions before the interview but questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked as the interview evolves (Patton, 2002, p. 453).

Sugiyono (2009) also explains that unstructured interview is free interviewing where it does not have the complete and systematically arranged guidance for collecting the data. To support the credibility of the interview, taking notes are paramount. Thus, the interviewer needs to listen and to make a note accurately of what respondents talk about. An interview can also be done in focus group or individually; focus group interview, unlike individual interview, is where the researcher puts participants (between five and ten) and interview them due to time or financial challenges.

Considering all the various types of interview, the researcher made use of the semi-structured interview since that allows for a range of questions written or unwritten that related to the topic, but may not be in the interview guide to be asked. The interview for teachers was done individually and the results were recorded, transcribed and analysed for the purpose of the research work. All the four teachers were interviewed. All these teachers had taught at least five years at the secondary level. One of the teachers is a WAEC examiner and he is conversant with the type of tense errors students commit. Time constraints allowed the researcher to adopt focus group interview to elicit students' views. This is because students talk a lot when they are in the mist of colleagues.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis involves working to uncover patterns and trends in data sets, and data interpretation involves explaining those patterns and trends. Error analysis is used both as a theory and a method of analysing the data. It is a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the forms of language writing and speaking (Richards & Schmidt 2002, p. 184). Based on the guidelines of selecting a corpus of language by Ellis (1995), written essays were collected from 115 students as an end-of term-examination. Various studies on error analysis including Gass and Selinker (2001, p. 67) and Huang (2001) informed the processes used to analyse the data. The following four steps were followed: *Data collection, identification of tense errors, and the classification of tense errors*. Grammatical error category in the Taxonomy of Error Analysis designed by James (1998, p. 304), was used for this research to record all the occurrences of tense errors made by the students.The written essays used in this study were read, marked and analysed. Every tense error was recorded only once from each participant even if it reoccurred. The errors were then categorized into present tense and the past tense.

3.7   Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the procedure adopted for the study. It highlighted the sources of data, the population and sample size, the instrument of the data collection, the technique used in analysing and interpreting the data in order to better explain the phenomena. The chapter finally ended with a brief discussion of data analysis. The next chapter discusses the result obtained from the data collected to show the type and causes of tense errors in students' written essays.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected. It analyses the tense errors identified in the written essays of students. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents analysis of the tense errors students committed in their written essays. Such errors include present tense and past tense errors. From this, it was revealed that the highest number of the errors committed was the present tense and the lowest was the past tense. This is an indication that they have little knowledge of English language. Although incorrect sentences were identified, some students produced well-written sentences and this indicates that students had fair idea of grammar of the English language; their only difficulty being its application in writing. The second section discusses the causes of these tense errors based on the findings.

Based on the findings of the study, several factors were realised to be the causes of tense errors in learners' writings. The analysis showed that learners could not differentiate between present tense and past tense and this was due to L1 interference, transfer of phonological elements as well as transfer of morphological elements. In addition to these factors, it was also realised that these errors occurred due to overgeneralisation, ignorance of rule restrictions, and incomplete application of rules, false concept hypothesised and context of learning leading to distortion of the meaning of their utterances. The analysed data have been represented in simple percentages and bar chart. These are further explained with examples in their various sections.

4.1. Categorisation of tense errors

After analysing the data, the researcher identified different types of tense errors in students written essays. These are present tense and past tense. As many as 162 errors were found in the present tense whereas 106 errors were respectively found in the past tense. An overview of the errors found in the two different tenses is presented in the table below. The table illustrates how many errors were found both in numbers as well as in percentages.

Table 4.1. An overview of the errors that occurred in the present and past tenses.

Type of error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Present tense	162	60.4
Past tense	106	39.6
Total	268	100

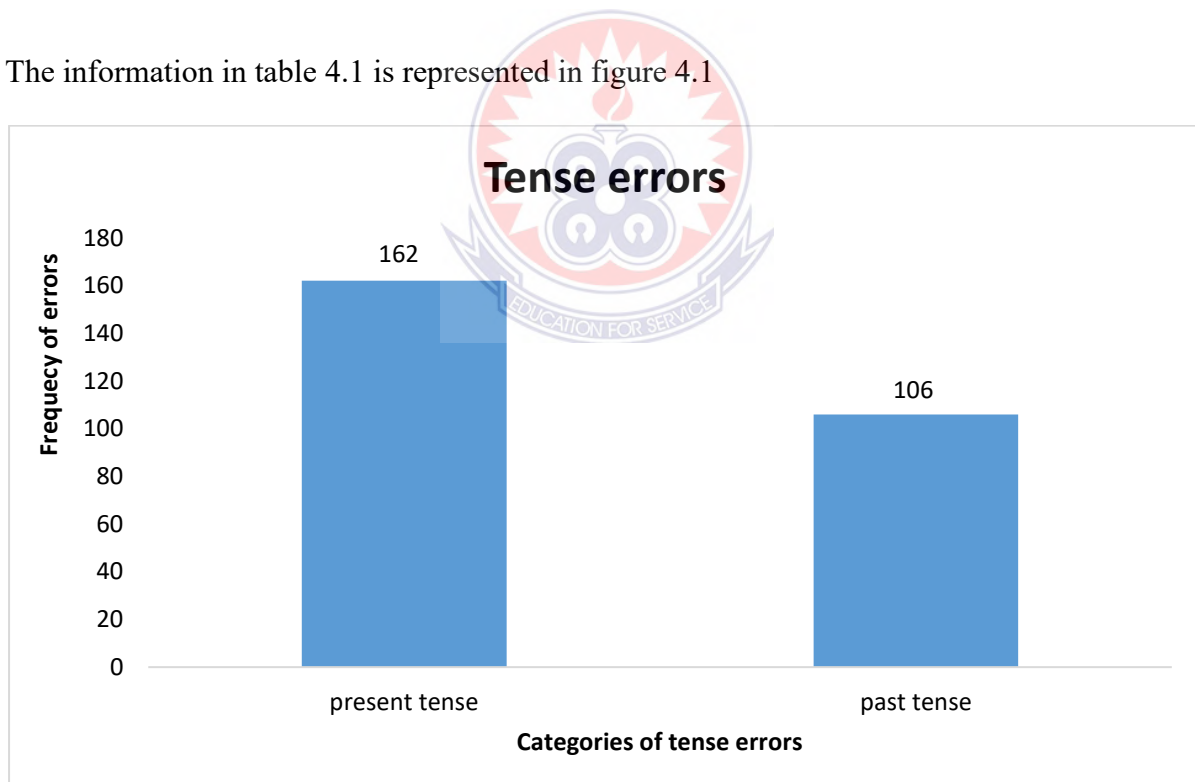The information in table 4.1 is represented in figure 4.1

Figure 4.1. Frequency of tense errors.

The types of errors that were found in the present tense and past tense are presented and illustrated with examples in each section respectively.

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4.2. The present tense errors

The present tense errors found in the scripts are more than half of the total errors, that is, 162 out of 268 (60.4 %) occurred with expressions of the present tense. The errors belong to six sub-categories namely, the present progressive (27.2 %) instead of simple present, simple past (44.4 %) instead of simple present, present perfect (8.0 %) instead of simple present, incorrect use of auxiliary(9.3 %), over use of verb (5 %), and omission of verb (6.1 %). In addition, the test topics were constructed in a way which implicitly forced the students to use the present tense more than the other one. This may be an explanation of why most errors occurred in the present tense.

The simple present is divided into three sub-categories: state present, habitual present and instantaneous present. All the three sub-categories refer to the present tense but differ in meaning. The state present is used when one wants to refer to an action in the present without specific time reference that is general statements which are timeless, or in other words, everlasting truths (Quirk et al., 1985 p. 179) and (Soemarto, 1994 p. 27). For example;
*(a) Bella **is** beautiful and Accra **is** the capital of Ghana.*
The habitual present is used for actions which are recurring (Soemarto, 1994 p. 27). For example; *(b) Philo **goes** to Takoradi every weekend.*

Finally, the instantaneous present is used if the verb refers to an action which starts and finishes at the same instant of the speech (Quirk et al., 1985 p.180). For example;
*(c) Leticia **gives** the man a smile.*
From sentences (a), (b) and (c) above it is seen that they all talk about the present but differ in meaning. As many as 162 errors, that is, 60.4 % of the errors that occurred in the present tense were made in expressions of the simple present are distributed as follows: the substitution of the present progressive in place of simple present occurred 44 instances, the simple past in place of simple present was used 72 times in contrast to the present perfect in place of simple

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present which was used 13 times. Incorrect use of an auxiliary and the overuse of verbs were found in 15 and 8 instances respectively. Finally, omission of verbs occurred 10 times. Table 4.2.1 illustrates the distribution of errors that occurred in the simple present.

Table 4.2 Summary of errors in the simple present.

Type of error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Present progressive in place of simple present	44	27.2
Simple past in place of simple present	72	44.4
Present perfect in place of simple present	13	8.0
Incorrect use of an auxiliary	15	9.3
Overuse of verb	8	5.0
Omission of verb	10	6.1
Total	162	100

Six different substitutions were found for expressing the simple present; the present progressive in place of simple present, the simple past in place of simple present, the present perfect in place of simple present, incorrect use of auxiliaries, the overuse of verbs and the omission of verb. An example from each substitution is exemplified below.

1.   Some organisations **are helping** them but it isn't easy because they……

2.   **Iloved** the people and the city very much and I hope…………..

3.   Many have **got** diseases like cholera and typhoid.

4.   ……may be they **didn't** try to sleep because they are afraid to get…..

5.   But I **am got** to study so I can get into the library.

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6.   *It **seem** that blog limits the movement of students who do not have access and **burden** the teachers.*

The sentences suggest that learners tend to over-generalise the rules for stylistic features when acquiring new discourse structures. In example (1), the students do not understand the right form of the present tense, so instead of using the simple present form, they used the present progressive form *"helping"* and the verb *to be "are"*. Again, the students ignored the fact that the verb *to be 'are* 'was not supposed to precede the progressive **helping** since the sentence is in the simple present. It is seen that the sentence was grammatically incorrect.

The errors in the sentence indicate that there is an enormous uncertainty among the students; whether the simple present or the present progressive should be used. This also affirms earlier study by Kohlmyr (2003) where she claims that "the use of the progressive for the simple present accounts for an overwhelming majority of these cases". The correct sentence is (1) "*Some organisations help them but it isn't easy because they……*"

The mix-up between the simple present and the present progressive is predicted to occur in writings. The only way of helping the students to master the use of the present progressive is through teaching this grammatical area explicitly by, for example, highlighting the different meanings between the use of the simple present and the progressive present in examples like:

(a) *I study English.*

(b) I am studying English.

This will enable the students to have an in –depth knowledge of grammar in English language

Sentences (2), (3) and (4) show that the students put the wrong form of the present tense in the sentences they made. Although these sentences are understood by readers, they are grammatically incorrect. This is considered to be a grammatical error in the usage of the present tense because it causes confusion to the reader. In these examples, the students are confused between the use of simple present, simple past and present perfect. Students' ignorance on the

application of rules on present tense forms are the primary causes of these errors. Many of these errors were committed in cases where irregular verbs were used. This means that the result can be interpreted in two ways: either the students do not have enough knowledge about how these verbs are inflected, or the students are so concentrated on what they are writing that they tend to forget the form of the verb. These types of errors are totally unnecessary and could be avoided if the teachers teach grammar explicitly and if the students have more time to practise it. The correct sentences are:

(2) *I love the people and the city very much and I hope….*

(3) *Many have diseases like cholera and typhoid*

(4) *….may be they don't try to sleep because they are afraid to get…..*

In sentence (5), the students put the wrong auxiliaries to make the sentence grammatically incorrect. The errors were found in the verbs *am* and *got*. The students used the verb *am got* after the subject of sentence instead of "***have***"

In sentence (6), the omission occurred two times. The errors were found in the verbs *seem* and *burden*. A form of a verb is determined by a subject of a sentence. As seen in the sentence, the subject of the sentence is *It.* It is a pronoun of the third person. According to English grammar rules, pronouns of the third person in simple present tense, the verb is followed by –s or –es. In line with this, sentence (6), the verb of the sentence should be followed by –s or –es but the students omitted the morpheme –s in the verbs *seem* and *burden*. Since verbs have a central role both in English and the Ghanaian languages, the students should not have made errors like this. The students are taught early in their school years that a sentence consists of a subject and a verb.

The results support the claim of Sukasame, Kantho, and Narrot (2013) that learners of English have so much difficulty on tense selection. According to them, though students can use all the tenses comfortably, in some situations they are not confident enough to select the correct

tense for consistency. Such claim is also true with the study by Lim (1990) revealing that English language learners know the rules of tense but they just jumble them when they are supposed to apply them. She adds that learners think in their L1 and then translate it into English. At the time of translating into English, they feel confused in which tense form they can use especially in present and past tense. Again, the results above agree with earlier studies by Husnu (2004), and Pomeyie (2007) that present tense errors are the most frequently committed tense error among second language learners of English.

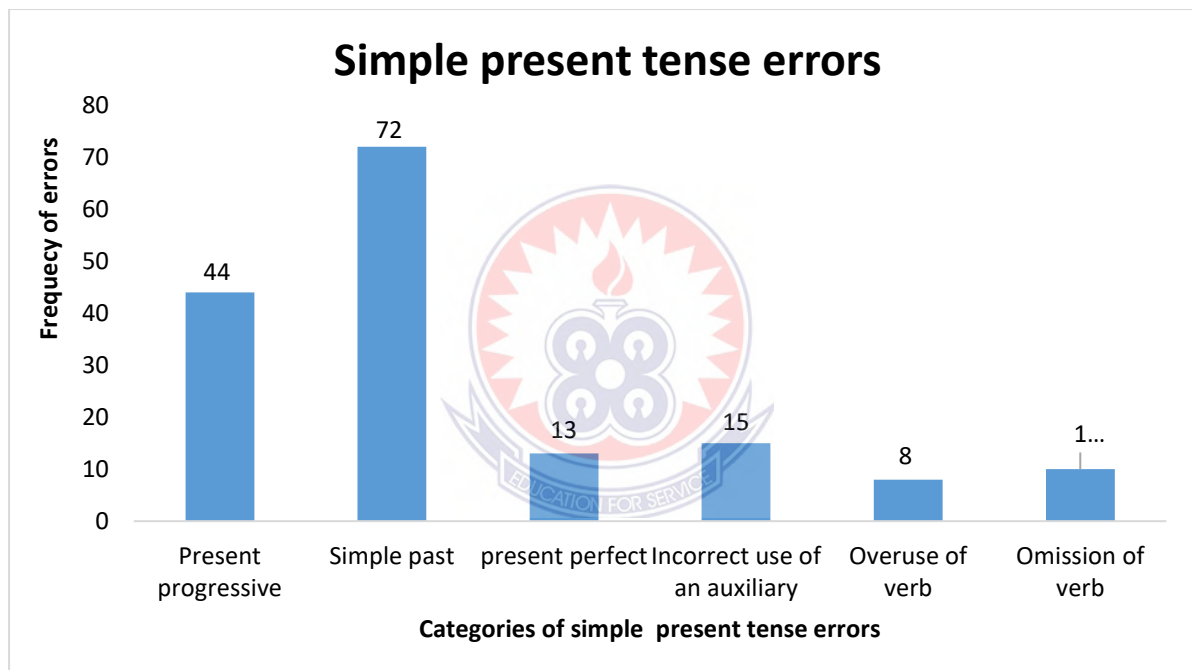Figure 4.2. Frequency of simple present tense errors

The results show that the simple present was the most difficult tense to use in a correct way, hence as many as six (6) types of substitutions were found. It is not surprising that the 162 errors were made in expressions of the present tense since students of Diabene Secondary Technical School have difficulties in mastering when to use the present tense.

4.3 The past tense errors

The errors that were found in the past tense are divided and presented in four sections; errors which belong to the simple present in place of simple past, errors made in the present perfect in place of simple past, errors found in the use of the past perfect in place of simple past, and finally errors which occurred with expressions of the past passive. The past passive is included in the investigation since this form is very important and useful in writing. A summary of the result is shown in table 4.3 below. A total of 106 errors occurred with expressions of the past tense. 64 errors were found with expressions of the simple present in place of simple past, whereas 34 and 8 errors were found with expressions of the present perfect in place of simple past, and the past perfect in place of simple past respectively. Incorrect use of the past passive occurred once. One thing to bear in mind is the fact that the test topics were constructed in a way which implicitly indicated that the past tense did not have to be used.

Table 4.3. A summary of errors in past tense.

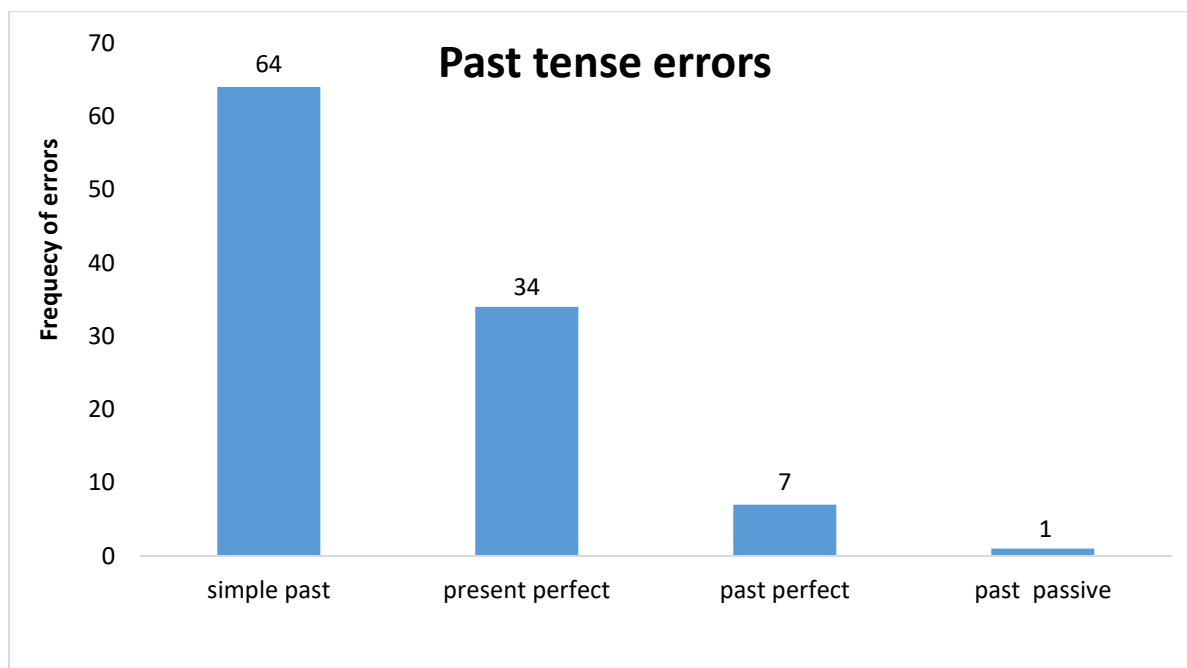| Type of error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
simple present instead of simple past	64	60
present perfect instead of simple past	34	32
past perfect instead of simple past	7	7
The past passive instead of simple past	1	1
Total	106	100

Figure 4.3 Frequency of past tense errors

The chart shows that majority of the errors found in the past tense is the simple past. Out of the 106 errors that were found in students' essay, 64 representing 60% is made with the expression of the simple present in place of simple past, 34 representing 32% is made with the expression of the present perfect in place of simple past, and few errors were found with the expression of the past perfect in place of simple past, and the past passive respectively. This is a clear indication that the students have difficulties in the usage of tenses.

4.3.1 The simple present instead of simple past

The simple past indicates that something happened at a specific moment in the past. In conformity with the simple present, the simple past contains three different meanings; the event past, the state past and the habitual past. Referring to a single and specific action in the past is the event state. When the verb's meaning is a statement, the state past is used and finally the habitual past concerns those verbs which refer to a repetition of an action (Isla met R., 2009, p.106) and (Schoenberg E.S., 2012, p. 201). The following examples illustrate the use of simple present instead of simple past errors.

*(i)…and I was in school when the rain **begin**… (began)*

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*(ii) We **are sleeping** in classrooms……………… (were)*

*(iii) Then I and my mother **was going** to the farm with the dog….(were)*

*(iv) But they **was stopped** to compete because they **was** tired on it… (were)*

*(v) And we **don't had** clean water and clinic and electricity…* (didn't have)

(vi) **Comparing** to that, our performance **isn't** that a big problem…… (Compared, wasn't)

(vii)*She me that I can't live without you……………. (told)*

Critically examining sentences (i) to (vi) is a clear manifestation that the students are confused on the type of tense to employ in their writing. They do not apply the rules in the usage of the tenses. They feel comfortable to use tenses irrespective of time reference. Instead of using the simple past they used the present progressive, past progressive and the past passive. This is a true reflection of the claim by Sukasame, Kantho, and Narrot (2013). According to them, though students can use all the tenses comfortably, in some situations they are not confident enough to select the correct tense for consistency.

On the other hand, the occurrence of errors like: (i) "*…and I was in school when the rain begin*" is surprising, since the equivalent in the Ghanaian Language is similar. Both English and the Ghanaian Languages use the simple past in cases like this. One explanation for why the simple past is substituted by the simple present is the fact that the students do not master the inflections of irregular verbs. Another explanation is that the students use the Ghanaian equivalent, a so-called transfer error. In sentence (vii), the students omitted the verb '*told'* in the sentence they made making it difficult for readers to understand. It is also surprising that omission of verb '*told*' occurs when one of the first grammatical areas a student is taught is the fact that a sentence consists of a subject and a verb. In my view there is no acceptable explanation for errors like this to occur in writings by senior high school students. Errors like this are likely to be slips but affect the communication between the writer and the receiver in a negative way.

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The results show that 64 errors occurred with expressions of the simple past. Instead of using the simple past, the simple present was used in 34 cases. The present progressive and the past progressive were used 3 and 8 times respectively. The past passive occurred six times, incorrect uses of the auxiliaries were found ten (10) times and finally the use of the –*ing* form of the verb and omission of verb occurred once and twice respectively. These figures are illustrated in table 4.3.1

Table 4.3.1 Summary of errors in the simple past tense

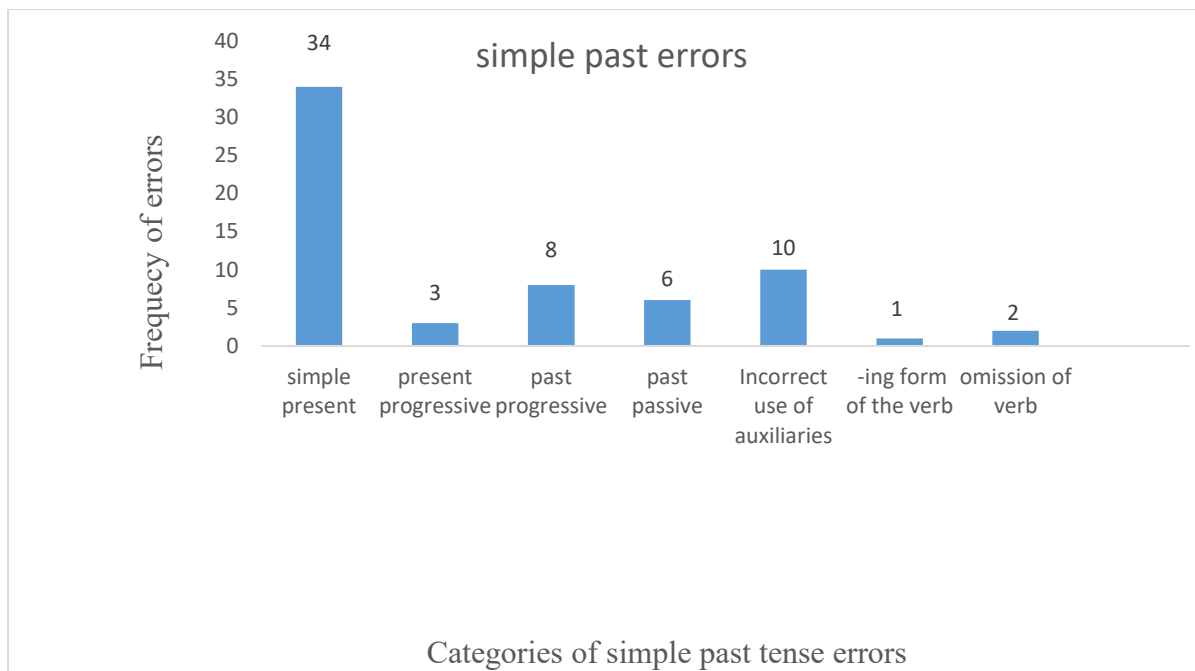| Type of error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Simple present instead of simple past	34	53
Present progressive instead of simple past	3	4
Past progressive instead of simple past	8	13
Past passive	6	9
Incorrect use of auxiliaries	10	16
-ing form of the verb	1	2
Omission of verb	2	3
Total	**64**	**100**

Figure 4.3.1 Frequency of simple past errors

Regarding the past tense, more than 50 % of the errors occurred with expressions of the use of simple present instead of simple past.

4.3.2 The use of present perfect

There is a slight difference between the use of the simple past and the present perfect. They both indicate the action that took place before the present moment, but the use of the former means that the action is over, it has come to an end, while the latter is used for actions which have continued up to or even continue after the present moment. Kast (2008) notes that present perfect has the same meaning like present tense. He gives an example of clause *I have got (I've got)* which has the same meaning as *I have*. This theory is also strengthened by Elsness (1997) who states that present perfect and present tense verbs can sometimes have close meaning. He also gives an example of a sentence *John has come already* which has close meaning with *John is here already*.

O'Dawyer (2006, p. 118) states that the present perfect tense 'expresses an activity or event completed in the past but with some relationship to the present'. He also explains that

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although the activity is started in the past, it still has some relationship to the present time. The verb formation of present perfect tense is *have / has + past participle (V3)*. The verb '*have*' will change into '*has*' if the subject is the third person, while if the subject is the first or second person, the verb formation uses '*have*'. Five (4) different substitutions were found for expressing the present perfect; the simple present, the simple past, the past perfect and combination errors with the auxiliary '*have*'. Examples of the substitutions are shown below:

(a) *I **learn, feel** a lot of people and I **have** a lot of friends in the team….. (**learned, felt, had**)*

*(b) But when I met him everything **is** perfect…. **(was)***

(c) We had always have animals so long I have lived anyway

 *(d) And when the student **have** finished their work….. (has)*

In sentence (a) the errors were found in the verbs *learn, feel* and *have*. The students forgot to add past marker –ed/ -t to the verbs *learn* and *feel*. Also, the students ought to have used the past participle of *have (had*) after the subject *I* in the second clause. It shows that the students still find it difficult to pay attention to the existence of a particular rule applied in the English language that is the use of a past marker in the present perfect tense. This buttresses the claim of Carson (2001) and Kurtz et al., (1993) that learners are often unsure of what they want to express which would cause them to make errors in any language.

Sentences (b) and (c) also suggest that the students were inconsistent with a particular tense to use. Finally, sentence (d) shows that the subject and the auxiliary do not have the correct form of a good clause. In the present perfect tense, the pattern is Subject + have/ has + V3 (verb) or Subject +have /has +been. It uses auxiliary '*have*' if the subjects are pronouns the first and second person or plural things while it uses auxiliary '*has*' if the subjects of the clause are pronouns third person or singular things. The total number of errors that occurred with expressions of the present perfect was 34 and is distributed in the following way: instead of using the present perfect, the simple present and the simple past were used 4 times and 3 times

respectively. The past perfect occurred 5 times. The frequency of combination errors with the auxiliary 'have' was 22. A summary of the numbers is shown in table 4.3.2

Table 4.3.2. A summary of errors in the present perfect

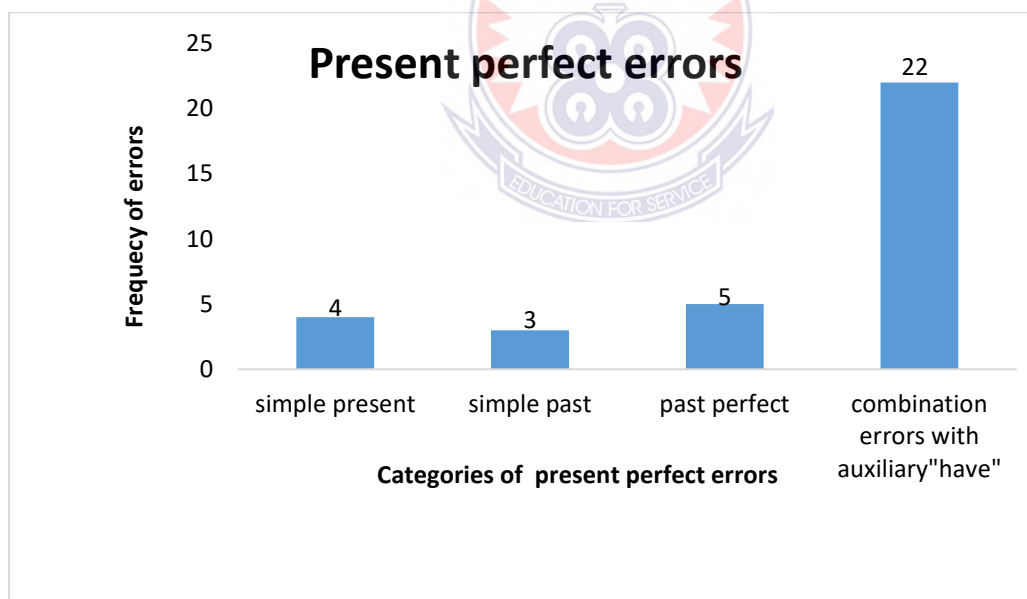| Type of error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Simple present in place of present perfect	4	12
Simple past in place of present perfect	3	9
Past perfect in place of present perfect	5	15
Combination errors with auxiliary 'have'	22	64
Total	**34**	**100**

Figure 4.3.2 Frequency of present perfect errors

The chart shows that combination errors with the auxiliary 'have' were most frequent ones.

More than 60% of the errors were so called combination errors.

4.3.3 The past perfect

The past perfect is used when the action took place and ended in the past. The past perfect can be seen as past-in –the past. The result of the incorrect forms used with expressions of the past perfect is illustrated in table 4.3.3. Only 7 errors were found. The use of the present perfect instead of the past perfect was the most common error and occurred 3 times. Incorrect use of the construction had + past participle as well as combination errors with *had* occurred twice each. Some of the errors are:

1. *I **have** had a fight with my friend (had)*

2. *And when Bella **was runned** out of money, Louisa would say I… (ran)*

3. *After we had **shopping** we **play** football.* (shopped, played)

In sentence (1) the students ignored the restrictions on the use of auxiliary "*be*" in the past perfect tense. They picked the auxiliary without considering the correct use of it. The students could not realise that the verb '*have'* should be in the past since the sentence is constructed in the past perfect. Sentence (2) also indicates that students confuse regular verbs with irregular verbs. A student has substituted the past of *run "ran"* with *"runned"*.

This error may have resulted from negative transfer. This is what Norrish (1987) refers to as *interference*. The student has transferred the idea that regular verbs take -ed to form the past, committing that error. In sentence (3) the students were confused as to which form of the past tense to use. They mixed up the past perfect continuous with the present tense and that makes the sentence grammatically incorrect, even though it can be understood by readers semantically. It also indicates that the students do not have knowledge in how to construct the past perfect. They use the right tense, but fail in using the whole verb phrase correctly.

Table 4.3.3. A Summary of errors in the past perfect

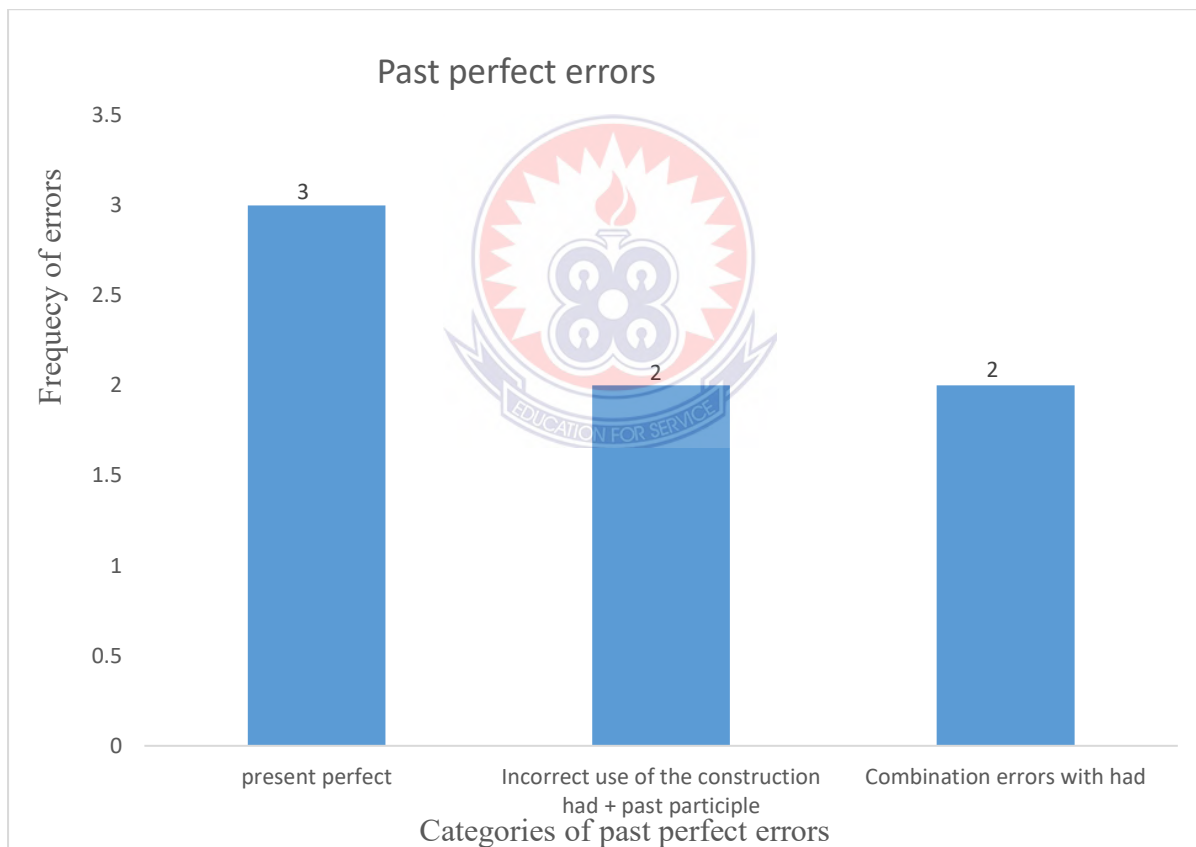| Type of error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Present perfect	3	42
Incorrect use of the construction had +past participle	2	29
Combination errors with had	2	29
Total	**7**	**100**

Figure 4.3.3. Frequency of past perfect errors

The results show that only 7 errors were made with expressions of the past perfect. This may depend on the fact that the past perfect was hardly used in the investigated material.

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4.3.4 The past passive

There are two auxiliaries used in constructions with the past passive namely 'be' and 'get', where the former is the most common used. The past passive is constructed by was/were or got + past participle as in: "*The mouse was chased by the cat*." There is only one case where the past passive is used incorrectly. The student has used the wrong form of the verb and looked like this: (a) *But when she been gone everybody been shocked*. The fact that the past passive only occurred incorrectly once may depend on the test topics which the students could choose to write about.

One thing that is alarming is the fact that still the students make the same type of errors that they made in the basic school. Teachers have to change their way of teaching grammar so that the students increase their knowledge in grammar and learn to express themselves in a more correct way. One way to help the students with their communicative skills is to teach grammar explicitly. In this way they will learn how to express themselves correctly both in speech and in writing. The results of the discussions above support the claim of Sukasame, Kantho, and Narrot (2013) that learners of English as a second language have difficulty on tense selection. According to them, though students can use all the tenses comfortably, in some situations they are not confident enough to select the correct tense for consistency. Such claim is also true to the study of Lim (1990) revealing that English language learners know the rules of tense but they just jumble them when they are supposed to apply them. She adds that learners think in their L1 and then translate it into English. At the time of translating into English, they feel confused in which tense form they can use especially in present and past tense. Limited knowledge of form of verbs and lack of the knowledge of the use of auxiliary verbs contribute to these kinds of errors.

4.4 Summary

In the 115 written essays of students analysed, a total of 268 errors were identified. The results of the present study indicate that the present tense category recorded the highest number of errors in students' written essays with a total of 162 errors representing 60.4%. The different types of present tense errors identified were simple present and the present progressive. Six (6) different substitutions were found for expressing the simple present tense. They were the present progressive, the simple past, the present perfect, incorrect use of auxiliaries, the overuse of verbs and omission of verb. This seems to suggest that incorrect use of the present tense was a major learning difficulty for all the students. Some present tense errors made appeared to be the result of carelessness in writing rather than lack of knowledge.

The past tense was the second highest error that was identified in students' written essays. Four different types of past tense errors were identified. They were errors in the simple past, errors in the present perfect, errors in the use of the past perfect and finally errors which occurred with the expressions of the past passive. Seven (7) different substitutions were also found for expressing the simple past. They were the simple present, the simple progressive, the past progressive, the past passive, auxiliaries, *-ing* form of the verb and omission of verb. This also suggests that the use of past tense was another major learning hindrance for students in Diabene Secondary Technical School. The use of the past tense shows that students still find it difficult in determining when and how to use the different forms of the past tense.

4.4.1 Causes of tense errors

After analysing the data collected from the scripts of students of Diabene Secondary Technical School, several causes of tense errors were realised. It was observed that students over-generalised the use of tenses as in when and how to apply them appropriately in their writing. That is, they jumble the rules relating to tenses in their writing. Such a claim is also true to the study of Lim (1990) revealing that English language learners know the rules of tense

but when they are supposed to apply the rules, they just jumble it. She added that learners think in their L1 then translate it into English. At the time of translating into English, they feel confused in which tense form they can use especially in present and past tense like whether the sentences should be in present or past form. Limited knowledge of form of verbs and lacking how to use auxiliary verbs make errors in tense.

Students' mother tongue interference (L1) was also seen as one of the causes of tense errors in their writing. Learners think in their L1 and then translate it into English (Erdogan, 2005). The students seemed not to have a clear understanding of when to use the two tenses, present tense and past tense, as illustrated in sentences (a), (b), (c) and (d). They seemed to concentrate more on content that they want to put across than on the appropriate language that they should use to express their message. Students who made this type of error do not understand or are not cautious about the crucial function of a verb in a sentence and how carefully a verb tense should be chosen to convey the precise meaning.

(a) In cities we were found many services.

(b) The class was very crowd.

(c) They doesn't need to work hard.

(d) The children was good.

This is supported by Carson (2001) who notes that learners may translate from L1, or they may try out what they assume is a legitimate structure of the target language, and they tend to over-generalise the rules for stylistic features when acquiring new discourse structures. This revelation is also buttressed by Norrish (1987) who observes that learning a language (a mother tongue or a foreign language) is a matter of habit formation. When someone tries to learn new habits the old ones will interfere with the new ones. This cause of error is called first language interference. When learning the English language, an individual already knows his mother tongue, and he attempts to transfer the features. The transfer may prove to be justified

when the structure of the two languages is similar (that is positive transfer). It may also prove unjustified when the structure of the two languages is different (negative transfer or interference).

English language learners are mostly separated from the target language context in terms of cultural, economic, linguistic and social aspects. Naturally, this distance creates confusion in the learners. As they are not familiar with the target language register, they employ a different strategy to communicate. This way, the learner may either employ a direct translation or adopt mother tongue structures in their original shapes. Direct influence of mother tongue may occur on two possible occasions: First, if the learner's familiarity with the target language is limited; and Second, when the learner refers to certain items and features which are peculiar to his culture, and do not have equivalents in the target language.

The learner's inadequate understanding of the forms of the target language also resulted in the commission of errors. Such errors have their origin in the target language itself. These errors, which are known as intralingual errors are essentially developmental in nature. These types of errors committed by the English as a second language (ESL) learners is also observed in the language produced by children learning English as their mother tongue. The learning process and the intralingual errors seem to be universal irrespective of their linguistic background. Generally, an active learner of English language analyses the language data to which he is exposed. From his analysis and observation of the data, the learner hypothesizes rules in framing sentences in the target language. Such hypothesis becomes the basis of his interlanguage: a language which he produces on the basis of his understanding of the target language. This language is the product of a linguistic system that is distinct from both the first and the target languages. James (1988, p. 3) describes the learner's version of the target language as 'a term suggesting the halfway position it holds between knowing and not knowing the target language'.

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Translation is one of the causes of tense errors in students writing. This happens because a student translates his first language sentence or idiomatic expression into the target language word by word. It has been noticed that translations occur higher in number when the teacher teaches by the translation method. Errors due to translation also occur during discussions because learners focus more on meaning rather than structure in a discussion. Their concentration is on over all meaning instead of structures and forms that they will be using to convey their message.

A response from the interview conducted revealed that teachers are one of the major cause of students' errors in their writing. This is because the way and manner a teacher teaches has a great influence on his/her students. According to Richards (2015), teachers' attempt to communicate in the target language without having completely acquired the grammatical form necessary to do so causes errors. He adds that when it happens like that the teacher automatically transfers errors to his subjects. The researcher also observed that some of the teachers especially mathematics, science and technical subjects teachers frequently use the Ghanaian Language during their lessons and when confronted they remark that students do not understand what they teach when they use English Language. This approach by the teachers affects the use of tense because it gives them more room to the use of the mother tongue than the English language. It therefore contributes immensely to the numerous tense errors found in students writing. James (1988, p. 191) also uses the term 'teacher-talk induced errors' to describe this type of error.

One of the many roles of a teacher is to provide models of the standard target language in class. There is a chance that teachers may not be good models of the target language with regard to the way they speak, write or generally teach the language. With this, the researcher observed that students of Diabene Secondary Technical School have cultivated the habit of

using the Fante in all deliberations on campus to the extent that when teachers ask questions in English students answer in Fante. This has adverse effect in their writing.

Another major cause of errors in students' written essays identified was the students' poor reading habits. The teachers interviewed explained that students have poor reading habits and some were of the view that they do not do extensive reading even at their leisure hours. A teacher lamented that the poor reading habit of students negatively affects their performance in writing and this was evidently clear in the scripts analysed. As a result, they believe that this limits students' stock of vocabulary. This was manifested in their analysed scripts when only few students were able to write the required length of words in the written essays.

Another teacher also said that students have difficulty with how to apply the appropriate tense, both in verbal and written communication. One of them saw this as laziness on the part of the students as well as low intellectual capability because they have less attention for their books. He indicated that students do not revise what they are taught. A student affirmed this assertion by saying that they do not take English Language lesson serious. He therefore attributed their difficulty in the application of tenses to their inability to read widely and attach importance to the study of English Language. He again suggested that students should do more reading and exercises to improve their performance in English Language.

In addition, it was observed that poor reading among the students can be attributed to the absence of a library in the school. Due to the lack of adequate number of classrooms the school authorities have converted the library to a classroom and this situation is making it difficult for students to access reading books. This affirms Mahama (2012) stance that many Senior High Schools either do not have school libraries or do not make use of the books they have in the libraries. His belief is that students have not acquired reading habits, hence, they are unable to improve their English through reading. In spite of this, students are provided with some books from the Regional Education Office. However, the researcher observed that

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students were not making good use of the few books that are supplied to them. The students admitted that they still make errors after their teachers have pointed them out to them because they do not attach importance or have less time for English language. Some of the students said that they do not read regularly and that contributes to their inability to properly use tense in their essays. They again admitted that most of them have difficulty in reading and that makes them lose interest in the English Language. This assertion probably affirms why most of them could not write the required 450 words length in their essays.

It was also observed that poverty could be identified as one of the causes of tense errors because some of the students come to the class without exercise books, pens and other relevant learning materials. Due to this handicap they become passive learners in class and do not participate in any class assignment or exercise.

Another student also said that their teacher does not have enough time for them because he is always complaining of class size. Such situations affect students negatively and therefore contribute to errors made by students. All teachers interviewed admitted the assertion made by the students that they have limited contact hours with them and that makes it difficult to give more exercises and due to the class size they cannot give individual essays because marking becomes difficult. This situation does not make the teachers to do effective work.

4.4.2 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the data which comprised the students written essays and interview. The study highlighted some common errors that students commit and the causes that account for these errors. To sum it up, the first research question addressed the major written errors of Diabene Secondary Technical School. Two (2) major types of errors were identified in students' written essays, which totalled 268 errors. The error categories were the present tense error and past tense error. The frequency of errors and how these errors occurred were also addressed. The frequency of occurrence of these errors were present tense (162) and past

tense (106). The second research question was also addressed by looking at the causes of the students' error. The causes were identified as poor teaching method and materials and competence of teachers. Laziness, and lack of motivation in the classroom were also identified as causes of errors. The next chapter discusses the summary of the study, its pedagogical implication and suggestions for future study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATION

5.0   Introduction

This chapter discusses the summary of the findings. The summary gives a brief account of all the tense error types identified in the study and some causes of these errors. The chapter also includes a brief discussion on the role of tense error in teaching and learning English as a second language, and pedagogical implications. The pedagogical implications also highlight some ways of minimizing tense errors in students' written essays. The chapter finally ends the discussion with suggestions for future research and conclusions.

5.1   Summary of findings

The objectives of the research were to find out the types of tense errors commonly committed by students in their writings, identify the sources and causes of these errors, and how to reduce these errors. Data for the research were gathered from Diabene Secondary Technical School in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis of the Western Region, Ghana. The data were gathered from students' written essays, and interview of some teachers and students. The first research question sought to find out the types of tense errors commonly committed by students in essay writing. In line with the Taxonomy of Error Analysis designed by James (1998, p. 304)*, grammatical* (tense) categories were used for this research to record all the errors made by the students. Based on the discussion of the findings and the examples given, it is concluded that the students in this study committed tense errors which were categorized into present tense and past tense.

The highest number of tense errors recorded was present tense (60.4%) and the least was the past tense errors (39.6%). Most of the students' errors of tense in essay writing can be attributed to poor reading habits and their inability to communicate in the English Language.

These situations imply that teachers need to emphasize and inculcate reading habits in students to overcome the challenges of tenses. The results of the study indicate that teachers need to adopt different strategies when responding to errors found in students' writing (Ferris, 2002). Also, learners' errors which are repetitive should be used as samples in class and then students should be asked to correct the errors.

The alarming thing about the results is that students do not appear to have enough knowledge in how to use the appropriate tense in writing. This phenomenon found in Pomeyie's (2007) study on tense. Her study confirms that indeed students in Senior High Schools have serious problems with tense and surprisingly, many teachers are not aware of it. This means that these problems have occurred for a long time. Something has to be done about this and one way of solving the problem is to teach grammar explicitly. This suggestion is affirmed by Hedge (2000, p. 171) who claims that there is no way that one can know a language without knowing its grammatical basis. The importance of teaching grammar explicitly has been forgotten by many English teachers. The teachers mainly concentrate on trying to teach the students to communicate, but communication requires knowledge of grammar. It is of great importance that the message is grammatically correct, otherwise both the messenger and the message run the risk of being misunderstood and not being taken seriously.

There must also be a balance between grammar and the other skills. A balance between the different skills would be the most ultimate way of teaching English as a second language. The students' needs must be the central point in the teaching and tendencies from the study indicate that the students need more grammar teaching. The teacher's role is essential in providing an environment in which students will learn about writing, see models of good writing, get lots of practice writing, and receive help during the writing process. This is supported by Hedge (1988) who argues that it is dangerous to focus a student's attention on

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only highly controlled writing exercises whose primary aim is mastering form, rather than the construction of meaning.

5.2   The role of tense errors in the teaching and learning English

The primary aim of this study was to investigate tense errors committed by students learning English so as to understand the strategies and techniques used in the process of second language learning. Error analysis is a very important area of applied linguistics as well as of second and foreign language learning. It is also a systematic method used to analyse learners' errors. Errors are not always bad, rather, they are crucial parts in the process of learning a language. They may provide insights into the complicated processes of language development and also serve as a systematic way for identifying, describing and explaining students' errors. Errors may also help to better understand the process of second and foreign language acquisition. This study tried to investigate the errors that students of Diabene Secondary Technical School consistently and persistently commit in their writings, though English is a compulsory subject at all levels in their schools.

In the present study, the written essays of students were analysed for the purpose of error analysis. Results of the analysis suggest that students lack grammatical accuracy in their writing and are not sure of the grammatical rules that may apply in their English writing. The study revealed that students' writings are highly influenced by poor reading habits and communication deficiencies. A study of error analysis helps teachers to identify the problematic areas of teaching language at different levels of instruction. Through errors, teachers are able to understand the nature of the learner's knowledge at a given stage in his/her learning and discover what he still has to learn.

In addition, Fallahi (1991, p. 25) notes that "error analysis is a clue for the teacher to pinpoint the learning problems which can rarely be predicted by contrastive analysis". In view of this, a course based on error analysis will enable the teacher to teach the point of error and

to emphasize more on these errors where the error frequency is higher. For instance, students in this study need more attention on the application of present tense since it is the highest type of error they committed. Errors provide feedback to the teacher; they inform teachers about the effectiveness of their teaching strategies. Errors show teachers what parts of the syllabus they have been using, what they have inadequately taught and need further attention. This enables teachers to do remedial teaching for students and pay attention to special needs.

5.3   Pedagogical implications

Language learning is a gradual process during which errors or mistakes are to be expected. Visibility of errors attest to the fact that learning is taking place. Error Analysis is a valuable aid to identify and explain difficulties faced by learners. Candling (2001, p. 69) considers English language learners' errors as potentially important for the understanding of the processes of language learning. Findings on error analyses can be used to determine what a learner still needs to be taught. They provide the necessary information about what is lacking in his or her competence.

The findings of the present study point out the significance of learners' tense errors as they provide evidence of how language is learned and what strategies the learners are employing in learning the different language. For instance, this study shows that present tense and past tense errors are the most common for the students in the study. It was realized that some students still have difficulties in sentence construction. Since grammar plays an important role in writing, teachers should pay attention to this problem. With these results, teachers should assist students to become more aware by establishing "a comprehensive taxonomy of the learners' errors" (Husada, 2007, p. 103) and their sources. Therefore, teachers should train and guide the learners to apply the right strategies to become better language users.

Findings from this study have provided feedback and they also tell the teachers something about the effectiveness of their teaching. Error Analysis serves as a reliable feedback

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to design remedial teaching methods and materials. Michaud, McCoy and Stark (2001) observe that teachers need to view students' errors positively and should not regard them as the learners' failure to grasp the rules and structures of English, but they should view the errors as a process of learning. Errors, if studied systematically, can provide significant insights into how a second language is actually learned. Through Error Analysis, educators are informed about devising appropriate materials and effective teaching techniques, and constructing tests suitable for different levels and needs of learners. If English language teachers/ instructors know about all these, there is the likelihood that the learning of English language will be enhanced in this country.

To help students overcome tense errors and improve their writing in English language, the classroom teacher should adopt specific teaching and learning strategies that would assist students. Teacher intervention in this instance is crucial because it can provide learners with specific information and strategies aimed at overcoming these writing problems. In order to minimise the students' tense errors in producing sentences, teachers need to give them more exercises in writing. It would be better if teachers also give some feedback and consultation, especially in grammar for the students when they are writing. By giving feedback and providing consultation for the students, it will make them notice whether they may commit some errors in their writing. After knowing the errors and having feedback from the teacher, they would correct their errors and improve on their writing. This process of writing may be one of the considerations to make students usual to produce a well formed sentences.

Teachers also need to be aware of the inconsistency of the English language. Carney (1994) maintains that phonological awareness is essential in that it makes learners aware of underlying phonological rules. Again, to reduce tense errors in students' writing, the students should develop extensive reading habits and devote more time for tense. For English language teachers, they should improve the way they teach. This, they can do by improving their

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techniques in teaching by preparing relevant materials to help reduce learners' tense errors. Teachers need to emphasize that it is only through practice that students make the errors and learn to engage in the process of negotiating meaning through different stages. Involving learners in their own writing assessment would be motivating for them and will increase learner involvement in learning. Teachers need to take their students through the process of writing. They need to help them practice more and constant composition writing to develop their confidence level.

Teaching writing needs devoted and selfless teachers. Teachers must commit sufficient time to reading and writing. In this case, teachers should train and guide learners to apply the right strategies to become better English language users. As much as possible, teachers should organise enough individual class exercises and assignments on essays. Thus, teachers should give students adequate writing practice. As Mooko (1996) notes, the problems encountered in the ways composition writing is taught in schools include the fact that students are not given enough writing practice. This is supported by Fuller and Snyder (1990) who examined writing in Botswana schools and concluded that less time is allocated to English writing essays in primary and secondary classrooms. They also note that although teachers consistently assigned written work, only a small proportion was devoted to writing short essays in class. In addition, Rowell (1991) concludes that students are not given adequate instruction on composition writing and her study revealed that instances where students were given the opportunity to write paragraphs and compositions were quite rare.

Again, for effective teaching of essay writing in schools, headmasters and other stakeholders should help create enabling environment particularly through the provision of teaching and learning materials and the creation of relatively small class sizes. As this study has also revealed, some of the writing errors are pedagogical in nature. The failure of many students to use standard rules in writing implies a failure of the school and the education system

at large. It is the role of the teacher as well as the school to develop and extend the skills of the students in academic writing. Likewise, it is the responsibility of curriculum developers to carry out regular evaluations of the English syllabus and teaching method to check whether they reflect the objectives of teaching. In line with this, it is recommended, as observed by Owu-Ewie (2006), that a National Language Advisory Board should be constituted to advise government on language planning and policy implementation.

Also, measures should be taken to improve writing instruction in schools such as the provision of better-equipped libraries, relevant textbooks and materials for teaching English language. It can also include writing workshops, refresher courses, and remedial teaching to students with severe cases of writing difficulties. An important aim of literacy is to develop individual abilities to communicate effectively in national and global contexts. For instance, Gyasi (1990) counts among these causes, scarcity of qualified teachers and textbooks together with absence of a reading culture. Moreover, teachers' attempt to teach a composition topic in a day should be discouraged in all levels of schools in Ghana. The effective teaching of a composition topic should take a longer time and allow for enough practice by learners.

It should be known to teachers that error analysis has been employed to draw a picture of the learners' learning strategies and never meant to eliminate or even reduce them. Rather, it is intended to help teachers adjust their teaching methods and understand their students' learning strategies. However, errors, regardless of the teaching methods employed in the classroom, exist and will stay as long as English language teaching is practiced. Therefore, teachers should not be so worried about them. Teachers should encourage students to develop the habit of extensive reading to improve both written and spoken communication. When teaching writing, we must look for ways to help students learn how to express themselves clearly and how to organize their ideas logically. We must show them how to make their writing

vivid and interesting. Writing a composition necessarily involves the dual task of deciding what to say and how to say it.

Moreover, in other to improve students writing, especially in grammar, students need to pay attention to their grammar when they are writing. They cannot only focus on the context of their writing because when they want to write something, grammar is very important. It values the writing to readers. Besides receiving feedback from the teacher, students also need to do self-correction to their writing. It is important for the students because realizing that the teacher may not correct every sentence students made. Encouraging self to be better and always want to learn more is also important. That is one of the keys to be a better English language learner.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

Considering the results of this study, a number of recommendations for future research are suggested. First, it is suggested that a more comprehensive study of the English language writings of students may be conducted by other researchers to extend the results of the study. This is to investigate the errors committed by students in other senior high schools across the country and compare these errors in the various schools. Again, the study focused on the types of errors made by students in the tenses but in the process of analyzing the data, the researcher found that errors also occurred in other types of grammatical errors. The researcher also found that most of the students arranged their sentences with a lot of syntactic errors. Considering this, further investigation of other types of errors in students' essays is strongly recommended. Thus, future researchers may enlarge the focus analysis by analyzing all the error types in students writing, not only focusing on the tense errors so that other types of errors can be revealed and both teachers and students can cooperate with each other to improve students skill in producing correct grammar, especially in writing.

Finally, students' tense errors are also influenced by poor reading habits and communication deficiencies. This affects their application of appropriate tenses in their verbal and written communication. The researcher therefore suggests that potential researchers should delve into the errors caused by poor reading habits in students writing and the way forward.

5.5 Conclusion

The primary aim of this research work was to evaluate tense errors in the written essays of senior high students and the scripts of Diabene Secondary Technical School students were examined for the purpose. The field notes made during interviews and examination of students' written essays, notes and students' exercise books were categorized for analysis in line with the research questions from which conclusions were drawn for discussion and recommendations. The study identified errors committed in the writing were limited to only tense and were categorised as present and past tenses. The study also revealed that the most frequently committed error was present tense errors followed by past tense errors. Based on the results, teachers are encouraged to lay more emphasis on reading, written exercises and enforce the speaking of English Language in school to minimise tense errors in their writing. This study adds to existing knowledge on students' errors. It is therefore hoped that more research may be undertaken to expand the current study to cover other areas of English language writing.

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