

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA



**THE FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH VERBAL GROUP IN L2
WRITING: THE CASE OF SHS FINAL YEAR STUDENTS IN LOWER
MANYA KROBO MUNICIPALITY**



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**A dissertation submitted to the school of graduate studies in
partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of
the degree of Master of Philosophy
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**DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS
FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES EDUCATION
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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, **Vera Selorm Zokli**, hereby declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works, which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:

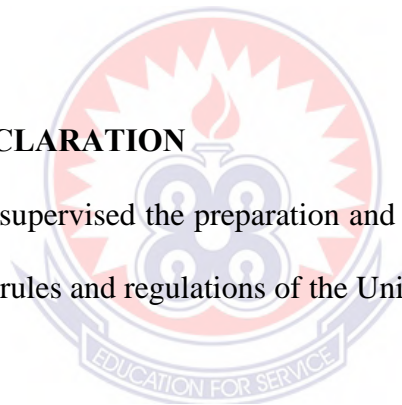
SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I supervised the preparation and presentation of this dissertation in accordance with the rules and regulations of the University of Education, Winneba.

Supervisor's Name: Prof. Sefa Owusu

Signature:

Date:



DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my lovely children, Kevin Edem Kodzo Tsigbe and Doreen Destiny Delase Afua Tsigbe.



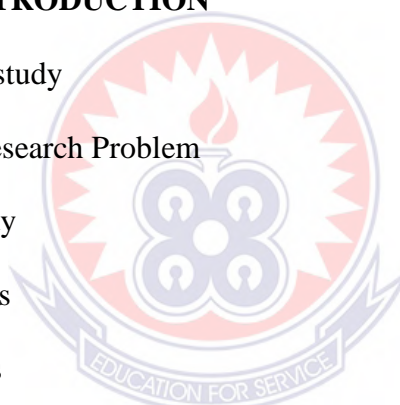
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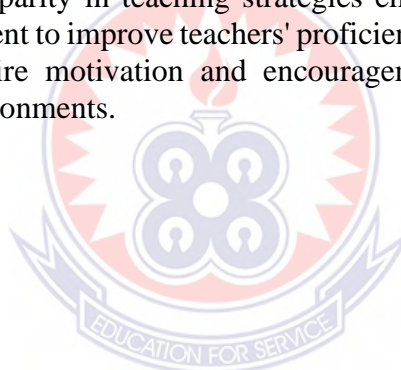
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ABSTRACT

Language evolves in response to the specific needs of the society in which it is used. The English verbal group, a core element of the language without which there is no English, focuses on the forms and functions of the verbal group in Senior High School students' L2 writing and investigates the challenges in its teaching and learning across four public Senior High Schools in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality. The research approach is qualitative, with a case study design. The study's sample consists of 75 General Arts Form Three students enrolled in Literature-in-English and 10 English teachers, totalling 85 participants. A convenience sampling technique is employed. The researcher used interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and students' essays to gather data. The analysis of the forms and functions of the verbal group in students' L2 writing revealed a significant gap in teaching and learning within English language classrooms. Teachers mainly focus on the forms of the verbal group rather than its functions, which hinders students' effective written communication. Although explicit instruction is provided on simple and extended verbal group structures, students continue to struggle to select and combine these forms appropriately and meaningfully in their writing. The students' essays contained numerous grammatical errors, including omissions of finite operators, subject-verb agreement issues, saliency problems, inflectional errors, incorrect conjugation of irregular verbs, and non-standard constructions. This disparity in teaching strategies emphasises the need for targeted professional development to improve teachers' proficiency in teaching the verbal group. Finally, students require motivation and encouragement that foster inclusive and effective learning environments.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

For decades, there have been concerns about how Senior High School students present their written texts with grammatical errors. These concerns focus on the Forms and Functions of the English verbal group in their L2 writing, which garnered significant attention for its learner-centred and interactive nature, aiming to develop learners' communicative competence (Dolphyne, 2001). Given this, the study delves into the forms and functions of the English verbal group in L2 writings in four Public Senior High Schools (SHS), on form three students in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality.

Downing & Locke. (2006) state that “the English verbal group is the grammatical unit by which we most typically express our perception of events” (p. 317). Events here are all processes that include events, actions, states and acts of consciousness. On the other hand, the English verbal group is the constituent that functions as a **finite** (temporal or modal operator) plus **predicator** or as a predicate alone if there is no finite element, and as the **process** in a transitive structure. Therefore, the verbal group is the expansion of a verb (Halliday & Mathessian, 2014). The English verbal group is an important element in L2 writing. Understanding its Forms and functions in meaningful sentence structure and how second language learners use these structures in writing plays a crucial role in communication. The forms of the verbal group include **lexical verbs, primary auxiliaries, modal auxiliaries, semi-modals, lexical auxiliaries and the infinitives.**

Downing & Locke. (2006) explained that the English verbal group structure could be **simple**, consisting of an element, thus the lexical verb (*ate, run*). The simple

form of the verbal group is usually a lexical element as a **finite** (present or past indicative) or **non-finite** form (imperative, infinitive, present or past participle) of a lexical verb. On the other hand, a one-word verbal group such as “*took*” in “*He took the pen*” has the **finite** and the **event** fused and are realized by one lexical item.

Finite forms: The girls **jump** the wall.

The girl **jumps** the wall.

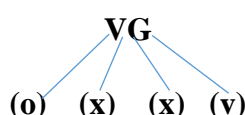
The girls **jumped** the wall.

Non-Finite forms: **Jump** the wall! They agreed **to jump** the wall at night.

Jumping the wall makes them stubborn.

Though initially **accepted**, the girls were dismissed.

The **extended** verbal group structure is formed, consisting of one or more auxiliaries and a main verb as the head (*is eating/ has been eating*). Up to four or five auxiliaries can occur if a lexical auxiliary is included in a fixed order in accordance with its grammatical meaning. In the verbal group, the first auxiliary verb is known as the **operator** (Downing & Locke, 2006). This is represented in the diagram below.



They **will have been eating** by now.

This operator, which is very important in English Language sentence structure, carries the four functions known as “NICE” (Negation, Inversion, Code/Substitution, and Emphasis). The operator realized by primary auxiliaries and modals helps to build up the symbolic representation of the event and carries tense, modality and aspectual meanings.

According to Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2014), it is worth noting that grammatical meaning and use of the verbal group are embedded in the functions that the forms express. The syntactic functions of the forms determine the type of meaning expressed, **grammatical or lexical**. The auxiliaries (**primary and modal**) carry grammatical meanings rather than lexical meanings (**tense, aspect, modality, person, and number**). On the other hand, the main verbal form expresses both lexical and grammatical meaning. Another unique quality of the primary auxiliaries (**be, have, do**) is that they function both as auxiliary and main verbs of the verbal group, except for (**doing and done**) which function only as a main verb (Downing & Lock 2006).

Examples: *Selorm **did** not do any work today (**auxiliary verb**).*

*Mary **did** everything (**main verb**).*

The lexical auxiliary **have to** can also function both as an auxiliary and as a main verb when it takes the **do-support**. **Have got +to infinitive** also functions only as an auxiliary.

According to Fema & Abubakar (2020), writing is the externalization and recording of thinking. Thus, L2 writing becomes so important since it is a means by which students communicate and learn to express themselves better. Because of this, one can describe L2 writing as being fundamental to education as well as a path very important to language learning. Additionally, L2 writing plays vital, cross-cultural, and traditional roles in a person's business, workplace, and governmental actions throughout the world's geography. Richards & Rogers (2014) also believe that L2 writing plays a key gate-keeping role in career improvement. The opinion shared by these scholars pinpoint clearly that for one to do well in any career there is a need to be proficient in English as a second language writing. L2 Writing generally reflects whether a person has gained mastery of the language or not.

Given these, what L2 writers need to learn is how to write and how to engage their audiences, by selecting the appropriate verbal group, which are essential elements of their authority and credibility. This is because students are expected to develop intellectually, to contribute positively to a better society and nation. Every language has its grammar, and for that matter, English is no exception.

According to Gieve Patel (1966), cited in Fema & Abubakar (2020), it is in the roots, not the branches, that the strength of a tree lies. Similarly, the strength of any L2 writing lies in its grammar, specifically the forms and functions of the verbal group. The verbal group serves as the base and foundation of all languages, including the English language.

Larsen Freeman (2014) states that the teaching of verbal groups should consider students' ability to understand both the forms and the functions, as well as the appropriate use of language structures. This approach will improve their progress in their L2 writing. According to the English Language syllabus for Senior High Schools, English is taught as a second language to enable students to communicate accurately and effectively, both orally and in writing, in various situations inside and outside school.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2001), language is a means of communication among people that involves a sensitive element, which is the verb, making the verbal group the most complex system of the English language due to its various choices and constructions. Fantazi & Hamza. (2018) explained that sometimes teachers overlook complex forms, which are rarely used in spoken situations or written forms. This is because they might cause confusion during explanations. Kress (2016), cited in Fantazi & Hamza (2018), mentions that:

'All the highly complex verb forms are built up out of very simple resources; the complexity, which involves only the system of tense, results from the fact that selection for tense may be made more than once in one verbal group' (2016, p.76).

In furtherance, it is uncommon to find students who, for whatever reason, find themselves in the classroom, who need to learn the verbal group of the English language, and who do so without the benefit of formal instruction. Some are natural acquirers who become proficient without the benefit of formal instruction. The outcome of this is that, humans are amazingly versatile learners and that some people have a natural aptitude for acquiring languages and will succeed no matter what the circumstances (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). In contrast, most students' entire exposure to the verbal group of English as a Second Language comes in the form of classroom instruction as lexicogrammar. This aspiration is the belief that teachers will be better prepared to meet their students' learning needs if they have a firm grounding in the verbal group of the English Language they are teaching.

Teachers can explicitly accomplish this by giving students rules and exercises with the appropriate grammatical terminology, but they can also teach grammar implicitly as well (Larsen-Freeman 1999). Because of this, Larsen-Freeman (2001), states that the verbal group is the vortex around which many controversies in Language teaching have swirled. It is also a subsystem of language, which has attracted much attention from linguists.

Within the Ghanaian Senior High School context, English functions as the primary medium for academic instruction and assessment, making proficiency in L2 writing a critical requirement for students' educational progression. However, classroom experience and existing studies suggest that many SHS students continue to experience difficulties in deploying the English verbal group accurately and

meaningfully in their written work, particularly with tense, aspect, and modality. These challenges are especially consequential at the final-year level, where students are expected to demonstrate control over complex grammatical resources in examinations and academic writing.

The Lower Manya Krobo Municipality is a relevant context for examining these issues, as it reflects typical public Senior High School settings where English is taught as a second language and where learners rely predominantly on classroom instruction for grammatical input. Despite the centrality of grammar and specifically the verbal group in the English Language syllabus, little empirical attention has been given to how verbal group forms and functions are taught and realised in students' authentic writing at this level. Focusing on four public Senior High Schools in this municipality allows for an in-depth, context-sensitive exploration of learners' verbal group choices within real instructional and assessment conditions.

Against this background, examining the **forms and functions of the English verbal group** in SHS students' L2 writing, alongside the **instructional practices** through which these forms are taught, becomes essential. By adopting a qualitative case study approach in four public Senior High Schools in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality, this study seeks to provide a detailed account of how final-year students select and use verbal group resources to construct meaning in writing, as well as the challenges teachers face in facilitating this process. In doing so, the study aims to contribute contextually grounded insights to grammar pedagogy and L2 writing instruction within the Ghanaian educational setting.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The English verbal group is a complex grammatical unit that carries a heavy syntactic and semantic load, making it one of the most difficult areas for learners of English as a second language (L2) to master. Research has consistently shown that learners experience persistent difficulties with tense, aspect, and modality, even when they appear to understand grammatical rules (Cowan, 2008). In practice, students often demonstrate knowledge of the verbal group in isolated exercises but fail to apply it accurately and meaningfully in communicative contexts, particularly in writing. In Ghana, Senior High School (SHS) students continue to struggle with the selection and sequencing of verbal group forms in their essays and compositions, resulting in errors.

Empirical studies show that grammar instruction in ESL contexts is often **teacher-centred and form-focused**, with grammatical elements taught in isolation rather than integrated into resources for meaning-making (Hinkel, 2004; Biber, Grey, & Poonpon, 2011). As a result, learners struggle to apply grammatical knowledge effectively in writing, particularly when form–function relationships are not made explicit (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2004). Studies focusing on the English verbal group further indicate that auxiliaries, tense, aspect, and modality are frequently taught as separate items, leading to persistent misuse in learner writing (Fantazi & Hamza, 2018; Fema & Abubakar, 2020).

In the Ghanaian context, research on learners' use of the English verbal group remains limited and fragmented. Existing studies tend to examine isolated grammatical forms using quantitative approaches, often at the tertiary level, with little attention to how choices of verbal group realise meaning in authentic SHS writing (Adejare, 2012; Schneider, 2014). Consequently, there is a lack of qualitative, context-sensitive studies

that holistically examine the **forms and functions** of the English verbal group in the L2 writing of Ghanaian SHS students.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a **qualitative case study design** involving four public Senior High Schools in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality. Drawing on Systemic Functional Grammar, the study analyses students' written texts and classroom practices to provide an in-depth account of how verbal group resources are selected and used for meaning-making in L2 writing.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The researcher's intent in the study is to examine the forms and functions, coupled with the challenges of teaching and learning the English verbal group, in four SHS students' L2 writing in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study of the English verbal group in L2 writing is to:

1. Examine the forms of the English verbal group in final year students' L2 writing in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality.
2. Assess the functions of the English verbal group in final year students' L2 writing in Lower Manya Krobo Municipality.
3. Investigate the challenges in teaching and learning the verbal group to final year students in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the forms of the English verbal group in final year students' L2 writing in Lower Manya Krobo Municipality?
2. What are the functions of the English verbal group in final year students' L2 writing in Lower Manya Krobo Municipality?
3. What are the challenges in teaching the English verbal group to students in Lower Manya Krobo Municipality?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The recent study is meant to benefit stakeholders, teachers, students, planners, and curriculum developers. Key among them is teachers of English who are directly involved in the teaching of the verbal group to students and with policymakers at Ghana Education Service, as well as to all teacher training institutions that train teachers in the country. First, it is significant that the current study positively affects teachers of English language (GATE) to pay critical attention to the teaching of the verbal group to enable them, if not all, to minimize the excessive grammatical errors in communications. It will also get them to understand their role in the complete teaching process of the verbal group in the target language. This role includes making considerations on the type of teaching approaches to use at what point in time, the structure and the elements to correct, and the need to help students engage meaningfully with the use of the verbal group, which is the core of the language. The results seek to provide room for improvement in the use of verbal group structures to produce better students who are better writers.

Secondly, students who pay attention to the correct usage of the verbal group from their teachers also deserve recognition. Oftentimes, students find it very difficult

to understand the structure of the verbal group due to its complexity. Their inability to engage with the choice of the appropriate structure results in the constant occurrence of the same errors. This in turn has a toll on their performances in examinations. Hence, the study has the potential to draw their attention to the need to have positive attitudes towards the study of the verbal group. There is a need to constantly organize in-service training for teachers already teaching to get them abreast with current trends and to improve their skills in teaching the English verbal group. Finally, teacher trainees should take the teaching of the verbal group seriously while in school.

1.7 Limitation

During this study, several limitations were encountered, which influenced the research process and the interpretation of findings.

Access to information presented a challenge that impacted the comprehensiveness of the study (Garcia, 2020). Initially, the study aimed at collecting data on a longitudinal basis, with the help of second-year students' first and second-semester examination scripts and essays written in their classwork books. This could have clearly shown the development students attained in their writing skills concerning the progress they made with the verbal group, one way or the other. However, this was impossible, as the researcher snapped data (a single term) of third-year students' mock scripts for the analysis. This influenced the researcher's ability to generalize the findings to the external population.

Furthermore, the research approach initially was to be a mixed-method, but statistical accessibility posed a challenge to the researcher, and therefore, limited the study to a qualitative approach.

Lastly, time constraints posed another significant limitation to the study (Garcia, 2020). The limited time available for data collection, analysis, and interpretation

restricted the extent to which several visits for observations to the four Senior High Schools in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality could be explored. The researcher also attempted to include the two Private SHS in the study for an in-depth result, but the time constraint was a challenge. Despite efforts by the researcher to maximize efficiency in data collection and analysis processes, the limited timeframe necessitated prioritization of the most relevant information to address the research objectives effectively. Other research studies could adopt control and experiment groups where the participants of the experiment group would be taken through verbal group teaching strategies before being given a series of items to write to ascertain learners' achievements and engagement levels, focusing on the Systemic Functional Grammar concept of teaching the verbal group.

1.8 Delimitation

The scope of the research could have centred only on students' essay scripts to make judgments of the forms and functions, in addition to the challenges encountered in teaching and learning the English verbal group. However, it has expanded to include observation, interviews, and focus group discussions of students and teachers in and outside the classroom on the strategies used in teaching and learning the verbal group to make for a more comprehensive study.

Additionally, for an in-depth and comprehensive finding, the researcher delimited the study to four Senior High Schools in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality in the General Arts classroom setting that offers literature-in-English, which excluded other subject areas from the scope of inquiry (Gonzalez, 2017). It ensured specification and clarity to investigate the forms and functions of the English verbal group used in the L2 writings.

The study was also delimited to examine the forms and functions of the English verbal group as the primary focus of investigation (Chen & Wang, 2021). By delimiting the research to the verbal group, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of this specific group of clause elements within English grammar without extending the inquiry to other groups used by students in their L2 writing.

Finally, adopting a case study approach delimited the research to make room for multiple institutions, namely Krobo Girls Presbyterian Senior High School, Akro Senior High Technical School, Manya Krobo Senior High School, and Akuse Senior High Technical (Yin, 2018). While acknowledging the inherent limitations of the time, this approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the forms and functions of the English Verbal Group within students' L2 writing. Despite the limitations, the detailed insights gained from the study offered valuable contributions to the broader discourse on language teaching and learning strategies.

1.9 Organization of the Study

Chapter One of this thesis sets the stage by providing a comprehensive background to the study, stating the rationale behind the investigation, and outlining the specific research objectives and questions guiding the inquiry. The purpose of this research is to delve into the knowledge base on the forms of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing, the functions of the verbal group in students' L2 writing, and to identify the challenges encountered in the teaching and learning of the English verbal group.

Furthermore, this introductory chapter states the significance of the study, underlining its potential contributions to language education and pedagogy. Shedding light on the forms and functions of the English verbal group and its importance in L2 writing, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the efficacy and feasibility

of the English verbal group in enhancing effective L2 writing outcomes within the SHS setting.

Moreover, this chapter delineates the limitations and delimitations inherent in the study, acknowledging the constraints that may affect the generalizability and scope of the findings. By transparently addressing these limitations, this research endeavours to ensure the integrity and reliability of its conclusions.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis are carefully organized to facilitate a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the research topic. Chapter 2 presents a thorough discussion of the empirical studies, synthesizing the theoretical issues related to the forms and functions of the English verbal group, which unearths the challenges and errors during L2 writing. Additionally, it presents a critical analysis of the current study's Systemic Functional Grammar framework, establishing a theoretical basis for the subsequent empirical investigation.

Chapter 3 explained the methodological process, focusing on the qualitative research design, the nature of the research site and population, sampling techniques, and the instruments and procedures involved in the data collection. Through content analysis, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, this research endeavours to investigate the forms and functions of English verbal group in SHS students' L2 writing.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the findings of this thesis, where the collected data are critically analyzed, and discussed in light of the research objectives. Through thematic analysis and interpretation, this chapter seeks to elucidate the complexities and nuances inherent in the forms and functions of the English verbal group, thereby unveiling the challenges in its teaching and learning.

Chapter 5, which is the final part of the study, presents the summary. This section also spells out pedagogical implications as well as proposes some recommendations based on the findings.

In essence, this thesis looks at the holistic exploration of the forms and functions of the English verbal group in SHS students' L2 writing, focusing on bridging the gap between the rules and reasons for the choice of verbal group while offering pragmatic insights to inform pedagogical decision-making and enhance effective and meaningful communication outcomes.

1.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the main concern is to provide the context for the study. It begins by discussing the English verbal group, its forms, and functions in students' L2 writing. In furtherance, the chapter discussed the specific problem addressed by the study, outlining the research's purpose, objectives, and the questions guiding the investigation. On the other hand, the chapter addresses the limitations and delimitations inherent in the study, acknowledging the boundaries and constraints that may affect the research outcomes. Finally, it presents an overview of how the subsequent chapters are organized, offering a roadmap for the reader to navigate the study's structure and content. Overall, this chapter serves as a foundational framework, setting the stage for the in-depth exploration and comprehensive analysis in subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The chapter extensively explores the historical perspectives of earlier researchers on the English verbal group. It encompasses a thorough literature review and studies on the concepts of the English verbal group. The discussion extends to the forms of English verbal group in students' L2 writing and sheds light on the functions of English verbal group in students' L2 writing. Furthermore, the chapter delves into the challenges faced in teaching and learning English verbal group.

The focal point of the chapter is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced and how students select and combine the appropriate forms of English verbal group in context. The synthesised knowledge from earlier research and existing literature forms a robust foundation for the subsequent investigation into students' challenges in mastering the forms and functions of the English verbal group in L2 writing.

The chapter finally looks at the theoretical framework adopted by the researcher in carrying out the study. This framework serves as a guiding structure for the comprehensive examination of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing, combining insights from prior research with a unique perspective to address the specific objectives of the current study.

2.1 The concept of the English verbal group

Several researchers have pointed out that the verbal group, an obligatory element of the clause structure, carries high syntactic and semantic loads. As such, it is

an area of maximum divergence and one of the most difficult aspects to master particularly by learners of English as a Second Language.

The concept of the English verbal group is multifaceted, encompassing various perspectives from notable linguistic scholars. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), the verbal group constitutes the element that serves as Finite plus Predicator or exclusively as Predicator when there is an absence of a Finite element in the mood structure of the clause. Simultaneously, the verbal group operates as a Process within the transitivity structure of the clause, particularly in a representation clause.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002), as cited by Downing & Lock (2006), further emphasise the significance of the Verbal Group as the grammatical unit primarily expressing our perception of events. The term 'event' encompasses processes ranging from events and activities to states and acts of consciousness, all analyzed within the semantics of the clause. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) contributed to the understanding of verbs by defining them, not only grammatically but also semantically, stating that a verb denotes an action or state of being.

The English verbal group, a syntactic system, is central to the structure of sentences, with verbs playing a crucial role in predetermining this structure (Teubert, 2007). According to Herbst (2014), the number of complements it takes, making it the central element in the sentence hierarchy, determines it as a verb. Matthews (2007) emphasizes that the verbal group is independent of dependency or governorship, highlighting its significance in describing lexical units and constructions.

The English verbal group, known as verb valence, emerges as a critical area in the description of English and assumes a major role in foreign language teaching, whereas, it is also a common source of errors in language learning (Herbst & Wang,

2004). Hua (2004), views the English verbal group as the ability of verbs to attract complements, fill spaces, and achieve balance in sentences.

Zhou (1994) adds a semantic dimension to the verbal group, stating that it is a word, based on its semantics, which necessitates specific elements during sentence construction. As Haspelmath & Muller (2004) noted, the verb demonstrates the most interesting and diverse structure-changing operation. The verb is characteristic of its concern with related elements of primary importance in determining the number of dependents of a syntactic structure, thus enabling semantic completion of a sentence. Consequently, the English verbal group is the main verb and other elements that are related to it. The concept of the verbal group has several attributes that help define it and distinguish verbs based on their ability to take different numbers or participants in a sentence.

In summary, the concept of verbal group, also known as the verb valence, is rich and nuanced, considering both grammatical and semantic aspects. It plays a pivotal role in sentence structure and language learning, contributing significantly to our understanding of how verbs interact with other elements within the verbal group construction.

2.1.1 Attributes of the English Verbal Group

As remarked by Croft (2012), “a central part of the grammar of every human language is the encoding of events and their participants in a clause.” Franson Manjali (1994) cited by Aydin & Torusdag (2013), denotes his thoughts about this subject in the following sentences: “For Tesnière, the meaningfulness of a sentence was due to the central organizing role of the predicate verb which represented an action and functioned as the highest syntactic node of the sentence. The verb is the complete and independent element of a sentence. For this reason, Tesnière (1959, p. 39), cited in

Herbst (2014), viewed the sentence as representing a ‘little drama’ (petit drame) wherein the predicate represents an action (in the theatrical sense) or even a process, and the dependents of the predicate are the principal elements in the action.

Since Tesnière distances himself from a logical conception of grammar he eschews the “subject-verb-object-indirect object” type of propositional structure; he opts for a rather theatrical conception where the nominal elements are initially non-heterogeneous actants in participating in a process but appearing in their functionally specialized roles as subject, object, and indirect object in the context of sentence structure.” As Nivre (2005, p. 5) stated, “The idea is that the verb imposes requirements on its syntactic dependents that reflect its interpretation as a semantic predicate.” The notion of verbal group captures the inherently relational nature of verbs. As verbs denote events, they necessarily imply the event’s participants, i.e. the verbal arguments. For this reason, valence can be viewed as referring to argument realization (Goldberg, 2016), which provides a direct link to research on the syntax-semantics interface (Levin & Rappaport, 2005), which regards argument realization as crucially determined by the meaning associated with specific verb classes.

2.1.1.1 Argument structure

The argument structure, as one of the key attributes of a verbal group is all about the specified number of arguments a verb can combine within a sentence. Hewings (2022) and Goldberg (2016) state that these arguments are typically noun phrases or nominal groups or pronouns that perform various roles about the verb as subject, objects, and other complements.

The three terminologies such as transitivity, complement, and valence are related but different concepts in linguistics. Fillmore (1968) cited by Downing & Locke (2016), explains that transitivity refers to the ability of a verb to express a process

type in a sentence. Thus, material, verbal, mental, relational, existential and behavioural processes. On the other hand, the complement of verbs is a grammatical element that completes the meaning of a verb. It provides additional information about the action or state expressed by the verb. Complements can be of various types, including direct objects, indirect objects, prepositional objects, and subject complements. However, valence encompasses the overall number and type of arguments a verb can take in a sentence, including subjects and complements. Therefore, complements are a subset of the arguments that contribute to the verb's valence.

2.1.1.2 Agent and Patient Roles/ Semantic Role

Downing & Locke. (2016) and Herbst (2010) state that verbal group often relate to the roles of agents, thus, those acting and patients receiving the action in a sentence. Some verbs inherently assign these roles, while others rely on the sentence structure to assign them. The study by Veselovská (2017) revealed that what follows the verb can be semantically identified as the Patient/ Theme, Recipient/Beneficiary, and their complementary condition is either Manner/ Place/ or time. These are realized as the right valence of the verbal groups. According to Downing and Lock (2016), verbs may have specific semantic roles associated with their arguments. For example, some verbs require a particular type of object, like “*eat*” requiring a food item as the direct object. The indirect object is associated with two semantic roles, the **Recipient** (the one who receives the goods or information), and the **Beneficiary** or ‘*intended recipient*’.

1. The doctor gave oxygen *to the injured man*. (Recipient)
2. I’ll buy drinks *for you all*. (beneficiary)

2.1.1.3 Syntax and Sentence Structure

According to functional grammarians like Downing & Locke (2016), Goldberg (2006), Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), Herbst (2014), McCarthy (2006), and Quirk et al. (2010), understanding verbal group is essential for analyzing the syntax and structure of sentences, as it determines how elements like subjects and objects are organized within a sentence. These attributes collectively help linguists and grammarians classify verbs based on their valence and understand how they function in sentences. It is a fundamental concept of studying syntax and sentence construction in language.

In addition to the attributes of the concept of verbal group, it also applies in various linguistic and grammatical contexts, primarily related to the structure and analysis of sentences. Some specific contexts in which the verbal group is relevant are:

2.1.1.4 Grammar and Linguistics

Linguists use the verbal group to categorize and classify verbs based on their ability to combine with different numbers and types of arguments. This classification aids in the study of language structure. As Jackson & Amvela (2007) note, words are not normally used in isolation; they are combined with other words to form larger units with various relationships. Moreover, verbs are crucial in forming clauses and sentences constituting predicates that, in turn, are “the semantic and structural centre of the clause” (Valeika & Butkienė, 2006). Verbs dictate the basic patterns of a simple sentence or a clause.

2.1.1.5 Language Teaching and Learning

In the ESL classroom, the concept of the verbal group is key when teaching grammar to students. It helps students understand how verbs work in sentences and how to construct grammatically correct sentences. Although the roots of the valence concept

are noticed in Tesnier's works, it is remarkable that the development of the concept is strongly linked to descriptive linguistics in a foreign language concept. Thus, Herbst (2010) perceives verbal group as an error-prone area for ESL learners as it involves idiosyncratic knowledge that has to be learned.

2.1.1.6 Error Correction

Lacking lexical and collocation knowledge, ESL students often face difficulties choosing an appropriate word that fits the context (Wu, 2010). Therefore, in language editing and proofreading, knowledge of the verbal group is essential for identifying and correcting errors related to subject-verb agreement, subject-object agreement, and overall sentence structure. Considering language variation, every language and dialect has a unique verbal group, and understanding these variations is important for studying language diversity.

2.2 Forms of English Verbal Group in Students' L2 Writing

The verbal group, which is the main verb and the words that relate to the verb in the group, is the simple structure or the extended structure (Halliday & Mathessian, 2004). Simply put, a verbal group is typically a group with a verb as its Head. That verb is likely modified before either the verb (pre-modification) with auxiliary verbs, after the verb (post-modification or qualification), or both. It can also be the head alone as the form of the verbal group (Adejare, 2012).

- E.g
1. He **slept**. (is=head)
 2. She **is eating** the food. (is=pre-modifier) + (eat-(ing) =head)
 3. She **has quickly finished** her chores. (has, quickly= pre modifiers) + (finish(ed) =head)

4. She **sings** beautifully in the morning. (Sing(s) =head)+ (beautifully, in the morning= post modifiers) adverb and prepositional phrase.
5. She **read** the book. (read=head)+ (the book=post Modifier) direct object.
6. Kevin **gave** his friend a gift. (gave=head)+ (her friend= post Modifier) indirect object.
7. The class **elected** him a rep. (elected=head) + (rep= post Modifier) object complement.
8. Doreen **plans** to travel abroad. (plans=head) + (to travel abroad= post Modifier) to-infinitive.
9. The car, damaged in the accident, **was taken** to the garage. (was taken=aux+head) + (damaged in the accident= post Modifier) participle phrase.
10. The student **mentioned** the book that he had read. (mentioned = head) + (that he had read= post Modifier) relative clause.
11. Alima **cried** because she was happy. (cried =head) + (because she was happy = post Modifier) adverbial clause.

The elements in the group constitute the forms of the verbal group.

2.2.1 The simple structure

According to Downing & Locke (2016), in the simple verbal group, the finite, and the event are fused. For example, He **ate** the kenkey. (ate = finite + event) These verbs are lexical or main verbs. In the Verbal Group, according to Downing & Locke (2016), Fawcett (2000), Huddleston & Pullum (2002), and Thompson (2002), **either the lexical verb is regarded as the main element (v), which functions alone, whether in finite or non-finite form, as in the examples:**

- 1) Eating for life, he swallowed the egg.

- 2) He sees the boss all the time.
- 3) They saw the boss yesterday.
- 4) Active reading is a way of preparing for an examination.
- 5) The boy, seeing the dog fainted.
- 6) I came across a letter written ten years ago.
- 7) Ama put the picture in the book.
- 8) I am warning you; take note of what they say.

The lexical or main verb, which conveys the primary action, state, or occurrence in a sentence, provides the main semantic content of the verbal group. The main or lexical verb with a zero base can be morphologically inflected with *-s*, *-ed*, *-ing*, and *-en* (Adejare & Adejare, 2006; Adejare, 2016; Huddleston, 2016). “The primary auxiliary verbs *be*, *have*, *do*, and *can* function both as auxiliary and as lexical elements of the verbal group except *doing* and *done*, which function only as lexical elements” (Downing & Locke, 2016, p. 318).

E.g.

- 9) He is the class prefect.
- 10) She has a pen.
- 11) They did the work yesterday.

The above examples and explanations by scholars indicate that the lexical verb form expresses the main action that is taking place in any sentence; therefore, the intention of the sentence becomes clear. They can equally be referred to as full verbs that convey the semantic meaning in a sentence. Nordquist (2019) posits that, not surprisingly, the great majority of verbs in English are lexical verbs, which are not those that are auxiliary or helping verbs. Lexical verbs do much of the heavy lifting in

English. They provide the action (intransitive and dynamic verbs), e.g. “Alice *dances*.” “They *hit* the ball, I *catch* it”, explains what is happening to various direct objects (transitive verbs), e.g. “Delase *sees* the light.” and describes the state of being or situation (static or stative verbs) among their many duties. E.g. “We *are* what we *believe* we are.”

2.2.2 The extended structure of the verbal group

The auxiliary verb is the grammatical element in the verbal group that accompanies the main verb or lexical verb to express a thought. It is the integral component of the verbal group. Adejare & Adejare (1996), Fema & Abubaka (2020), and Nordquist (2019) distinguished the two sets of auxiliaries. They classify the **primary auxiliaries** and the **modal auxiliaries** by stating that the former group is concerned with subject-verb agreement and full past syntax. The latter group has no concern with concord and, in some cases, even the full past syntax.

2.2.2.1 Primary Auxiliary Verb Forms

Eastwood (1998) explains that English auxiliary verbs can be used in two different ways, either as ‘*auxiliary verbs*’ or ‘*ordinary verbs*’. He further justifies his claim by providing the following table:

<u>Auxiliary Verbs</u>	<u>Ordinary Verbs</u>
They <i>are</i> waiting for a bus.	They <i>are</i> at the party.
I <i>have</i> thought about it.	I <i>have</i> a plan.
<i>Does</i> Emil need any help?	Emil <i>does</i> all the work.

Adejare & Adejare (1996) discuss the **primary auxiliaries** by paying attention to their dual functions. They explain that the auxiliaries, **BE** and **HAVE**, have both finite and non-finite forms, but the third member, the auxiliary **DO**, has only finite

forms. These collectively generate a host of finite and non-finite forms. The auxiliary *be* generates five finite forms and three non-finite forms. In turn, the auxiliary *have* generated three finite forms and two non-finite forms. Finally, the auxiliary *do* generate only three finite forms.

The table below shows the finite and non-finite forms of the verbs

Auxiliary Form	BE	HAVE	DO
Finite Forms	am, is, are was, were	has, have, had	do, does, did
Non-Finite Forms	be, being been	have, having	

To demonstrate the dual membership of lexical and auxiliary subsets by the primary auxiliaries' finite forms, another table is provided:

The table below showed the primary auxiliaries as lexical and auxiliary

FINITE FORMS	LEXICAL VERB	AUXILIARIES
AM	I <i>am</i> a student.	I <i>am</i> studying English.
ARE	Seyram <i>is</i> good at languages.	He <i>is</i> training to be a banker. They <i>are</i> planning a joint venture.
WAS	I <i>was</i> in Ho in May.	It <i>was</i> raining every day.
WERE	We <i>were</i> young women then.	We <i>were</i> staying on the campus.
HAS	Dela <i>has</i> good looks.	She <i>has</i> taken good care of herself.
HAVE	I <i>have</i> some money.	I <i>have</i> been to the bank today.
HAD	He <i>had</i> problems with tense.	We <i>had</i> been with him for a long time.
DO.	I <i>do</i> my work well always.	You <i>do</i> go on, don't you?
DOES	Selorm <i>does</i> well in every exam.	She <i>does</i> (not) like loafing.
DID	Sedem <i>did</i> a U-turn	She <i>did</i> (not) do it well, though.

2.2.2.2 Modal Auxiliary Verb Forms

As it has been stated earlier, according to Adejare & Adejare (1996), modal verbs are used to express various moods and mental attitudes of the speaker or writer. The modal verbs are otherwise called secondary auxiliaries, and they primarily mark modality. The modal auxiliaries are among the more difficult structures in the verbal group that students and teachers have to deal with because some of the students, who have been told that present tense verbs with third person singular subject require an –s ending, overgeneralize this rule to modals (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). In English, modals do not inflect. Moreover, they are distinguished from other auxiliaries as well as from ordinary verbs by their lack of tense and their resultant lack of subject-verb agreement. Another formed property of the modal auxiliary is that they directly precede a verb without the intervening infinitive “to,” which is required when two ordinary verbs follow each other in sequence. For example;

Modal verb + verb

9. I can go.
10. *I can to go.* (Incorrect)

Downing & Lock (2016) added that it is the auxiliary verbs that introduce the verbal group in a sentence, hence termed lexical auxiliary verbs, which form chain-like structures with the main verb of the verbal group. The first word is the **finite verb**, which, according to Downing & Locke (2016), is the **‘finite operator’ (o)**. For instance: One auxiliary and lexical verb, as in:

1. Kwami **is** helping Vincent.
2. Edem **is** beaten.
3. Kevin **has** played the ball.
4. They **have** played the match yesterday.

5. He ***does*** do the assignment.

Two auxiliary verbs and a lexical verb, as in:

6. He ***will be*** playing the match tomorrow.

7. She ***has been*** snoring all night.

Three auxiliary verbs and a lexical verb, as in:

8. The match ***might have been*** played yesterday.

9. The students ***will have been*** singing the hymns in the chapel.

10. The girls ***should have been*** dancing by now.

2.2.2.3 Lexical Auxiliary/ Phrasal Modals

Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) and Hewings (2022) refer to the **lexical auxiliary** verbs as phrasal modals, quasi-modal or periphrastic modals, which are multiwords that function semantically as modal verbs in English. Leech (2004) explains that, in grammatical terms, these verbs are not modal auxiliary verbs on the same footing as others because they have an *infinitive to*, and can combine with other modals. In English, every modal seems to have lexical auxiliaries or phrasal modal counterparts. These are as follows:

The table below shows modal verbs as lexical auxiliaries and their phrasal counterparts:

Modals	Lexical aux /Phrasal modals
Can, could	Be able to
Will, shall	Be going to, be about to
Must	Have to, have got to
Should, ought to	Be to, be supposed to
Would (= past habit)	Used to
May, might	Be allowed to, be permitted to

(cf Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2014)

The lexical auxiliaries or the phrasal modals do not exhibit the same formal properties as the true modals, except for “*used to*”; subject-verb agreement must be applied to all the phrasal modals. In addition, all phrasal modals require a “*to*” *infinitive* to precede the main verb. Simply put, the phrasal modals or lexical auxiliaries behave syntactically like the way ordinary verbs rather than true modal verbs. As in:

11. She *is able to go* to Ho.
12. He *is going to go* to Adaklu.
13. Esi *has to go* to Anfoe.

Lexical auxiliaries or phrasal modals give English users a way to mark tense and modality in the same verb form. It has been noticed that modal + modal cannot occur sequentially in a statement. E.g:

14. We *can should* study hard. (incorrect)
15. She *will must* improve his work (incorrect)
16. He *will have to* improve his work. (correct)

Both tense and modality are expressed in the sentence above through the auxiliary verbs. The modal verb *will* expresses future tense, while *have to* functions as a modal expressing obligation or necessity. Therefore, the sentence means- *He will be required to improve his work in the future.*

Another disagreement is that a lexical auxiliary cannot precede a modal verb in communication.

E.g. 16. He is **able to must** do the work. (Incorrect) instead,

17. He *must be able to* do the work.

The lexical auxiliaries or phrasal modals occasionally appear to take perfect or progressive aspects. E.g.

18. Lately, Thelma *has been able to* read a chapter in the morning. (Perfective aspect)

19. Elorm *is trying to* work harder to pass the examination. (Progressive aspect)

Given this, it perfectly shows that lexical auxiliaries or phrasal modals are tensed and inflected like ordinary verbs. Their relation to the modal auxiliary is a semantic one. When they occur with the aspectual markers, they are treated synthetically as ordinary verbs taking an infinitive rather than phrasal modals (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2014). According to Nordquist (2019), auxiliary verbs have a more subtle function because they often complete sentences without the reader being aware of how they contribute to their structure. Therefore, an auxiliary verb in its capacity determines the *mood, modality, tense, voice, or aspect* of another verb in the verbal group. Simply put, a helping verb comes before the main verb in a sentence, and together they form the verbal group. They (auxiliaries) sometimes require the presence of lexical verbs to function within the verbal group; however, that does not deny their significance as grammatical sentence elements.

Despite their syntactic dependency, auxiliary verbs are seen to have enjoyed high frequency as far as the use of sentence elements is concerned. So, it is worth noting that the auxiliary verbs. However, they require lexical verbs, have semantic indispensability, and sometimes some of them function as main verbs in sentences and convey effective meanings on their own. Given the detailed information about the forms of English verbal groups, there is a need for SHS Form Three students in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality to select and combine lexical verbs with auxiliary verb forms appropriately in their L2 writing to avoid grammatical errors.

2.3 The Functions of the English Verbal Group in Students' L2 Writing

Accuracy is one of the verbal properties that commonly refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct expressions. Accurate expressions are not always acceptable unless they are appropriate, but the accuracy indicates the quality of expressions produced by speakers or writers. The English verbal group expressions consist of several basic components. The verb forms participate in verbal expressions (Rubba, 2001). The syntactic evidence of the English verb forms investigated in this study includes these properties: transitivity, theme-rheme, and cohesion. Every verb in the transitivity that falls under the ideational metafunction in systemic functional grammar has three attributes: the process, the participants, and the circumstances (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004). The main argument of the transitivity system is that the most vigorous conception of reality consists of "events" from doing, happening, feeling, and being. These incidents are ordered within the language's semantic system and expressed using clause grammar (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014).

Halliday describes what is happening, what is being done, how he feels, and under what circumstances. The transitivity system comprises six **processes**: material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal, and existential (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). In transitivity, the process is the "embryo" of the clause; without it, there is effectively no clause. Supporting this "embryo" to develop are the participants (consisting of subjects and objects). At the periphery of the embryonic structure are the circumstances, composed of adjuncts and adverbs (Bakuuro, 2017), which are optional. Therefore, the term 'process' encompasses everything expressed by the verb; this could be an event, whether physical or not, circumstances, or relationships.

2.3.1 Material Processes

The material process describes actions occurring in the physical world. It involves two key participants. The first is the actor, an essential element in the process (Eggins, 2004). The second, optional element is the "goal," which indicates the entity's life or death impacted by the process.

Table 1: Material Processes

The students	cleaned	the toilets
Actor	Process: material	Goal

2.3.2 Mental Process

The mental process encodes the meaning of feelings or thoughts in the mind. They are internalized processes, as opposed to externalized doing and speaking processes. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), in contrast to material processes, mental processes involve at least one human participant with a mind in which the process occurs. Sensing refers to participants who are involved in mental processes. *Phenomena* are entities that sensors can sense, think about, or capture.

Table 2: Mental Processes

The girls	Felt	so excited
Sensor	Process: mental	Phenomenon

2.3.3 Relational Process

Relational processes relate to those that exist in an abstract realm (Thompson, 2013). Typically, the abstract relationship between two participants associated with the process is considered. However, unlike material processes, a participant does not

physically influence others. There are two types of relational processes, attributive and identifying (Thompson, 2013). Attributive relational processes show the characteristics a particular object has. This type of process expresses the relationship "x carries attribute y," where "y" is the attribute assigned to the carrier. To depict the link between attribute and carrier, the verb "be" is often used. Identifying relational processes indicates that the two entities share the same properties.

This process involves two independent participants: tokens, which are the entities or occupants, and the value, which defines the token by giving it a meaning, referent, function, status or role (Egins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Jones & Locke, 2011).

Table 3: Relational Processes

Akua	Is	The most beautiful girl in the class.
Carrier/identified	Process: relational	Attribute/Identifier

2.3.4 Verbal Processes

The act of saying something is known as the verbal process, which exists at the intersection of mental and relational processes. Only verbal processes, such as speech and meaning, can express the relationship between ideas embedded in human consciousness and ideas embodied in the language (Thompson, 2013). The participant who speaks is known as the Sayer. The Target is the recipient to whom the process was directed. What was said is verbiage.

Table 4: Verbal Processes

My friend	Told	me about the news.
Sayer	Process: verbal	Verbiage

2.3.5 Existential Processes

Existential processes are those that exist and occur. Existential sentences typically include the verb *be*, and even though it serves no representational function, the word *there* is required as a subject (Halliday & Mathessian, 2014). Some objects or events are said to exist. Any phenomenon, such as a person, an object, an institution, an abstraction, an action, or an event, can be defined as existing.

Table 5: Existential Processes

There	Was	a chaos.
	Process: existential	Existent

2.3.6 Behavioural Processes

Psychological and psychological behaviour are both examples of behavioural processes. They are the least visible of the six types of processes, and the boundaries of process behaviour, which are limitless, with some material and mental processes (Halliday & Mathessian, 2014). The behavioural process is the outward manifestation of inner work, acting on conscious processes and physiological states. Participants who behave well are referred to as "behaviour."

Table 6: Behavioural Processes

The baby	Cried	all day long.
Behavior	Process: behavioural	

Egins (2004) explained that processes fall within various tenses to manifest their intended meaning to readers during communications. For that matter, one of the difficult grammatical areas for ESL/EFL students to master is the English verb tense-

aspect system. Paradoxically, this area is not usually perceived as being especially difficult to teach. The reason for this is that many grammatical rules exist that capture the structural facts concerning various tense-aspect combinations and the semantic facts related to the meanings these combinations convey (Larsen-Freeman 2019).

2.3.7 Tense

Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) stated that tense in the morphological sense refers to the inflections used with finite (e.g. inflectable) verbs. Given this perspective, according to Adejare (2010, 2012), Haccius (2002), Larsen-Freeman (2019, 1999), and Larsen-Freeman (2014), it is well known that English has two tense forms, present and past. Leech (2012) explained that it is true that there is a rough and partial correspondence between 'Present Tense' and present time, and between 'Past Tense' and past time. Therefore, he suggested that it would be better to call the Present Tense the 'Non-past Tense', as it can be used for future as well as present time (p. 5). Celce–Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) explained that if the irregular verb *be* is excluded, the past tense would be realized through either regular suffixation. As in:

1. We **dance[d]** on our way home. (dance)
2. They **kiss[ed]** at the wedding. (kiss)
3. Ama **jump[ed]** over the cart. (jump)

Or other irregular vowels and consonant changes. As in:

1. They **met** the headmistress. (meet)
2. We **bought** a designer bag. (buy)
3. Kafui **went** to the town center. (go)

The present tense is explicitly marked only in the case of third-person singular subjects.

For instance:

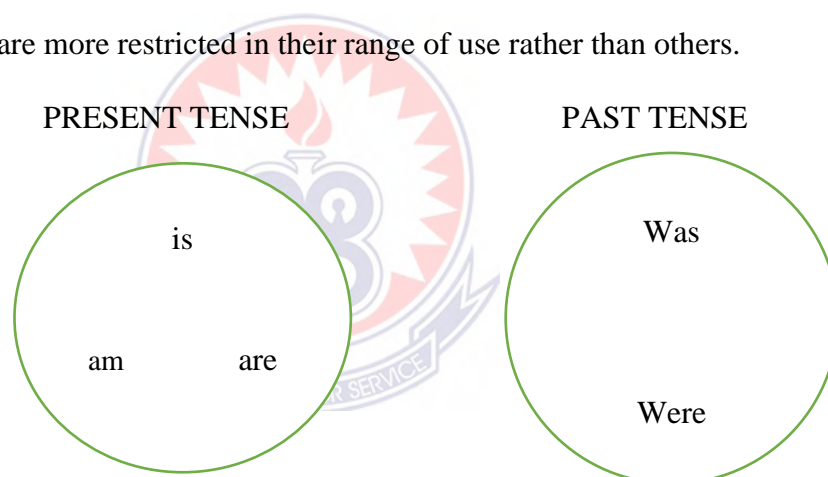
1. She **cook[-s]** a delicious food.

2. He **run[-s]** to school.
3. It **jump[-s]** across the river.

Finally, it is expressed implicitly with a lack of marking for all other subjects.

I	
You	run {∅} to school.
They	walk {∅} to church.
We	

The verb *be* is more highly inflected than any other verb in English and can express the present through three forms, and the past through two forms. Some of the forms are more restricted in their range of use rather than others.



Some examples in sentences are:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. I am late for the meeting. | 1. Kevin was very fast at doing the work. |
| 2. The girls are very beautiful. | 2. You were late that day. |
| 3. He is here. | |

The multiplicity of *be* verb makes it very difficult for students to select the appropriate form of the verb in their L2 writing. The copula *be* functions as an operator, which does not need the *do* auxiliary.

According to Celce–Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2014, 1999) and Leech (2012), every non-imperative English sentence must have either a modal auxiliary (can, will, must) or a grammatical tense (past or present). Leech (2012) explained that the usual application of the present tense to the present time focused on the **simple present tense**. Therefore, the simple present tense is suitable for expressing “eternal truth”. The following are examples of the meaning of the uses of the simple present tense:

A. Habitual actions in the present

1. I **read** the book every morning.
2. He **scores** the goals.

B. General, timeless truths, such as physical laws or customs

3. Action **speaks** louder than words.
4. The Earth **revolves** around the sun.

C. states

5. It **is** cloudy.
6. They **live** in Kumasi.
7. I don't **have** a car.

D. Events or actions in the present, such as in sporting events. The event present is particularly suitable for commentaries in real time. It is also used in the performative act or speech (Leech, 2012).

8. The goal **counts!**
9. He **scores** a goal.

However, the event present does occur exceptionally in ordinary speech in exclamations such as

10. Here **comes** my bus!
11. Up we **go!**

E. Speech acts in the present

12. I **nominate** Eyram.

13. I **second** the motion.

F. Conversational historical present (in narration). The Present Tense may be used to describe events in the past. The use, which is traditionally known as **HISTORIC PRESENT**, is best treated as a storyteller's license, whereby past happenings are portrayed or imagined as if happening now (at present) (Larsen-Freeman, 2019; Leech, 2012).

Leech (2012) stated that, when discussing an artist's work, we feel justified in using the **Present tense**, because the work, and through it (in a sense) the artist, is still 'alive'. On the other hand, the whole career of a painter, writer, or musician may be viewed as a timeless reconstruction of the works themselves, so it is also justified to expect the use of **Past and Perfect tense** in narrative writings (Leech, 2012). Given this, students are at liberty to present their L2 narrative writings in the simple present tense, simple past, or the perfective aspect to carry their intended messages across accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately.

14. So, she **enters** the room and **crosses** over to the other side without looking at anyone.

15. Selorm **is killed** and buried.

16. Therefore, he **stands** up in the boat and **waves** his arms to catch our attention.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2019) and Leech (2012), the simple present tense may refer to events or states realized in future time. The 'futurate present' refers to future events regarded as *already planned or predetermined* (Leech, 2012, p. 6).

17. The train **leaves** at eight o'clock.

18. When she comes, we'll **find** out. (Here, the main clause is in the future time verb.)

As humans, we do not only report our present experience; we can also anticipate or recall an event that has already taken place. On the other hand, the same general semantic character for the simple aspect holds for the **simple past** as well. Leech (2012) explained that there are two meanings of the past tense. One basic element of meaning is that the happening takes place before the present moment. This is what Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) refer to as '*remoteness*'. As in,

19. Eyram **worked** as an executive secretary for two years.

Normally another element of meaning is that the speaker has a definite time in mind. This definite time in the past is often made explicit by an adverbial expression accompanying the Past Tense verb. For instance,

20. We **visited** Aflao last week.

21. Krobo Girls' Presbyterian SHS **won** the Maths and Science quiz in 2023.

Another use of the past tense is for habitual or repeated actions in the past. For instance;

22. It **rained** almost every weekend in Odumase.

When the past tense is used to express a state. For example;

23. Aku **owed** me a lot of money.

24. He **seemed to** be a creative writer.

In some cases, the past tense is used to express an indirect sign of politeness and to express social distancing. For example,

25. **Did** you want some water to drink before the trip?

26. I am calling because I **wanted** to ask a favour.

Given these ideas about the simple past tense, it is used when the writer or the speaker has already conceptualized a complete event factually, which is a remote event in some way.

Unlike many other languages, there is no true **future tense** in English. Prototypically, the modal *will* or the phrasal modal *be going to* serve this purpose, but other modals, such as *may*, *could*, and *might*, not to mention the simple present and present progressive, are also appropriate to fill this gap among the formal markers of tense in English. It is equally well known that the modal *will* is usually assigned to fill the role of the simple future. One difference in the core meaning of the future tense is that events are not factually knowable like those in the past and present tense. Therefore, the future cannot be based on factuality; *will* is strongly for prediction, not based on facts. For example,

27. The girls **will** finish the work before breakfast,

The core meaning of strong predictability can be expressed as:

a. An action to take place at some definite time.

28. Edem **will** go abroad next year.

29. The dog **will** jump over the wall at night.

b. A future habitual action or state, and even for a present habit, for which a strong prediction can be made.

30. After the national service, Kevin **will** start studying for his final examination.

31. Destiny is so jovial. She **will** wake up, and before coming out, she **will** sing a nursery hymn aloud.

c. A situation where the subordinate clause suggests a limitation on the event.

32. Emil will repeat class five **until she is good at mathematics**.

d. In the main (result) clause of future conditionals.

33. If you go, **you will regret**. (Example from Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

In light of the above explanations about the simple tense in the English language, it is clear that the simple aspects of the verbal group allow a writer or a speaker to express an event as a whole, not open to development or change. On the other hand, whether the event-specific or general, the simple tense allows for strong prediction or factual statements.

2.3.8 Aspect

Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999, 2014) explain that an aspect of the English verbal group is the internal structure of the action that occurs *at any time*. According to Downing & Locke (2016), Hewing (2022), Larsen-Freeman (2019), and Leech (2002), English has only two aspects of the verbal group combined with the present, past tense and the future time to arrive at the traditional 12 tenses. These aspects are **perfect and progressive**. The perfect aspect refers to a verb form that indicates an action that has been completed at some point in time or has relevance to the present. It is typically formed using the auxiliary verb “have” followed by the past participle of the main verb.

The core meaning of the **present perfect** aspect is ‘prior’, and it is used with some other point in time. This is because it connects the past action to the present event and emphasises the importance of that past event to the present situation.

a. A situation that began at a prior point in time into the present. As in,

34. I **have been** a teacher since 1998.

35. He **has been** here in the morning.

- b. An action occurring or not occurring at an unspecified prior time that has current relevance.

36. The teachers **have** (already) **attended** the meeting.

37. He **has** (already) **seen** that picture.

- c. A very recent completed action, often with the word *just*.

38. Mary **has just completed** the assignment.

- d. An action that occurred over a prior time moment that is completed at the time of speaking.

39. The price of cement in Ghana **has doubled** in the last four weeks.

- e. With verbs in subordinate clauses of time or condition.

40. Eyome will not be full until she **has finished** the food.

41. If you **have done** your homework, you can watch TV.

The **past perfect** offers:

- a. To describe an action that was completed before another action in the past. It is formed with 'had' followed by the past participle form of the verb. For instance,

42. He **had left** before I arrived.

43. They **had played** the ball in the morning.

44. By the time Sedinam arrived, they had already left.

The **future perfect** is used to describe actions that will have been completed at a specific point in the future. It is often formed with "will have" followed by the past participle form of the verb. As in;

45. Emma **will have finished** all the assignments by the time we get there.

46. They **will have travelled** to five regions by the time their vacation ends.

47. Selorm **will have saved** enough money for the trip by next month.

The **progressive aspect** is a grammatical feature used to express actions or events that are ongoing or in progress at a specific time. It emphasises the continuity or duration of an action. The progressive aspect of the English verbal group is formed by combining a form of the verb 'to be' with the present participle (the-ing form) of the main verb.

- a.** Present progressive indicates an action currently happening or in progress. As in:

- 48. Olivia **is studying** for the promotion examination.
- 49. We **are travelling** to Saboba.
- 50. She **is cooking** dinner.

It can also be used to describe temporal action.

- 51. I **am dancing** Agbadza.
- 52. I **am living** in Winneba for the weekend.

On the other hand, it is used to show repeated action or describe a developing situation.

- 53. She **is constantly texting** he husband. (repeated action)
- 54. The weather **is threatening** to rain. (developing situation)

- b.** Past progressive indicates an action that was ongoing at a specific time in the past.

- 55. The stubborn boys **were watching** a movie when the housemaster called.
- 56. The students **were having** dinner when the light went out.
- 57. She **was talking** to my very good friend.

- c.** Future progressive indicates an action that will be ongoing at a specific time in the future.

- 58. Tomorrow by this time, they **will be running** the 100-meter race.

59. They **will be working** on Edem's project next week.

In simple terms, the present progressive form, sometimes called the present continuous form, combines the form of the *be* verb (*am, is, are*) depending on the number and person of the subject with the present participle, an **-ing** form. The past progressive form combines the past form of the *be* verb, here in two forms, the first and third person singular form *was*, and all the other persons and numbers with *were* followed by the present participle. In the case of the future progressive, there is the use of the modal verb, *will* plus *be* with the *-ing* form of the main verb.

The **perfect progressive** form of the verbal group, according to Leech (2004) also known as the perfect continuous aspect and combines features of both the perfect and progressive aspects. It is used to describe actions that have been ongoing up to a certain point in time or have recently been completed. With a focus on the duration or continuity of the action. For instance,

- a. The **present perfect progressive** describes actions that started in the past and are still ongoing or have recently finished.

60. She **has been studying** for three hours.

61. They **have been living** in Accra since last year.

- b. The **past perfect progressive** aspect describes actions that were ongoing until a specific point in the past.

62. I **had been waiting** for him for three hours when he finally sent a message.

63. They **had been working** there for a year before he had a son.

- c. The future perfect progressive describes actions that will be ongoing up until a specific point in the future.

64. By next year, I **will have been teaching** at Krobo Girls' SHS for six years.

65. They **will have been driving** for an hour by the time they return.

Notably, perfect progressive aspect often combines the sense of completion or up-to-now time reference of the perfect aspect with the continuous, ongoing nature of the progressive aspect. It is commonly used to stress the duration or ongoing nature of actions over time. Like the progressive aspect, the perfect progressive is typically not used with stative verbs.

2.3.9 Modality

According to Adejare & Adejare (1996, p.196)

"...modality in the verbal group performs special semantic functions that enable a speaker to infuse personal views such as permission, e.g., (can), intention, e.g., (will), ability, e.g., (can) and compulsion, e.g., (must), etc...".

For a better understanding of the above quotation, a comprehensive table of the modal auxiliaries and their various meanings is below.

Table 7: Shows modal verbs with meanings

MODALS AND THEIR MEANINGS	
Model Auxiliary	Meanings Attached
CAN	Ability, Permission, Request, Possibility
COULD	Ability, Request, Possibility
SHALL	Futurity, Willingness, Intention, Suggestion, Insistence
SHOULD	Obligation, Advisability, Necessity, Expectation
WILL	Willingness, Intention, Prediction, Insistence, Request
WOULD	Willingness, Habitual Action in the Past, Possibility, Wishes, Desire

MAY	Permission, Possibility, Wishes, Purpose, Concession
MIGHT	Permission, Possibility, Concession, Reproach
MUST	Necessity, Prohibition, Compulsion, Obligation, Certainty, Probability
OUGHT (TO)	Moral Obligation, Duty, Necessity, Desirability
USED (TO)	Past Discontinued Habit
NEED	Necessity, Importance, Desirability
DARE	Challenge, Courage, Boldness, Disapproval

(Cited from Fema & Abubaka, 2020, pp. 4)

Some of the meanings attached to the above auxiliaries are as follows:

Ability

66. We ***can*** speak Ewe.

67. Adzoa ***could*** run when she was young.

Permission

68. ***Can*** we knock on the door?

69. ***May*** I open the window?

Request

70. ***Could*** you send the food to the kitchen?

71. ***May*** I join the group for the discussion?

Possibility

72. If I were you, I ***could*** do it easily.

73. Justice ***can/may/might*** come tomorrow.

Futurity

74. We ***shall*** visit Winneba the next day.

75. I ***shall*** see Emefa tomorrow.

Willingness

76. I ***will*** give Edem my purse.

77. The nanny said she **would** look after the baby.

Intention

78. I would visit the museum if I had the time.

79. She wishes they **would** visit Accra.

Necessity

80. You **must** take the medicine daily.

81. She **ought** to work hard for her family.

Obligation

82. We **must** complain the matter to the police.

83. You **ought** to be polite to others.

'Dare'

The verb 'dare' is used in the senses of defying, challenging, or facing something boldly and it has all the usual forms as a regular verb.

84. He doesn't **dare** to write a letter to her.

85. She **dared** to drink before her father.

As an auxiliary verb, it has no inflections, and it is then used in the sense of 'have the courage to'.

86. She **dares** not speak to her father.

87. How **dare** he talk like that!

'Used to'

88. It is used to express a past-discontinued habit.

89. There **used to** be a hotel in Adaklu.

90. She **used to** teach English to first-year students.

In some other constructions or expressions, the use of auxiliaries like **can, may**, etc., for instance, in reported speech or conditional sentences has to be given special

attention. Christophersen & Sandved (2019), briefly discuss the use of auxiliaries in reported and conditional sentences, and below are some of the points worth noting.

If the verb of reporting is in the present tense, the form of the auxiliary in the reported speech is the same as in the original utterance:

91. I **can** swim – He says he can swim.

92. It **may** be true – She says it may be true.

One exception here is that **will** sometimes replace **shall** and vice versa

93. I **shall** do it straight away – He says he **will** do it straight away.

94. You **will** regret this – He says I **shall** regret this.

If the verb of reporting is in the past tense, the auxiliary in the reported speech occurs in a different form from the one used in the original utterance, as in :

95. I **can** do it – He said he **could** do it.

96. It **may** be true – she said it **might** be true.

Therefore, **can-could**, **may-might**, **shall-should**, **will-would**, but **dare** and **need** are regularly unchanged.

97. I **dare** not tell her – He said he **dare** not tell her.

98. You **needn't** go – He said I **needn't** go.

In conditional sentences, we normally use **would** or **should** plus infinitives, as in:

99. If you asked him, he **would** probably agree.

100. If I had enough money, I **would** go to the West Indies.

(Christophersen & Sandved, 2019: 204-208)

Negation

Auxiliaries are also used to make negative expressions, even if the positive counterparts do not have the auxiliaries as in:

101. She likes singing – She **does not** like singing.

102. They wrote names last week – They ***did not*** write their names last week.

English speakers use modals in extremely subtle ways to try to control or advise others to express affect (positive or negative), to mark attitude or stance, to show authority, and for other purposes. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2014) explain that often the choice between semantically similar or between modals and phrasal modals (lexical auxiliaries) will be a matter of usage preference rather than meaning per se.

2.3.10 Mood

Mood, being one of the functions of the English verbal group, has three main types. These are declarative (indicative mood), interrogative, and imperative mood. Downing & Lock (2016), Hewing (2022), and Leech (2004) explained that moods convey the writer's or speaker's attitude towards the factual content of the sentence. The moods in English have their sentence-type counterparts.

Declarative – statement sentence type (E.g. *I am going home.*)

Imperative – command sentence type (*E.g. come with my bag*)

Interrogative – question sentence type (E.g. *Who is there?*)

As Allen and Widdowson (1975, p. 75), cited in Celce-Murcia (2014) noted, the three main English mood systems correspond to the three main communication functions of language: telling someone something, asking someone something, and getting someone to do something. Given these explanations, declarative or indicative sentence mood is appropriate for the students' L2 writings because it addresses the reader directly.

2.3.11 Voice

The active and passive voices are also one of the basic building blocks of the verbal group (Kaur, 2018). Active voice is the subject of the phrase doing the verb's action. The active voice accentuates the actor. Active voice is mostly preferred because it is crisper, more concise, and more alive (Yelin & Samborn, 2009). Simply put, active sentences are sentences in which the subject acts. The passive voice is a sentence whose subject suffers (subject to action) from what is stated in the predicate. Not all active sentences can be made passive (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). Active sentences that have an object can be changed into passive sentences. Commands and exclamations cannot be used passively. Often, the active voice is more recommended than the passive voice. It is because by mentioning the actor as the subject of the sentence, the meaning of the sentence will be clearer without leaving confusion to the reader and not forcing the reader to digest the meaning more deeply (Fitria, 2021).

Verbs in passive sentences in English always use the past participle. Mustika (2017), stated that in English, the passive voice uses the formula “**to be + V-en** (Past participle)” which is based on the tenses used (time of occurrence). The verb tenses that are frequently and most commonly accepted by active and passive voices are:

Simple Present

1. Kafui writes the memo. (Active)
2. The Memo is written by Kafui. (Passive)

Simple Past

1. He swept the house. (Active)
2. The house was swept by him. (Passive)

Present Continuous

1. She is reading the newspaper. (Active)
2. The newspaper was being read. (Passive)

Past Continuous

1. They were cleaning the room. (Active)
2. The room was being cleaned. (Passive)

Present Perfect

1. They have completed the punishment. (Active)
2. The punishment has been completed. (Passive)

Past Perfect

1. They had danced the whole night. (Active)
2. The whole night they had been dancing. (Passive).

It is worth noting that the passive was the last verb to appear in the string, thereby assuming its position as the final optional auxiliary element. According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), it is perceived that the learning challenge of the passive voice is the form. Nonetheless, learning to use the passive voice presents a long-term challenge to ESL/EFL students.

The textual metafunction of language falls within the domain of the clause as a message. Under this function, “we organise our messages in ways that indicate how they fit in with other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing.” (Thompson, 2004, pp.30). The textual metafunction represents the relationship to textual interactivity (which is examined with reference to disfluencies such as hesitations, pauses, and repetitions). Spontaneity (natural or unrestrained reaction), which is determined through a focus on lexical density, grammatical complexity, coordination (how clauses are linked together), and the use of nominal

groups and communicative distance—that is, looking at a text’s cohesion, how it hangs together, as well as any abstract language it uses. The textual orientation concerns the verbal world with the flow of information in a text, which relates to clauses as messages. It is described by Halliday (1994, pp. 97) as the “relevance” or the enabling function. As a message structure, a clause consists of a theme accompanied by a rheme. The theme is the element that serves as the point of departure or starting point of the message, and the rheme is the part in which the theme is developed. According to Eggins (1994), cited in Bakuuro (2017), the theme typically contains familiar or given information, which has been provided somewhere within the text or is similar to the context. For example;

The thief + has stolen my father’s hat.

My father’s + hat has been stolen by the thief.

THEME

RHEME

In the above, we have players. That is, the doer and receiver. From the above, the speaker has chosen what elements he deems fit to become the themes in the two sentences. Hence, a theme in a clause is a matter of the speaker/writer’s choice and not a fixed element. As Hoang Van Van (2006, p.161) points out, functional grammar provides linguists “a vibrant pool of instruments which helps researchers to tackle not only phonological but also grammatical (syntax), semantic and discoursal problems of a text.

2.4 The challenges of teaching and learning the English verbal group

According to Bloor & Bloor (2013) and Halliday & Mathiessen (2014), the Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) expresses language as an entity that develops in response to the specific demands of the society in which it is used. Halliday adds that

the nature of language is closely connected to the functions it must serve and that it reflects aspects of the situation in which it occurs. These are the three metafunctions (interpersonal, ideational/experiential, and textual). To them, language is a representation of human experience, serving as an instrument of thought to conceptualize or represent the experiential or real world to ourselves, including the inner world of our consciousness. Therefore, another name for a clause as representation is clause as experiential construct, equally known as the ideational function of language (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014).

The textual metafunction of the clause portrays it as having a theme and a rheme, clause as a message. The interpersonal metafunction has a mood and a residue clause as an exchange.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), grammar in general encompasses three dimensions when it comes to its teaching and learning. These dimensions are morph syntax (form), semantics (meaning), and pragmatics (use). For SHS, three students to present their L2 writing accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately, teachers need to identify the challenges of their students and tailor the teaching objectives to the learners' needs. Students, as well as teachers, face challenges during the teaching and learning of the English verbal group. As Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (2014) explain, students are exposed to the form of the **BE** verb and the **third-person singular inflection**, which is the interpersonal metafunction in systemic functional grammar, almost immediately in any English class or any English-speaking environment they find themselves. These verbal groups are superficially simple to describe and understand, yet they pose problems for students at all levels of proficiency. The **BE** verb poses the greatest challenge because it functions as an auxiliary verb as well as a copula verb. The **BE** verb's structural role as a copula links nonverbal predicates (i.e. Nouns,

adjectives, and certain adverbials, also known as prepositional phrases) with their subjects and serves as a carrier for tense and subject-verb agreement. That is, in the present tense, the form of the **BE** verb reflects the person and number of the subject noun as well as signalling present tense.

E.g. **I am, he is, you are, etc.**

The structural function of the copula **BE** is different from the use of *be* in the progressive form or aspect, where **BE** combines with *-ing* to make the action denoted by the main verb more limited. For instance,

Copula: I am or He is / tall/a teacher/ in town.

Auxiliary: He is talking to Ama.

Auxiliary **BE** always occurs in conjunction with another verb, which is why it is referred to as an **auxiliary verb**. The auxiliary verb functions as a progressive aspect and as an auxiliary element in the passive form in several phrasal modals. The copula *be* is the most frequent in English and has a more distinct form concerning person, number, and tense than any other verb in English. Compared with the traditional paradigm for the verb **BE** to that of a lexical verb, such as **walk**, makes this clear: Thus, a verb **walk** has two present tense forms and one past tense form. E.g. **Present: Walks-** third person singular, **Walk-** all other persons and numbers. **Past: Walked-** all persons and numbers. The verb *be* as a copula has three distinct present tense forms and two past tense forms. Another unique feature of the copula **BE** is its syntactic behaviour, just like an auxiliary verb and has the operator function concerning question formation, negation, and other constructions, for instance, **come**, which requires the addition of a **do** auxiliary as the operator if no other auxiliary is present.

E.g. Selorm **is** a teacher.

Edem come(s) to school.

Is Selorm a teacher?

Does Edem come to school?

Selorm isn't a teacher.

Edem **doesn't** come to school.

As the main verb **come**, other copula verbs, apart from **BE**, take the *do* auxiliary in questions and negatives. Failure to recognise and teach this special status of the **BE** will result in sentence errors. E.g., **Did he become** the president? She **doesn't feel** well.

Another challenge is the use of the wrong form of **BE** in a sentence. As in: "**Am** in the classroom." instead of "**I'm** in the classroom."

Finally, the copula **BE** does not occur in all languages, especially in the present tense; many languages have nothing equivalent to the copula **BE**, but all languages have verbs. Thus, students end up with its omission. E.g. * **Vera in the room.*** According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), the **BE** verb as a copula is a marked form, and its meaning is primarily temporal and aspectual.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), even though students have challenges with the form and use of the **BE** verb, some teachers, unlike students, do not have control over the subject matter and therefore do not teach it at all.

Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) stated that the challenge with concord is specifically to the third-person singular form of the verb. This is the number agreement between the subject and the verb only in the present tense, where the third person singular is explicitly inflected, while other forms are not. Given this complexity, students tend to simplify and omit the third-person singular inflection. For example, ***He live in Accra.*** instead of, **He lives in Accra.** Occasionally, some students overgeneralize the inflection and apply it to uninflected forms such as modal auxiliaries or to verbs following modals.

E.g. ***Jasmine cans jump.*** Or ***Jasmine can jumps well.***

Students sometimes overuse the inflection as an agreement marker because they interpret the *s* ending as a plural marker on the verb to be used in agreement with a plural subject.

For instance, ***I / They / You comes to the house.*** ***The students goes for breakfast every morning.***

Larsen-Freeman (1976), cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2014), explain that the reason for the omission, the slow and late acquisition of the third person singular inflection on the verb, might be its lack of perceptual saliency (difficult to hear at the end of the word as **asks**) and its low frequency of native speaker speech. In addition, it is the only inflection in the present tense with little communicative utility since the person or number is always clear from the subject nominal group, just as it is with the other persons and numbers that do not take any inflection. Reid (1991), cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2014), explained that all English verbs have a number, except the **BE** verb, which encodes numbers lexically even in the past tense; other English verbs encode numbers only in the present tense. The challenge with subject-verb number agreement is that **form, meaning, and use** are associated with it. When a form is synthetically singular but notionally plural (or vice versa), there is a potential conflict (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

Research has identified that when it comes to the **perfect and progressive aspect** of the verb, students face the challenge of omitting one of the two important constituents when forming one of the aspects. (ie. The auxiliary verb, **have/ be**, or the principal inflections (**-ing/-en**)).

Another challenge is how students learn to deal with the **irregular form of the verbs and the past participle form**. The regular forms, the past, and the participles do not cause undue stress because they all end in **-ed** inflection. The irregular vowels

and consonant changes in the English verbs become a great challenge for students. Because teachers cannot teach every structure in the classroom, it becomes a problem at all levels where students find themselves.

E.g. **buy, bought, bought** **throw, threw, thrown**

In the case of **tense and aspect** combination, the distinction between **the simple past** and **the present perfect** is also one of the challenges faced during the teaching and learning of the verbal group. Inoue (1979), cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2014), pointed out that the present perfect is identical to the past. For example,

1. Selase *has jumped* the wall.
2. Selase *jumped* the wall.

Here, if the time of the jumping is the same, then there is no difference. However, the present perfect is more on the present perception rather than the actual time the event took place. This concept is very difficult to get across to students.

On the other hand, the use of the **simple present tense and the present progressive** for future scheduled events and plans is sometimes indiscernible. Some of these uses are very close, and difficulties may arise. For instance,

1. Vera *arrives* today.
2. Vera *is arriving* today.

In this case, both tenses can be used, but the simple present is more formal and impersonal. Learning to use the tense appropriately seems to be the greatest challenge students face with the verbal group.

Another challenge students face is the choice between *will* and *will to act* appropriately. This is because **modals** are one of the most difficult structures teachers

and students have to deal with. As already stated above, students overgeneralize the third-person singular inflection –s ending to modals. E.g. ***Esi cans sing.***

Another challenge that students may face with the modals is how they precede the main verb without when two ordinary verbs follow each other in sequence.

E.g., I must eat gari.

I want to eat gari.

(Modal + Verb)

(Verb +Verb)

* I must to eat gari.*

* I want eat gari.*

According to Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2014), many students treat modals like ordinary verbs and produce errors by adding superfluous *to infinitives*. *

You must to study hard for the final examination.*

Apart from the complications about modals, another challenge is when teachers attempt to convey their meaning in context to students because modals are used for various reasons. According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), like *may*, virtually all modals can express both logical probability and social interaction. The lexical auxiliary or phrasal modal **used to** is also a challenge for students because of its inflection, which normally manifests in their L2 writing. This challenge stems from the way it is pronounced by both teachers and students, for instance: ***use to.***

The teaching and learning challenge of **tense-aspect modality** is when students in their L2 writing suddenly leave the present tense axis to the past tense and to future time in a short discourse (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2014). The reason for this challenge is that they have learned the tense system bit by bit at the sentence level without ever learning how the bits interact in large pieces of discourse.

In conclusion, the challenges in teaching and learning the verbal group are common in students' L2 writing. These errors encompass **BE** verb and the **third person singular inflection, irregular form of the verbs and the past participle form, tense**

and aspect, modals, and voice. Recognizing the specific challenges associated with each pattern and employing tailored instructional strategies are essential for teachers to support their students' language learning.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Grammar- M.A.K. Halliday (1985)

The focus of this study is based on Halliday's (1985) systemic functional grammar framework, which revolves around language, works within a context and serves effectively to attain the goals of the study. The framework is constructed around some basic concepts, one of which is the concept of "metafunction". Considering the clause as a unit in which meanings of three different kinds are combined, the clause serves as a pivot around which metafunctional discussions centre. Halliday divides the way we use language into three different metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. As Hong Van Van (2012, pp.16) puts it, functional grammar provides linguists "a vibrant pool of instruments", which helps researchers to tackle not only phonological but also grammatical (syntax), semantic and discoursal problems of a text.

In assessing the forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing, this framework, based on the triangulation of the three metafunctions- ideational, interpersonal and textual, offers a comprehensive perspective that aligns with the objectives and issues identified in the study. With systemic functional grammar, the English verbal group is not restricted to prescriptive rules about linguistic form, but by the unity of ideational, interpersonal, and textual for communicative purposes. In addition, the metafunctions are not in a hierarchical arrangement as many conventional as many other conventional linguistic approaches presume, but rather interconnected and have equal importance. This interconnectedness is represented through lexico-grammar and discourse semantics. As SHS students often encounter

difficulties in grasping the complexities of verbal group work, this framework offers a structured and interconnected model to guide their instructional strategies. It promotes a balance between explicit grammatical knowledge and the ability to apply this knowledge meaningfully in diverse contexts, thus serving as a robust theoretical foundation for the study.

2.5.1 Systemic Functional Grammar Framework – M.A.K Halliday (1985)

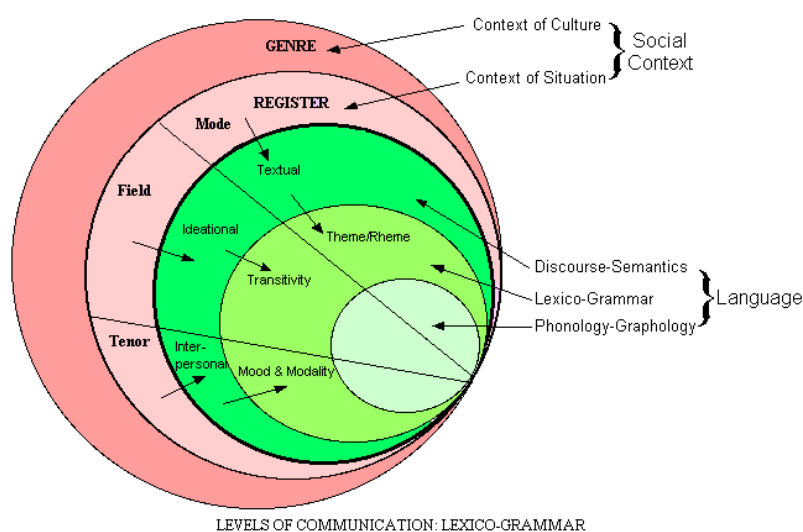


Figure 1: Levels of communication: Lexico-Grammar

2.5.1.1 Interpersonal Metafunction

According to Halliday & Mathiessen (2004), the interpersonal metafunction in the systemic functional grammar framework is a clause as exchange, which views language use as involving interactions that initiate or respond to the act of giving or demanding information. The principal grammatical element in this metafunction is the mood, which is a choice between imperative and indicative. In the interpersonal metafunction, the verbal group in the mood is split into finite and predicate, which work with the subject. Subject + finite and residue containing the predicate. The interpersonal metafunction analyses how students of English as a second language

select and combine the forms of the verbal group in the clause to interact appropriately and meaningfully in their L2 writing.

For example, 1. *She is a singer.* (Simple structure)

is=finite and event-infused.

The above is in a simple present tense expressing the identity of the person, in the active voice and in the indicative or declarative mood.

2.5.1.2 Ideational/Experiential Metafunction

The ideational metafunction of language in the Systemic Functional Grammar framework is used as an instrument of thought, conceptualize or representation of the experiential or real-world, including the inner world of our consciousness (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004). The principal grammatical element in this metafunction is transitivity, which is the verbal group in the clause. According to Halliday (1994), the ideational metafunction is the overall source for constructing experience. It explains the activity expressed by a sentence's participants and the manner of the participants. The role of the verbal group in the metafunction is the process type (mental, material, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioural). In students' L2 writing, the analysis of transitivity focuses on the functions of the main verb to conclude on the kind of process the selected verbal group expresses.

E.g. Africa is the best continent.

The verbal group *is* expresses a relational process indicating the attribute of the African continent.

2.5.1.3 Textual Metafunction

According to Thompson (2004), the textual metafunction emphasizes the fact that language is used to organize discourse and create continuity and flow in our text or

conversation. The textual metafunction falls into the domain of the clause as a message. The theme in the textual metafunction is the grammatical system or element, while the rheme expands the discourse process beyond the theme. The textual metafunction plays both a linguistic and a social role in the language. The theme is the starting point of a message, as the rheme is the rest of the message. Given this, in the current study, the textual metafunction analysis the functions of the verbal group of the information from where it typically contributes to a new information (rheme) in students' L2 writing. In this study, the researcher analysis how students organize their messages clearly and how their verb choices support coherence and flow in writing.

- **Theme :** *Africa* (topical theme)
- **Rheme:** *is the best continent*

The verbal group *is* in the above statement expresses the identity of Africa as the best continent.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) provides a robust theoretical framework for examining the forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing. SFG conceptualises grammar as a meaning-making resource, where linguistic choices are shaped by the communicative purposes and contexts in which language is used. Within this framework, the verbal group realises the **process** element of the clause and plays a central role in expressing experiential meanings, interpersonal relations through mood and modality, and textual cohesion in discourse.

This framework is particularly relevant to the present study because it enables an analysis of students' difficulties with the verbal group beyond surface-level grammatical errors. From a Systemic Functional Grammar perspective, students' inappropriate selection and combination of verbal group elements reflect challenges in

deploying grammatical resources to realise intended meanings in context. By examining verbal group constructions in terms of tense, mood, modality, and processes, the study aligns with Systemic Functional Grammar's emphasis on the interaction between form, function, and context.

Furthermore, Systemic Functional Grammar provides systematic categories for analysing authentic student texts, making it well-suited to the qualitative case-study design adopted in this research. The framework guides the identification and interpretation of verbal group patterns in students' writing, which allows the researcher to relate these patterns to broader issues of meaning-making and coherence in L2 discourse. Consequently, the Systemic Functional Grammar framework offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically meaningful basis for understanding the challenges faced by Senior High School students in using the English verbal group within the Ghanaian context.

2.6 Related Studies

A study conducted by Luvuno & Ajani (2021) at a university based in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, to determine if the explicit instruction of selected grammar aspects, modal auxiliary verbs, improved students' ability to write English. The study was qualitative in nature, and a case study design was adopted. The focus was in relation to a sample of 80 student teachers who were randomly selected in the Faculty of Education. Participants of 40 were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. For the experimental group, training lasted six weeks. Both groups were made to write similar essays, and those essays were marked focusing on the students' ability to use modal auxiliary verbs. The study's findings revealed that the experimental group performed better than the control group in the use of modal auxiliary verbs. Based on the findings, the study recommended explicit grammar instruction at all students'

levels of study in order to overcome the challenges they have in writing English. Thus, time should be created to ascertain that adequate explicit grammar lessons are offered to all pre-service teachers at the university. This study is similar to the current study because it analyses students' essays based on the use of the verbal group, specifically the modal auxiliary verb, which is one of the four elements examined in the current study. This study focuses on university students in South Africa, while the current study focuses on Ghanaian Senior High Schools. Additionally, the study used only one instrument in its data collection.

Vivianti et al. (2021) conducted a study on the topic "Realization of mood and modality in the analytical exposition of undergraduate students of Tidar University, finds out that in 15 analytical exposition texts made up of 511 clauses there were only 72 clauses that contain the use of 'can' and 'will' expressing possibility and 14 clauses with "should" expressed obligation. According to the researchers, students underuse modal verbs in their expository texts, exposing their low level of proficiency in the verbal group.

Adejare (2022) conducted a study on the topic: "Revisiting the Description of Tense in English." The study was not based on field data collection but critically reviewed materials to properly situate the main argument against existing descriptions of tense in English. The study explained that traditional grammarians' conceptualization of tense, which narrowly interpreted English to have only two tenses to mean morphological representation only, whereas a language's grammatical system consists of both syntactical and morphological aspects. Therefore, the study proposed the future tense marked syntactically by placing the modal auxiliary WILL/SHALL or the lexical auxiliary BE GOING TO before the base form of the verb, as the mechanism for future tense marking in English. This study has a slight similarity with the current

study in the use of reviewed material and the focus on tense, which is only one of the functions of the verbal group. The study adopts the natural language theory as a framework.

Fema & Abubakar (2020) also conducted a study on the topic “The Auxiliary Verbs and Their Functions: An Overview.” The discussion is done by reviewing the works of different authors on the auxiliaries, distinguishing the two sets - **the primary auxiliaries** (have, be & do) and **the modal auxiliaries** (can, could, dare, may, might, must, need, ought, shall, should, will & would). Each set of the auxiliaries is discussed with much emphasis on different usages to illustrate how crucial the auxiliaries are, as far as the conjugation of the verbal group is concerned. Their findings show that students need constant practice of the auxiliary verbs with other components of the English verbs and verb formation, such as tense, aspect and modality. Personal pronouns should be extensively taught along with the finite operators to help students understand how to use the various auxiliary verbs in oral and written communication.

With all the studies conducted on auxiliary verbs, none of them concentrated on the importance of teaching and learning auxiliary verbs by ESL students to help them write competently at the tertiary level. The studies looked at the challenges of students’ use of only the auxiliary verbs while the current study analysis the forms of the verbal group including the auxiliary verbs. The studies do not conduct interviews and observation to ascertain the challenges of students’ use of the auxiliary verbs. The studies lack the use of a Systemic Functional Grammar framework that monitors the effective use of the auxiliary verbs all of which the current study pays particular attention to.

Larsen-Freeman (2002) conducted a study on “Helping Students Make Appropriate English Verb Tense-Aspect Choices” and found out that one of the difficult

grammatical areas for ESL/EFL students to master is the English verb tense-aspect system although this area is not usually perceived as being especially difficult to teach. The reason for this study is that grammatical rules exist that capture the structural facts concerning the various tense-aspect combinations and the semantic facts related to what meanings these combinations convey. Their study explained that tenses are taught singularly, even though the tense-aspect combination is a system; this is because it functions as such at the level of text. Their study stated that it is very important to identify that students' greatest learning challenge lies in knowing the difference between the present perfect and the simple past. Quite apart from the semantics of the verb itself, the past perfect and the simple past, or the simple present and the present progressive, also compounds the learning and teaching challenge. To them, learning to identify how tense-aspect combinations operate in discourse helps students practice the tense-aspect system as a resource that promotes cohesion in texts.

In furtherance, Rahman & Ali (2015) conducted a qualitative study on the topic "Problems in Mastering English Tense and Aspect and the Role of Practitioners." The study examined some difficulties EFL learners face in their attempt to master tense and aspect properly. It also explored the ignorance of lexical aspects, which causes problems in learners' attempts to learn and use tenses and aspects properly. Finally, the study explores the roles English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners played in helping learners overcome the problems they face in mastering tense and aspect. The study revealed that most learners face problems in mastering tense and aspect due to their L1 interference. In addition, it appeared that many EFL learners fail to master tense and aspect properly because 'ESL/EFL course and materials often ignore lexical aspect and its effects in the structures presented.

The study of Larsen-Freeman (2002), Rahman & Ali (2015) conducted on tense-aspect choices and challenges lacks real-world classroom observation and interview with participants. Both studies are on corpus analysis and focus on only two functions of the verbal group. The current study uses interviews, focus group discussion, analysis of students' essays and classroom observation as instruments for the study. Larsen-Freeman employed the three-dimensional framework in her study while Rahman & Ali adopted the functional grammar framework just as the current study. Additionally, the studies are foreign-based in the tertiary institutions.

A study conducted by Basri (2006) on "Syntactic Properties of The English Verbs in Students' Essays" was a cross-sectional design done quantitatively in Makassar. The study used a proportional random sampling technique to determine the 200 sample texts that had been produced by the different graded levels of students in English departments. The essay writing as a research instrument was used for gathering data about the students' problematic repertoires of English verbs based on the syntactic properties in terms of tense, aspect, voice, and mood, with their constituents. The students were provided with 12 topics, and they had to choose the most familiar (attractive) one for an 80-minute essay. Findings indicated that students' essays contain more inaccurate properties of the English verbs more than the accurate ones. The diverse constituents of the English verbs on syntactic properties (i.e. tense, aspect, voice, and mood with its indicators) showed that students' performance of the English verbal group are weak (mood with 34.63%), weaker (tense with 27.83 % and aspect with 21.51%), and weakest (voice with -35.72%). This study has a similar focus on the functions and the forms of the verbal group but it was a quantitative approach, lacks the use of the Systemic Functional Grammar Framework, interviews, focus group discussions and observation. The current study is sited in the Eastern Region of Ghana,

adopts the Systemic Functional Grammar Framework with a qualitative approach and focus mainly on four Senior High Schools.

A study by Fitria & Muliarsi (2022) Analyzed undergraduate students' ability and their difficulties in identifying passive voice. This descriptive qualitative study took place at the University of Indonesia with 51 participants. The approach used a test as an instrument for collecting data. The findings revealed that active sentences are easier to construct for students rather than passive sentences. The researchers explained that students needed to learn passive voice to remember the form and structure of the sentence itself. In addition, for student to change active voice to passive voice correctly, students must understand the reason for the formation of each sentence. In another vein, Larsen-Freeman (2014) explained that the challenge students face with the passive voice is not about the *form* but rather the *use*, especially when using *been* or *being* in the passive voice. This study analysis a function of the verbal group similar to the current study, which examines the functions of the forms of the English verbal group used in students' L2 writing. Nevertheless, the study did not adopt interviews and observation in the data collection and analysis. The participants are undergraduate students in the University of Indonesia, a foreign institution.

A study conducted by Guo (2006) on “Verbs in the Written English of Chinese Learners: A Corpus-based Comparison between Non-native Speakers and Native Speakers.” The study was a mixed method approach in nature and a corpus based design by detecting the similarities and disparities between Non-native Speakers and Native Speakers written English. The focus was on the forms of verbs where the findings suggested that L2 learners underuse English verbs as compared to the native speakers. On the other hand, L2 learners have more challenges in the use of verbs in their L2 writings rather than native speakers. This study, even though it was carried out in

Birmingham University, with Chinese learners of English Language shares some similarities with the current study, which is the analysis of the verbal group forms.

The findings from Sylviane et al. (2019) on the topic “Lexical verbs in academic discourse”, states that undergraduate students select verbs depending on the type of essay they write. These students turn to make use of limited verb forms or patterns. The study also observed that even at the advance level, learners still need help to acquire the appropriate grammatical structures. On the other hand, learners’ large population and the simplification of the very few textbooks contributed to the challenges of learners’ inability to use verbal group appropriately in communication.

Issah (2017) investigated errors in the use of English tense and aspect in the written compositions of students at Wulugu Senior High School in the Northern Region of Ghana. Using students’ written essays as data, the study identified frequent misuse of tense forms, inappropriate aspectual choices, and confusion between simple and perfect constructions. The findings revealed that students often relied on rote knowledge of grammatical rules without understanding their functional meanings in context. Issah attributed these difficulties to inadequate instructional approaches and students’ limited exposure to meaningful writing practice. This study is relevant to the present research as it empirically confirms that Ghanaian SHS students experience persistent difficulties with tense and aspect—core functional elements of the verbal group. However, the study focused narrowly on tense and aspect and did not examine the broader forms and functions of the verbal group as a meaning-making resource.

Gyau (2022) conducted a quantitative study on the deviant use of mood and modality in argumentative essays written by second-year students at Berekum College of Education in Ghana. The study analysed students’ use of modal verbs and mood structures and found widespread misuse of modals, resulting in ambiguity and

weakened interpersonal meaning in students' writing. The study concluded that students struggled to express obligation, probability, and certainty appropriately due to limited functional understanding of modality. Although the study provides valuable insight into modal usage within the Ghanaian context, it was conducted at the tertiary level and adopted a quantitative approach. The present study extends this line of inquiry by examining modality alongside other verbal group functions in Senior High School students' writing using a qualitative framework

Nartey et al (2024) evaluated the use of modal verbs in essays and assignments written by teacher trainees in a Ghanaian College of Education. Adopting a qualitative case-study approach, the researchers found that although modal verbs were frequently used, many were functionally inappropriate or semantically misaligned with the intended meanings of the texts. The study highlighted students' overreliance on a limited range of modals such as *can*, *will*, and *must*, and their inability to distinguish subtle modal meanings. This study is relevant to the current research because it demonstrates how Ghanaian learners struggle with modality as part of the verbal group. However, it focused exclusively on modal verbs and did not examine other components of the verbal group, such as tense, aspect, and voice, which the present study seeks to address holistically.

Agor (2018) analysed intra-sentence grammatical issues in the written work of undergraduate students in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. The study identified persistent grammatical problems, including verb form errors, agreement issues, and inappropriate clause construction. The findings suggested that many of these difficulties stemmed from earlier stages of language learning and were carried over into higher education. Although the study was conducted at the tertiary level, it provides empirical evidence that grammatical challenges—particularly those involving verb structures—persist

across educational levels in Ghana. This supports the need for studies at the Senior High School level to examine how verbal group forms and functions are developed and used in L2 writing.

A study by Bakuuro (2017) focuses on the difficulties Ghanaian SHS students encounter in studying English grammatical concord in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The author aimed to identify the challenges that teachers and students face in the teaching and learning process and to suggest ways of improving the situation. The study adopted a Mixed-Method approach using interventions and a questionnaire to collect data. The study used convenience and purposive sampling methods. The participants were ten English teachers and twenty students. The data were analysed thematically, and the researchers identified several challenges that teachers and students faced in the teaching and learning of the verbal group. According to the study, the challenges that teachers face include large class size, an inadequate number of qualified teachers, limited instructional hours and inadequate teaching and learning resources. Students, on the other hand, face challenges such as their background knowledge of the English language, difficulty in understanding the structure of the verbal group, and a lack of interest in the subject. The researchers suggested that addressing the challenges identified in the study could help improve students' proficiency in the English Language and their overall academic performance.

The study by Bakuuro (2017) adopts intervention tests and questionnaire as data collection tools. The current study make use of interview, focus group discussion, observation and content analysis as instruments for data collection. Their study focused on error analysis and causes for the challenges. The current study is based on triangulation of data findings and discussion for in-depth result. Finally, the current

study takes place in the Eastern Region of Ghana, precisely the Lower Manya Municipality.

Adejare (2012) conducted a qualitative study on the topic “Textual Functions of the English verbal group” using data from spoken instructional texts recoded in selected secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria. Four subjects (Christian religious knowledge, Geography, Physics, and Chemistry) and four teachers were participants. The framework employed is natural language theory. The study identified 27 textual functions, which described entities. Present tense *BE* and imperative mood expressed the highest percentage of the functions. The study confirmed that the verbal group underrepresents its textual functions in natural language.

After reviewing numerous studies on the English verbal group in students’ L2 writing, it becomes evident that the majority of the literature has concentrated on error analysis of the verbal group in exception of Adejare (2012), who examined the forms and functions of the verbal group in the spoken communication by teachers.

Although some of these studies provide valuable insights into specific aspects of verb usage among Ghanaian learners, they do not offer a holistic, functional analysis of the English verbal group in Senior High School students’ writing. Consequently, there is a need for a qualitative study grounded in Systemic Functional Grammar to examine how students select and use verbal group forms to realise meaning in context. The related studies also used a singular aspect of the objectives thus a forms of the verbal group, often neglecting other equally vital components crucial for in-depth exploration.

Furthermore, many studies relied solely on reviews of other research documents, with only a limited number adopting text without classroom observation and interviews as an instrument. In addition, none of the studies focused on four Senior

High Schools in the Lower Manya Municipality. Given this, the researcher aims to bridge this gap by focusing on the forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing. Through a combination of content analysis, observation, focus group discussions and interviews, the study will be conducted in four Ghanaian Senior High Schools within the Lower Manya Municipality. Its primary objective is to investigate the forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing and delve into the challenges both teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of the English verbal group.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The chapter starts with an introduction, the concept of the English Verbal Group, the attributes of the concept of the Verbal Group, Forms of English Verbal Group in Students' L2 Writing, Functions of English Verbal Groups in Students' L2 Writing, and Challenges of Teaching and Learning the English Verbal Group. The theoretical framework adopted by the researcher was thoroughly discussed in the chapter of the thesis. The methodology and research design are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The literature on the topic was vividly reviewed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the discussion is on the methodology used for data collection, processing, and analysis. The chapter described and justified the research design used. Additionally, how the participants were sampled, with the instruments and procedures employed for data collection, were well explained. There is also an explanation of the techniques in the analysis and the interpretation of the data collected. Finally, interrater reliability and ethical issues were addressed in this chapter.

3.1 Research Approach

According to Creswell (2006), the research approach involved procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data in a study. Burke et al. (2014) identify three research approaches, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

The research study adopted the **qualitative approach**. According to Crossman (2018), qualitative research emphasizes understanding phenomena in their own right, open, exploratory research questions, unlimited emergent description options, and special strategies for enhancing credibility. According to Buston et al. (2018), the qualitative research approach seeks to answer ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ questions rather than ‘how often’ and ‘how many’. The prime goal is not to enumerate as it is in the case of a quantitative approach. Similarly, Creswell (2009) states that qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Buston et al. (2018) state that, the key characteristic of

qualitative research facilitates the researcher's understanding of the meaning assigned to the phenomena by those being studied. Hence, the recognition that the qualitative approach is particularly pertinent in providing insight into the dimension of care that matters to those receiving the care. The human problem in this study is the inappropriate use of the English verbal group by Senior High School Form three students in their L2 writing. Students at this stage of their academic level are to master the forms and functions of the English verbal group with no or little difficulty, but to no avail. The qualitative approach is the best way to explore the forms of the verbal group in students' L2 writings, the functions, and the challenges during the teaching and learning process.

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a logical model of proof (Nachmias & Nachmias, 2014). Another way of thinking about a research design is as a "blueprint", dealing with what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyze the results (Kothari, 2004; Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell (2012), the purpose of a research design is to accomplish a complete comprehension of the context being studied. For that matter, the study design is a case study.

3.2.1 Case Study

According to Yin (2012), a case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the case and the context may not be evident. Case studies, according to Stake (1995) as cited in Creswell & Poth (2018) are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures

over a sustained period. Therefore, a case study in this research design focuses on multiple cases; thus, teachers of the English language and students offered literature-in-English in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality's four Public Senior High Schools. The researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the inappropriate use of the English verbal group in L2 writing within these four Senior High Schools. In addition, the case study is embedded within the larger context, which is the municipality. The researcher describes the forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing, specifically in the selected schools.

3.3 Description of Research Site

The study is in four (4) public Senior High Schools in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality, the Eastern Region of Ghana. These schools are Krobo Girls' Presbyterian Senior High School, Akro Technical Senior High School, Manya Krobo Senior High School, and Akuse Methodist Technical Senior High School. These schools were selected because they are part of the double-track system for easy accessibility. On the other hand, the situation found in them reflects that of the other High Schools in Ghana; hence, the findings that were obtained may be the same as the findings in all other Senior High Schools.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size is an efficient and practical way for data collection since it forms the basis of the population under study. Sampling also describes a sample drawn from a larger population (Burke & Christensen, 2014). According to Creswell & Clark (2009), purposive sampling, collection of open-ended data, analysis of text or pictures, representation of information in figures and tables, and personal interpretation of the findings all inform qualitative procedures.

Purposive sampling techniques may be defined as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions. Maxwell (1997), cited in Teddlie & Yu (2007), further defined purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which, "particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 87). Therefore, the researcher purposively selected ten (10) Form 3 General Arts classes in the four Senior High schools that offered Literature-in-English because they write many essays using various shades of verbal group structures.

The researcher used **quota sampling**, a non-probability sampling method. This means the sample selection was not random and did not provide an equal chance of being selected. The researcher allocated to each school's target population 15% based on their performance, and that was categorised under **above average**, **average**, and **below average**, resulting in 75 students. Additionally, **convenience sampling** involves drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Therefore, (10) teachers were willing to take part in the study, so they were successfully sampled. To arrive at the sample size of 85 participants for the study, the researcher, before commencing the data collection procedure, met with the respective schools involved at the time of submitting permission letters to the various schools, and with the help of the Heads of Departments for Languages, students were selected. Table 8 presents the details of the students selected.

Table 8: students sampled

Name of Schools	Type	Enrollment	Percentage		Participants	
			allocated		focus groups	
School A	Public	313	15%	46	8	
School B	Public	100	15%	15	3	
School C	Public	47	15%	8	2	
School D	Public	40	15%	6	1	
Total		500		75	14	

3.5 Data Collection and Procedure

In this study, the researcher used four instruments to collect raw data. These were students' essay scripts, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. These tools, although different, were used to complement one another for the comprehensiveness of the research objectives. According to Yin (2018), case studies using multiple sources of evidence were rated more highly, in terms of their overall quality, than those that relied on only a single source of information.

3.5.1 Essay scripts

Before embarking on the data collection exercise, the researcher seeks permission from selected schools through letters. On the very day, the researcher requested students' exercise books upon meeting with the Heads of Departments and other essay materials, such as mock papers, available for photocopy. After persistent requests, the researcher receives mock essays for the analysis. In the end, some students submitted more than one essay type, totaling two hundred and eighty essays (280). This becomes successful with the help of some teachers involved in the study.

Table 9: Number of scripts

Schools	Number of script types	Number received
School A	mock & assignments	200
School B	mock	20
School C	mock & group work	30
School D	mock	30
Total		280

To avoid interpretation overload on 280 essays, the researcher selected one essay per participant, which illustrated verbal group patterns to maintain rich qualitative depth. Therefore, the total scripts analyzed was **75**.

3.5.2 Interview

Apart from students' essays, interviews are another instrument used to collect data for this study. Richards (2003, p. 51) describes an interview as a "conversation with purpose." Buston et al. (2018) explained that one of the commonly used qualitative methods of data collection includes an interview of various forms. For instance, semi-structured, an in-depth session, and focused group discussions. Creswell (2018) states that a qualitative interview means the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants or interviews participants by telephone on the internet. The semi-structured interview was used to solicit teachers' views on the challenges they encountered during teaching the English verbal group. In this process, the researcher not only listened to what was said but also what was meant. Being a good listener, the researcher assimilates large amounts of new information from interviewees without bias. All interviews were carried out in the respective schools of the participants. The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder. Later, manually transcribed on paper and given codes

when the researcher played the sound bite. The data was coded with the letter **T-** to represent a teacher, respectively. For clarity, the first two letters of the alphabet that begin the names of the schools were indicated before numbers were attached. For instance, the teacher interviewed from Krobo Girls' SHS is coded as **KRT1**. Appendix C has more details.

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion was also one of the instruments used in collecting the data for the study. A focus group discussion is also a qualitative research method with a small, diverse group of participants that engage in open and structured discussion about a particular topic or research area to gather in-depth insights and opinions from the group members through group dynamics and interactions (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The focus group discussion with a **minimum of 4 to a maximum of 6 participants in each group** was conducted with students in the four selected Senior High Schools, thereby arriving at **14 groups** in all. The discussions were recorded with a digital audio recorder, transcribed manually on paper, and given codes when the researcher played the sound bite. The data was coded using the letters **G-** to represent a group of students, respectively. For clarity, the first two letters of the alphabet that begin the names of the schools were indicated before the letter **G**, and numbers were attached. For instance, the focus group discussion from Akro SHTS is coded as **AKG1.2** (participant).

The interview data were transcribed using verbatim or naturalized transcription to preserve participant's original language use, including grammatical inaccuracies, hesitations, and incomplete constructions that were analytically relevant. A standardized qualitative transcription coding system was applied consistently across all transcripts, using uniform speaker labels, pause markers and line numbering. This

approach ensured that the data were suitable for systemic functional grammar analysis of verbal group structure, transitivity, and theme-rheme cohesion, and provided a stable base for systemic coding and interrater reliability.

3.5.4 Observation

Observational evidence is often useful in providing additional information about the study. Similarly, observations can add new dimensions for understanding the actual uses of a new technology or a curriculum and any problems encountered. A common procedure to increase the reliability of observational evidence is to have more than a single observer observing, whether of the formal or casual variety (Yin, 2018). Given this, the researcher co-opted a colleague teacher of English to assist her in the observation session, both as non-participants. In a semi-structured way, six classes were observed because six participating teachers willingly agreed to be observed, focusing on an observational checklist. This eventually created room to focus on specific aspects while remaining open to unexpected or emerging phenomena. The researcher coded the data just as in the interviews. The classroom observation checklist was structured around Halliday's three metafunctions **interpersonal, ideational (experiential), and textual** to examine how teachers taught the English verbal group and how students responded during instruction.

The interpersonal metafunction focused on how the teacher used verbal group instruction to negotiate meaning, stance, and interaction in the classroom. Specifically, the checklist examined whether the teacher emphasised **form correctness alone**, such as memorisation of rules and verb forms, or encouraged students to use the verbal group to **express attitudes, opinions, and degrees of certainty** in context. Attention was also paid to whether the teacher provided **feedback beyond surface correctness**, including explanations about the **appropriateness of verbal group choices** in particular

communicative situations. In addition, the checklist captured whether the teacher scaffolded learning through examples and guided activities that positioned students as **active participants** rather than passive recipients of grammatical rules.

The ideational metafunction addressed how verbal groups were presented as resources for construing experience. Observation items under this category focused on whether the teacher explained the **verbal group as a realisation of process**, rather than merely as a tense label. The checklist examined whether verb types were linked to **specific contexts of use**, such as actions, states, or habitual processes. Students' responses were also observed, particularly instances where students showed **confusion in differentiating verb tenses and aspects**, revealing difficulties in mapping grammatical forms onto experiential meanings.

The textual metafunction focused on how verbal group choices contributed to **text organisation and cohesion** in students' writing. The checklist examined whether the teacher explicitly highlighted the role of verbal group consistency in creating coherent essays, especially in expository writing. This included whether the teacher demonstrated how the **simple present tense** functions to maintain cohesion in expository texts. Students' written and oral examples were observed for **consistent or inconsistent use of verbal groups across a text**, which revealed areas of confusion in tense selection. Additionally, the checklist recorded whether the teacher modelled how verbal groups operate within **theme–rheme progression**, showing how clause-level choices contribute to the flow of meaning in a text. Appendix **B** has more details.

3.6 Data analysis

The **data was analysed** through content and thematic analysis of students' L2 writing on the first and second research objectives. The third research objective used evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, and observation with participants

sampled. According to Yin (2018), using multiple sources of evidence permits going beyond appreciating the breadth of a case study's scope.

3.6.1 Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). Mayring (2000) stated that qualitative content analysis is “an approach of empirical methodologically controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step-by-step models, without rash quantification” (p.2). In addition, content analysis is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p.453). These three definitions illustrate that qualitative content analysis emphasizes an integrated view of speech/texts and their specific contexts. Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes, and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. Given this, scripts obtained for the study were coded for easy reference, and the existing literature on the forms of the verbal group and their functions in the texts was identified. Concerning coding the scripts, the researcher first assigned the letter **S-** to each script selected, where **S-** represented scripts. Additionally, numbers were assigned to the scripts, beginning from one and upward, based on the forms and their functions of the English verbal group in those scripts and in the order in which the scripts were discussed. Hence, **S1-** means script one under study, while **S14-** refers to script fourteen under study.

3.6.2 Thematic Analysis

In addition to the content analysis, the study adopted a thematic analysis of teachers and students through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The researcher used the deductive approach (predefined themes). The researcher develops four main headings or pillars based on prior knowledge, existing theories, or specific research objectives. The researcher then analyzed the data by transcribing all audio recordings and organizing the notes from observations to ensure a comprehensive record of the collected data (Smith, 2020).

The initial data review phase began once the data had been organized to familiarize oneself with the content by reading through the notes from observations, focus group discussions, and interview transcripts. This provided a broad and comprehensive summary, laying the foundation for the subsequent analysis (Jones, 2019).

3.7 Validity Test

To enhance the validation process, content validity and pilot testing were employed. The content validity concentrated on the coding framework, where two experienced teachers of English grammar were consulted. They reviewed the categorization of the verbal group based on **Forms, Functions, clarity, comprehension of definitions, coding categories and accuracy in distinguishing verbal group functions**. With the help of a detailed coding framework including definitions and examples, a set of sample-coded students' scripts, and a feedback form for comments on clarity, comprehensiveness, and applicability, the teachers confirmed that the framework adequately captured the forms and functions of English verbal group in students' L2 writing. To assess whether the coding scheme could be consistently applied, the same two teachers, using a sample of 3 students' essays across different

proficiency levels, conducted a pilot test. The purpose of this pilot test was to determine whether there were ambiguities in categorization. The teachers coded the samples independently and compared results to confirm that the coding framework was practical and applicable.

3.8 Reliability

The issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research is often demonstrated through a particular technique of reliability. Reliability describes consistency within the employed analytical procedures by the use of a measuring device. A measurement is said to be reliable or consistent if the measurement can produce similar results if used again in similar circumstances (Noble & Smith, 2025).

Rasib et al. (2023) argue that reliability comes in four main types. Each can be estimated by comparing different sets of results produced by the same method.

1. Test-retest: The same test over time.
2. Inter-rater: Different people conduct the same test.
3. Parallel forms: Different versions of a test, which are designed to be equivalent.
4. Internal consistency: The individual items of a test.

A common way of assessing the reliability of observations is to use inter-rater reliability. Langdrigde (2011) states that interrater reliability is the extent to which two or more raters agree on classifying a common observation. It is a helpful measure in assessing the consistency of the implementation of the rating system. To enhance the credibility and consistency of data analysis in students' L2 writing, the researcher considered the interrater reliability between herself and an independent rater on the *forms and functions of the English verbal group* in students' L2 writing. This is to ensure an interpretative consistency. *The Krippendorff Alpha* was selected as the

reliability measure because it accounts for agreement for nominal data. It is appropriate for two or more raters, works with a small sample group, and is reliable for content analysis. The researcher, based on the previous quota sampling procedure, selected essay scripts from three performance levels- *above average, average, and below average* from the total essay scripts of 75 participating students, 32% totaling 24 scripts, were double-rated.

To establish interrater reliability, the **24** scripts were coded as, **Simple Structure** (**v only**= write, reads ate is, are, were, was, have, has, had, does, did), and **Extended Structures** (**ov**= will come, are singing), (**oxv**= is being paid), (**o (neg.) v= are not eating**), and (**inflected verbs as operators**=decided to marry). On the other hand, functions of the verbal group were also coded respectively. They are *transitivity* (processes), *textual* (theme-rheme), and *cohesion* (reader flow). The categories were clearly defined in the coding manual, with guidelines, examples, and explanations to prevent ambiguity and for consistent interpretation. There was a calibration session that catered for training on the coding manual, pilot coding with 5 essays independently, comparing the results to discuss inconsistencies to refine and adjust code guidelines where necessary.

Table 10: Proportional Distribution of Rated Essays

Schools	Proficiency Level	Total Scripts	Total Scripts	Sample for Double-Rating
School A	Above Average	46	6	2
	Average			2
	Below Average			2
School B	Above Average	15	6	2
	Average			2
	Below Average			2
School C	Above Average	8	6	2
	Average			2
	Below Average			2
School D	Above Average	6	6	2
	Average			2
	Below Average			2
Total		75	24	24

The distribution table visualizes equal performance levels of participants to avoid biases. On the other hand, the focus is on capturing *forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing* rather than achieving numerical balance. In addition, the focus of a qualitative case study is on its depth, rich description, and in-depth exploration of verbal group usage (Creswell 2012), not statistical generalization. Finally, the equal distribution in the case of cognitive and pedagogical explanation, Larsen-Freeman (2011) explained that learners at different proficiency levels exhibit distinct grammatical patterns in communication. In addition, to ensure comprehensive representation, the researcher adopted a flexible yet systematic approach.

3.9 Interrater Reliability Test on Coded Forms of Verbal Group

For validity, comprehensiveness, and reliability on the coded forms of the English verbal group, the researcher and another rater independently rated 24 students' essays across performance levels. The Krippendorff Alpha coefficient (α) is used to measure agreement. Below are the results:

Table 11: Results of the interrater reliability test by performance levels on the forms of verbal group

Performance level	Krippendorff Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Average	0.957	Very high reliability
Above Average	0.953	High reliability
Below Average	0.926	High reliability

According to Krippendorff (2011), Krippendorff's alpha (α) measures interrater reliability, where $\alpha \geq 0.800$ indicates strong agreement, $\alpha \geq 0.667$ is the minimum acceptable threshold for tentative conclusion, and $\alpha < 0.667$ is unacceptable reliability. Given this, the inter-rater reliability values on the forms of verbal group in students' L2

writing exceeded 0.900, suggesting near-perfect agreement between the two raters. The disparity between the lowest (below average performance level), 0.926, and the highest (average performance level), 0.957, is 3.1 percentage points, a minor but potentially meaningful difference. This is because Rater A applied subjective criteria for the above performance level, where, for instance, a student wrote:

1. Baroka want's to take a new wife.
2. Its a bad decision on the part of Sidi.

In the first sentence, the verb *wants* does not accept a possessive indication like the student wrote. Therefore, the rater ignored it, which was rated by rater B as a main verb with an error. Also, the verbal group that needs an apostrophe mark because it is the contracted form of the verb suffers the same criteria.

Some students with below-average performance levels face the challenge of spelling the verbs *have* and *has*. They are always written “*as*” and “*ave*” by omitting the letter *h*, which becomes confusing and brings about slightly lower disagreement. This suggests a challenge in *category-specific*. This aligns with prior findings that extreme categories always reduce inter-rater reliability (Krippendorff, 2018).

For in-depth credibility, comprehensiveness, and reliability on the coded functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing, Krippendorff Alpha coefficient (α) is used to measure agreement. Below are the results:

Table 12: Results of the interrater reliability test by performance levels on the functions of the verbal group

Performance level	Krippendorff Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Above Average	0.862	High reliability
Average	0.800	High reliability
Below Average	0.724	High reliability

The qualitative comparative analysis of 24 rated scripts across performance levels showed verbal group patterns and accuracy. The above-average performers demonstrated a more structured use of verb forms, making the functions (ideational and textual metafunction) easier to classify. There was some ambiguity in tense and the absence of punctuation marks, resulting in fewer disagreements between raters. The average performers exhibited minor inconsistencies in verb tense, which affected their choice of passive voice constructions; there was a slight disagreement between raters. With below-average performers, although recorded lowest, still high, more revealed inconsistencies in students' use of verbal group. Reasons for this include the omission of finite operators, inappropriate choice of verb tense usage leading to ambiguity in coding, and challenges to cohesion. There were non-standard constructions, making classification of the intended meaning more complex. Below are some errors identified.

1. The play **as** numerous themes. (has)
2. If her bride price is not **payed** she will not accept his proposal. (paid)
3. Her husband and her co-tenant **tells** her that she can not be **employ**. (tell, employed)
4. The house they lived in **were** a small place. (was)
5. Males were **giving** preference. (given)
6. The teacher **saw** that Adah, who **is** in the class, and **ask** why the kids **are** laughing. (Mismatch of tense instead of *was, asked and were*)
7. She **is** a good mother who **never left** her children with anybody. (Mismatch of tense instead of **was** and omission of **had/ has**)
8. The use of contrast **seen** in the poem where the caged bird **being compared** to the free bird. (omissions of the verb *is*)

9. Wole Soyinka, who won so many prizes, due to the books he wrote. (omission of the verb *is*)

10. He is able to bribe the contractors. (can)

In summary, the interrater reliability portrays the verbal group patterns observed in students' essays as valid and trustworthy. The majority of students present their L2 writings on the present tense axis, which paves the way for the specific choice of categories of verbal group that enables students to convey their intended messages.

Nevertheless, the slight decrease in agreement among below-average students highlights the difficulty of mastering complex verbal group structures. This aligns with Larsen-Freeman (2014), who stated that students' long-term challenge in choosing appropriate verb tenses has to do with learning when to use one tense versus another. This result reinforces the need for explicit instruction on the tense-aspect system in students' L2 writing. For full Krippendorff Alpha calculations by category, Appendix A has more details.

To establish the quality of the interview transcripts prior to thematic analysis, an interrater reliability check was conducted using a transcript quality rating sheet. Two independent raters evaluated a randomly selected 20% of the interview transcripts based on predefined criteria focusing on verbatim, accuracy, consistency of transcription conventions, and analytical usability for examining verbal group structure, transitivity, and theme –rheme cohesion. Each criterion was rated on a binary scale (0 = unacceptable, 1 = acceptable). Interrater reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha, yielding $\alpha = 0.82$, which indicates a high level of agreement and confirms that the transcripts were of sufficient quality to support reliable qualitative analysis.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

In every research work, the researcher is obliged to respect the values and rights of the participants. Given this, the ethical checklist by Hennink et al (2011) guided the study. Hennink et al (2011) posited that ethical considerations such as informed consent, self-determination, minimization of harm, anonymity, and confidentiality should be considered at all times. Given this, the researcher sent a letter of introduction from the Faculty of Foreign Languages to the Heads of the four Senior High Schools selected, seeking permission to carry out the study.

After being introduced to the Heads of Departments for discussion about the study, the researcher wrote letters to participating teachers and students through the Heads of Departments to seek permission by stating what the study was about and why it was important or socially useful. In addition, all the participants were informed why their opinions were important and how they were selected (Dornyei, 2010). Participants were also assured of anonymity, that is, their actual names during data collection would not be exposed therefore the researcher pseudonymize the data.

The researcher also assured confidentiality. For instance, before beginning the study with the focus group, the researcher ask the participants to agree to keep what is discussed confidential and to respect each other's privacy. Appendix **D** has a sample of the permission letter.

3.11 Chapter Summary

The chapter describes the methodology used in the study. The researcher has justified the methodological principles underpinning her inquiry. The research approach, design, population, how participants were sampled for the study, and instruments used for the data collection procedure were adequately presented. The chapter also explained how the analysis and interpretation of data for the study were

carried out. The validity test ensured that the coding scheme for the study was comprehensive and applicable across proficiency levels.

The interrater reliability test of the results showed that the coding was consistently applied, which enhanced the study's credibility. Finally, ethical issues were duly catered for to respect the dignity and integrity of all participants involved in the study.



CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents data analysis from the four instruments used: content analysis, interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. The study is divided into three main sections according to the research questions, and each research question is discussed under the main themes discovered from the data collection. All discussions are guided and rooted in the theoretical framework that underpins this study, which is discussed in Chapter 2. **This theory is Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar Framework.**

The analysis focuses on the forms of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing, the functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing, and the challenges of teaching and learning the verbal group. As said earlier, the analysis is divided into three main parts. The first part examines the forms of the English verbal group in students' L2 writings, which analyses themes on the **simple structure and extended structures (mood/ modality + predicate)**. These themes help identify how the verbal group is formed in students' L2 writing.

Additionally, the second part assessed the functions of the English verbal group used in students' L2 writing, focusing on **Transitivity (process) and textual organization**. The themes under this research objective identified the semantic and grammatical meanings of the forms of the selected verbal group. It equally looked at how these forms are used in the context of the English Language. To achieve rich description and an in-depth exploration, the researcher focused on the **performance levels** of students' L2 writings of data analysis on forms and functions of the verbal

group (**above average, average, and below average**); this is because of the quota sampling technique used.

Furthermore, the third part of the study investigates the challenges in teaching the English verbal group. In this instance, the focus is on the **challenges in teaching and learning the metafunctional roles of the verbal group based on classroom observation, focus group discussions and interviews**. All discussions were guided and grounded in the theoretical framework.

4.1 Research Question 1:

What Forms of English Verbal Group are used in the L2 writing of SHS Three Students in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality?

This section addresses Research Question One by examining the forms of verbal groups in students' L2 writing, with a particular focus on simple (V) and extended verbal group structures (OV and OXV) within the simple present and simple past tense systems. The analysis is grounded in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), which conceptualises the verbal group as a central grammatical resource for construing experience, enacting interpersonal relations, and organising text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The findings reveal a strong dominance of simple verbal group structures, realised mainly through lexical verbs without auxiliary elements. Extended verbal group structures occur infrequently, with OV structures appearing sporadically and OXV structures being largely absent. This pattern suggests that students operate largely within minimally expanded verbal group systems, limiting their ability to express aspectual, temporal, and voice-related meanings.

This finding aligns with earlier empirical studies in L2 writing, which report that learners tend to rely heavily on simple verb forms due to their lower processing

demands. For instance, Biber et al. (2011) found that L2 learners overwhelmingly favour simple clause structures and underuse complex verb phrase constructions, particularly in academic and narrative writing. Similarly, Hinkel (2004) reports that ESL learners often avoid auxiliary-based constructions, leading to restricted grammatical complexity in written texts.

4.1.1 Simple structure

The simple verbal group structure, realised through a single lexical verb, constitutes the most frequent form in the data. These structures are predominantly encoded in the **simple present tense**, with fewer instances of the **simple past tense**. Ideationally, the simple present tense construes experience as habitual or general, and it is mainly associated with **material** and **relational processes**.

Empirical studies consistently show that L2 learners overuse the simple present tense across genres. Verspoor, Lowie, & Van Dijk (2008) argue that learners initially rely on unmarked tense forms as default options, particularly when genre expectations are not fully internalised. Likewise, Schleppegrell (2004) demonstrates that students often struggle to shift from everyday language patterns to more context-sensitive tense choices required in school-based writing.

Although the simple past tense appears in recount-type texts, its use is inconsistent. Frequent tense switching within single texts suggests difficulty in maintaining a stable temporal frame. This finding supports Bardovi-Harlig's (2000) claim that mastery of tense morphology does not automatically translate into discourse-level control of tense in extended writing. The source text's code is preceded by examples ('S5' stands for the script and the specific number allocated).

Examples:

1. (S5): Adah **is** an eight-year-old girl.
2. (S12): Titi, Vicky, Dada, and Sunshine **are** their children
3. (S9): This suspension **opened** the chance for him.
4. (S10): Baroka **has** no knowledge of school but **has** much knowledge of tradition.
5. (S9): Africans **have** hope to overcome the suffering and exploitation.
6. (S50): Baroka, who **is** a cunning man, **deceives** her.
7. (S15): Look Back in Anger, **written** by John Osborne, is a non-African drama.
8. (S17): The drama **talks** about the theme of social class distinction.
9. (S32): I **am** sure this strategy will help reduce malpractices in my school.
10. (S5): She **did** her best to write the examination.

4.1.2 The extended verbal group structure

The **OV structure**, comprising a Finite operator and a lexical verb, is used mainly to realise **progressive aspect** and **passive voice** (e.g. *is writing, was played*). However, such constructions occur only sporadically and are often marked by auxiliary omission or tense mismatch. From an ideational perspective, OV structures enable writers to construe processes as **ongoing** or to foreground **affected participants** through passivisation. The limited use of OV structures in the data, therefore, constrains the range of experiential meanings available to students.

This finding echoes results from Ortega (2003), who observed that L2 learners' written production shows significantly less grammatical complexity than native-speaker writing, particularly in the use of auxiliary-based verb constructions. Similarly, Norris & Ortega (2009) found that learners' acquisition of progressive and passive

constructions is slow and highly dependent on explicit instructional input. The **OXV structure**, which realises more delicate meanings such as **perfect aspect**, **progressive–passive combinations**, and **perfect–passive constructions**, is largely absent from the students' writing. Where such structures occur, they frequently exhibit incorrect auxiliary sequencing or auxiliary substitution. Within SFG, OXV structures represent a higher level of **verbal group expansion**, allowing writers to layer meanings of time, aspect, and voice within a single clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The near absence of these structures suggests that learners have limited access to the more delicate systems of the English verbal group.

Empirical research strongly supports this interpretation. Larsen-Freeman (2006, 2015) notes that perfect aspect and complex auxiliary combinations are among the most challenging grammatical resources for L2 learners because they involve subtle meaning distinctions rather than transparent form–function mappings. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) similarly report that learners often avoid perfect constructions in writing, even at relatively advanced proficiency levels. Interpersonally, the dominance of simple verbal group structures positions propositions as **general and non-specific**, reducing the writer's ability to signal stance, relevance, or evaluative distance. Textually, inconsistent tense selection and limited use of extended verbal groups disrupt **temporal cohesion** and weaken the logical progression of ideas across clauses.

These findings are consistent with Schleppegrell's (2004) argument that grammatical choices play a crucial role in constructing coherent academic texts, and that limited control over tense and aspect undermines students' ability to manage information flow in writing. Hyland (2007) further emphasises that such grammatical limitations directly affect text quality and reader interpretation. Overall, the findings indicate that students demonstrate emerging control over the **formal accuracy** of

simple verbal group structures but show limited ability to expand the verbal group to realise meanings that are more complex. This pattern aligns with a growing body of empirical research suggesting that L2 learners' grammatical difficulties are not merely morphological but also **functional and discourse-related** in nature (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). The restricted use of OV and OXV structures, therefore, reflects developmental constraints in learners' grammatical repertoires and highlights the need for pedagogical approaches that explicitly integrate **form, meaning, and use** in the teaching of the English verbal group.

The analysis of the students' written texts revealed varied realisations of negation within the verbal group. Within the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) framework, negation is treated as an **interpersonal grammatical resource** that encodes polarity and positions the writer's stance in relation to the proposition (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The findings of this study align with this view, as negation was realised primarily through the verbal group in students' clauses.

One prominent pattern involved **modal negation**, where negation was attached to a modal finite. For example, in the clause "*A little room that will not be okay for them,*" the verbal group *will not* consist of the modal Finite *will*, the negator *not*, and the Predicator *be*. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), modal Finite elements are responsible for encoding tense and modality, while negation operates to reverse polarity within the clause. In this example, negative polarity is realised in the future tense, constraining a relational attributive process and signalling the writer's negative evaluation of the situation.

Another pattern observed in the data was the use of **contracted negative Finite forms**, as in "*Francis won't help Adah in any way.*" Here, negation is realised through the contracted form *won't*, which fuses the Finite *will* and the negator *not*. As noted by

Biber et al. (2011), contracted negatives are common in both spoken and written English and function to encode tense and polarity simultaneously. From an SFG perspective, the verbal group *won't help* realise a negatively polarised material process, expressing refusal or unwillingness and thereby enacting a strong interpersonal stance.

The data also revealed instances of **correlative negation**, such as “*Bono and Troy were not only co-workers but very good friends.*” Although the clause includes the negator *not*, polarity remains positive. Eggins (explains that the structure *not only ... but also* functions rhetorically to expand and intensify meaning rather than to negate the process. In this example, the Finite *were* realises a relational process in the past tense, while the correlative structure strengthens the interpersonal force of the clause by emphasising the closeness of the participants’ relationship. This indicates that some learners deploy negation-related structures as discourse resources, even when the verbal group itself is not negatively polarised.

These findings indicate that students demonstrate **partial control of negation within the verbal group**. While learners realise negative polarity through modal and auxiliary constructions, their use of negation appears uneven across different clause types. This observation supports Larsen-Freeman’s view that L2 grammatical development involves gradual expansion in both form and function, rather than linear mastery of structures. From an SFG perspective, the data suggest that learners are still developing their ability to use verbal group resources to express interpersonal meanings in extended writing. Below are the source texts’ code preceded by examples (‘S5’ stands for the script and the specific number allocated).

4.1.2.1 Structures with one Finite operator and an Event. (o v)

This one finite operator is necessarily the auxiliary.

1. **(S12):** In the first chapter, it **was noticed** that Adah started school.
2. **(S22):** Adah did not cry to express her love for Francis when he **was going** away.
3. **(S9):** He **becomes frustrated** and aggressive towards everybody around him.
4. **(S15):** Helena **will take** the position of Alison and marry Jimmy.
5. **(S21):** Jimmy **can do** anything to her.

4.1.2.2 Structures with one Finite operator, an Auxiliary and an Event. (o x v)

6. **(S3):** Africa **is being attributed** to paradise.
7. **(S35):** After they **have been released** from prison.
8. **(S19):** The caged bird **is being compared** to the free bird.
9. **(S22):** The dreams and aspirations of the caged bird **have been buried**.
10. **(S16):** Our skin **should be kept** for us to live strongly.
11. **(S1):** Baroka **is considered to be** a lion and a king.
12. **(S11):** This **can be pointed** out when Alison invites Helena.
13. **(S22):** A student in the boarding house, found outside without an exeat, **would be dismissed**.
14. **S19:** The people of Ibuza believe that men **are to be educated**.

4.1.1.3 Structures with negation

14. **(S7):** He **does (not) respect** himself.
15. **(S3):** The magazine contains pictures that people **have not seen** before.
16. **(S31):** A little room that **will (not) be** okay for them.

17. (S9): Bono and Troy **were not** only co-workers but very good friends.

18. Francis **won't** help Adah in any way.

4.1.1.4 Structures with an inflected verb operator and non-finite infinitive

15. (S20): Adah **decided to write** a book.

16. (S5): She **had to work** and care for her children.

17. (S12): Troy **begins to cheat** on his wife.

18. (S10): Baroka **is said to have** many wives.

19. (S30): Troy **learnt to play** baseball in jail.

4.1.3 Identified Errors

1. Sidi **do** not listen to Lakunle. (subject-verb agreement, *does*)
2. Baroka **have** married her in the end. (instead of *has/ marries*)
3. The use of contrast , **seen** in the poem where the caged bird , **being compared** to the free bird. (omissions of the finite operator *is*)
4. Wole Soyinka, who won so many prizes , due to the books he wrote. (omission of the finite operator *is*)
5. He still **have** more to choose from and **have** more to give. (error in subject-verb agreement instead of *has*)
6. Bono also **have** cheated, but his was better. (subject-verb agreement the use of *has*)
7. Rose **was hurted** because she loved her husband so much. (instead of *hurt*, irregular verb conjugation)
8. She is **being** proud of herself because of the image **being** brought to her. (instead of *is proud, she has*).

9. The dreams and aspirations of the caged bird **has being** buried. (instead of *have been*)
10. It shows how the power of females **are** seized because they have no rights. (inappropriate form of finite operator instead of **is**)
11. Adah **must to** wake up at 4:30 am to fetch water. (introduction of preposition after a modal verb)
12. Francis **as** rejected the children at the court. (L1 interference instead of **has**)

4.2 Research Question 2:

What are the Functions of the English Verbal Group used in the L2 writing of SHS Final year Students in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality?

This research question focuses on the **metafunctions** of the verbal group in Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar Framework. The transitivity of the English verbal group is discussed in terms of what the main verb is, what kind of experience it represents and how learners construct meaning through verb choices (**process and participant**). In short, the way students express themselves in a particular way is called processes (the most dominant processes identified in students' L2 writing are the **material, the mental and the relational**). The researcher further analyses how students organised their messages clearly (**Theme –Rheme**) and how their verb choices support **coherence** and flow in the L2 writing. Interpersonal metafunction analysis the commitment the finite expresses, and also whether clauses present facts, general truth or immediate events. The researcher analyses the grammatical functions against the forms of verbal group identified in students' L2 writings, which aligns with the metafunctions of the framework. Below are the source text's code examples, preceded

by the script number ('S2' stands for the script and the specific number allocated according to performance levels).

4.2.1 Ideational metafunction

4.2.1a Analysis on transitivity system (process type and participants)

1. (S4) *Before Troy **goes** out on that Friday he **makes** sure he **gives** all the money he **has gone** for as his pay to his wife then the rest **will be sent** to **drink** alcohol.*

Verbal group	Process type	Tense/ structure type
goes	Material	simple present/simple VG
Makes	Mental	Simple present/Simple VG
gives	Material	Simple present /Simple VG.
has gone	Material	Perfect aspect/ extended VG
Will be sent to drink	Material	Future passive/ extended VG

Ideationally, the verbal groups construe experience primarily through **material processes** (*goes out, gives, will be sent*), representing Troy's actions and the movement of money. The dominant use of the **simple present tense** construes these actions as **habitual or routine**, suggesting that the events are interpreted as regularly occurring rather than as a single past incident.

The verbal group **has gone** indicates an attempt to realise **perfect aspect**, which typically construes a completed process with current relevance. This suggests emerging awareness of aspectual meaning, even though the realisation is unstable. Similarly, **will**

be sent construes the process as **projected into the future** and shifts focus from the actor to the affected participant (*the rest*), indicating an attempt to deploy **passive voice** to manage experiential focus. The excerpt demonstrates that the student uses verbal groups to sequence actions and allocate roles, but relies heavily on minimally expanded structures, limiting the range of experiential meanings available.

Interpersonally, the consistent use of the **simple present tense** positions the propositions as **generalized statements** rather than as temporally specific events. This choice reduces the speaker's commitment to a particular time frame and presents the actions as typical behaviour. The modal operator **will** in *will be sent* introduces a degree of **predictability or certainty** about future action, signalling the writer's confidence in the outcome. This indicates control over the Finite as a resource for negotiating interpersonal meaning.

4.2.1b Textual Metafunction (Theme- Rheme & Cohesion)

Textually, the verbal groups contribute to the organisation of a sequence of actions linked by temporal and logical relations (*before, then*). However, the use of present tense across clauses creates tension with the temporal circumstantial element *that Friday*, weakening temporal cohesion. Despite this, the passive construction *will be sent* helps maintain thematic continuity by foregrounding *the rest* of the money rather than the actor, contributing to information flow within the clause complex. This excerpt shows that the student is able to use verbal groups to construe sequences of material actions and to experiment with expanded structures such as perfect aspect and passive voice. However, the heavy reliance on simple present tense constrains the ideational and textual meanings that can be realised, particularly in relation to temporal specificity. The analysis suggests that the learner's challenge lies not in the absence of

grammatical resources but in the functional deployment of verbal group choices to align meaning with context.

4.2.2a Analysis on transitivity system (process type and participants)

2. (S16) *Africa is the best continent and do not need to be given wrong misconceptions.*

Verbal group	Process type	Tense/ structure type
is	Relational	Simple present/simple VG
do not need to be given	Material (passive)	modal + passive infinitive construction/extended VG

is the best continent:

A **relational process** expressing quality and identity, linking *Africa* (Carrier) with *the best continent* (Attribute). This construes Africa's identity positively and evaluatively.

do not need to be given wrong misconceptions:

A **material process** expressed in **passive voice** (*be given*) with a **modal operator** (*do not need*). This construes an action imposed on Africa (*being given wrong misconceptions*) and negates it, highlighting what should or should not happen. The use of **modal + passive** allows the writer to talk about obligations and social expectations rather than personal actions. The verbal groups express not only identity (relational) but also agency and evaluation (material + modal), showing the student is trying to encode both **what Africa is** and **what should or should not be done to it**. The interpersonal function is that the **simple present tense "is"** conveys a strong, **general statement of**

fact, giving the text an assertive, declarative stance. The modal construction “**do not need to be given**” enacts **negative obligation**, signalling the writer’s evaluative stance: Africa should be treated in a certain way. Overall, the excerpt positions the writer as **authoritative and opinionated**, expressing both judgment and guidance.

4.2.2b Textual Metafunction (Theme- Rheme & Cohesion)

The conjunction **and** links the relational clause (*Africa is the best continent*) with the modal-passive clause (*do not need to be given wrong misconceptions*), creating **cohesion** and a **logical sequence** from identity to social consequence. Passive voice in the second clause foregrounds **Africa as the participant affected**, maintaining thematic continuity and keeping the focus on the continent rather than on the actor imposing misconceptions. This excerpt shows that the student uses verbal groups to achieve multiple functions: relational processes establish Africa’s identity, while modal-passive constructions convey evaluative meaning and social expectations. Ideationally, the actions highlight what should or should not happen; interpersonally, the modal expresses stance; and textually, passive voice maintains thematic cohesion. The excerpt demonstrates emerging awareness of how verbal group structures can simultaneously encode **identity, evaluation, and participant focus**, even if formal accuracy is still developing.

4.2.3a Analysis on transitivity system (process type and participants)

3. (S10) *Baroka is said to have many wives.*

Verbal group	Process type	Tense /structure type
<i>is said</i>	Verbal (stative) passive	Passive voice/extended VG
<i>to have</i>	Material	Non-finite

is said:

Verbal process (relational/mental) realised in **passive voice**, representing reported speech. Ideationally, this frames the information as **attributed to someone else** rather than the speaker, showing indirect experience.

to have many wives:

Material process embedded in the infinitive, indicating possession (*have*) and specifying what is attributed to Baroka. The student uses verbal groups to encode **reported experience**, signalling that the information is **second-hand knowledge**. This demonstrates awareness of how passive constructions can shift experiential focus from the speaker to the participant (Baroka). The passive construction “**is said**” reduces the writer’s personal commitment to the proposition, creating **distance and hedging**. This allows the writer to present potentially sensitive information about Baroka without asserting it as an absolute fact. Interpersonally, this shows emerging awareness of **stance-taking** through verbal group choice.

4.2.3b Textual Metafunction (Theme- Rheme & Cohesion)

The passive **foregrounds Baroka** as the main participant, keeping the thematic focus on him rather than on who says it. The infinitive phrase “**to have many wives**” complements the main clause, adding detail and completing the experiential meaning. Textually, this structure maintains cohesion by presenting the main participant first and embedding the associated action second. In this excerpt, the student effectively uses verbal groups to encode **reported experience**. The passive construction *is said* shifts focus from the speaker to the participant, while the infinitive *to have many wives* conveys material meaning associated with that participant. Ideationally, the clause

construes reported possession; interpersonally, it creates hedging and manages stance; and textually, the structure foregrounds the main participant and maintains thematic cohesion. This indicates that the student is developing awareness of **how verbal group structures can realise meaning beyond surface grammar**.

4.2.4a Analysis on transitivity system (process type and participants)

4. (S10): *Baroka has no knowledge of school but has much knowledge of tradition.*

Verbal group	Process type	Tense /structure type
Has	Relational	Simple present /simple VG
Has	Relational	Simple present /simple VG

Both instances of **has** realise relational processes of possession, attributing different qualities to the participant Baroka. **Has no knowledge of school** construes Baroka as lacking formal education. **Has much knowledge of tradition** construes him as rich in cultural or traditional wisdom. Ideationally, the verbal groups are used to define Baroka's identity through contrast, not through action. The student is using the verbal group to express states of being and possession, showing awareness that meaning can be constructed relationally, not only materially. The contrastive conjunction **but** works together with the verbal groups to express **evaluation**. Interpersonally, the writer positions the reader to see **traditional knowledge as compensatory or even superior** to formal schooling. The repetition of **has** reinforces the evaluative contrast, giving equal grammatical weight to both propositions..

4.2.4b Textual Metafunction (Theme- Rheme & Cohesion)

The clause is organised around a **contrastive theme–rheme pattern**:

- Theme: *Baroka*
- Rheme 1: *has no knowledge of school*
- Rheme 2: *has much knowledge of tradition*

The repeated verbal group **has** provides **parallelism**, enhancing cohesion and clarity.

The conjunction **but** clearly signals logical contrast, aiding textual flow.

This excerpt demonstrates the student’s ability to use the verbal group to construct **relational meanings**. Ideationally, the possessive relational process *has* is employed to attribute contrasting forms of knowledge to the participant. Interpersonally, the contrastive structure encodes evaluation, positioning traditional knowledge as significant despite the absence of formal education. Textually, repetition of the verbal group and the use of contrastive conjunction ensure cohesion and thematic clarity. This shows that the student is able to exploit simple verbal group forms to realise **complex identity and evaluative meanings**.

4.2.5a Analysis on transitivity system (process type and participants)

5. (S1) *Adah cannot do all the house chores and take care of her children too.*

Verbal group	Process type	Tense /structure type
Cannot do	Material	modal + lexical verb /extended VG
Take care	Material	non-finite verbal group (infinitive) – coordinated with the first.

cannot do all the house chores:

Material process indicating action and ability, expressed with the modal **cannot**, which conveys limitation or inability. Ideationally, this construes Adah as an actor facing constraints in performing tasks.

take care of her children:

Material process embedded in the infinitive form, coordinated with the first action. Together, the verbal groups represent **simultaneous responsibilities**, highlighting the experiential reality of Adah's workload. The student is using verbal groups to express **agency, capacity, and constraint**, showing how actions and obligations are realised through modal and material verbal groups. The modal **cannot** express **negative polarity** and communicates **limitation or impossibility**, positioning the writer as assessing the situation rather than merely stating fact. Interpersonally, this allows the student to express **evaluation or judgment** about Adah's situation in a subtle, non-confrontational way.

4.2.5b Textual Metafunction (Theme- Rheme & Cohesion)

Coordination with **and** links the two material processes, presenting them as **joint responsibilities**, which adds **temporal and logical cohesion**. The subject **Adah** is maintained throughout, keeping the thematic focus on the main participant and structuring the clause for clarity. In this excerpt, the verbal groups function to construe Adah's experiences in terms of **capability and responsibility**. Ideationally, they encode material processes reflecting tasks she is expected to perform and her inability to complete them all. Interpersonally, the modal *cannot* communicate limitation, signalling evaluative stance. Textually, coordination ensures cohesion between related

actions and maintains focus on the participant. This indicates that the student is developing awareness of **how verbal group structures can encode complex experiential and interpersonal meanings** in a single clause.

4.2.6a Analysis on transitivity system (process type and participants)

6. (S15): *As Adah **got to** England, she **realizes** that the money which she **sent to** Francis in renting a room he **spent** some and then the little **left** he **used it to rent** a little room that **may not be** okay for them.*

Verbal group	Process type	Tense /structure type
<i>got</i>	Material	Simple past/simple VG
<i>realizes</i>	Mental	Simple present/ simple VG
<i>sent</i>	Material	Simple past/simple VG
<i>Spent</i>	Material	Simple past/simple VG
<i>Left... used</i>	material	Simple past/simple VG
<i>to rent</i>	material	Infinitive
<i>may not be</i>	Relational	modal + relational process/extended VG

Got to England is a material process showing **movement**, situating the participant temporally and spatially. **Realizes** is also **mental process**, representing Adah's cognition and awareness. This introduces the **experiential dimension of thinking** rather than only physical actions. **Sent/spent/used** a material processes describing the flow of money, showing **cause-and-effect relationships** between Adah's actions and Francis's use of the money. **May not be okay** is a relational process with modal, evaluating the adequacy of the room; it expresses potentiality or uncertainty. The student uses verbal groups to construe a **complex sequence of**

experiences, combining **material processes** (actions) with **mental and relational processes** (awareness and evaluation). This demonstrates an emerging ability to represent a **multi-layered experiential meaning** extended clause. **realises** signals **subjective awareness**, showing the writer's engagement with Adah's perspective. **may not be okay** introduces **hedging**, softening the evaluation and showing sensitivity to uncertainty. Interpersonally, the verbal groups position the writer as **narrator and evaluator**, guiding the reader through Adah's experiences while signalling caution or judgment.

4.2.6b Textual Metafunction (Theme- Rheme & Cohesion)

The verbal groups are sequenced to **create narrative flow**: movement → cognition → action → evaluation. Temporal markers (**as, then**) and coordination (**and**) organise the events sequentially, maintaining **thematic focus on Adah and the money's use**. The passive evaluation (*may not be okay*) shifts focus to the **result of actions**, helping manage **information flow and thematic cohesion**. This excerpt illustrates how the student uses verbal groups to represent **complex, multi-part experiences**. Ideationally, material, mental, and relational processes construct sequences of actions, cognition, and evaluation. Interpersonally, the mental and modal constructions guide stance, showing awareness of possibility, judgment, and narrative perspective. Textually, the sequence of verbal groups, coordinated by temporal markers, ensures cohesion and maintains focus on the main participants and events. This demonstrates the student's growing capacity to **deploy verbal group structures for rich experiential, interpersonal, and textual meaning**, beyond simple sentence-level grammar.

In conclusion, the analysis of students' L2 writing indicates that verbal groups primarily function to construe material actions and basic relational meanings. Students show some emerging use of mental and passive constructions, but extended structures (OV and OXV) are used sporadically, limiting the range of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings they can realise. From a Systemic Functional Grammar perspective, this demonstrates that learners' challenges are functional rather than purely grammatical. These findings underscore the importance of instructional approaches that integrate form, meaning, and context, supporting learners in using verbal groups as resources for expressing complex experiences, attitudes, and text organisation.

4.3 Research Question 3:

What are the challenges in Teaching and Learning the English Verbal Group?

Larsen-Freeman (2003) suggests that grammar instruction needs to not only promote awareness in students but also to engage them in meaningful production, that the proper goal of grammar instruction should be '*grammaring*', which is the ability to use grammar constructions accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. The researcher used interviews, focus group discussions and observation to investigate the challenges in teaching the English verbal group in four Public Senior High Schools in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality. These instruments align with Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar framework to uncover practical difficulties of the verbal group teaching and learning. Although the content analysis uncovered some challenges, students face with the verbal group in L2 writing, practical experiences would help in the final analysis. The interview for teachers begins with warm-up questions to gather their background experiences.

4.3.1 Experiences and knowledge of the verbal group

The researcher asks about the number of years participants have been teaching English at the Senior High School and the forms they currently teach. According to respondents, they have been teaching English at the SHS for over five years. Most of them are teaching the third-year form, and others teach both the second and third-year forms. The following are some of the responses from interviewees.

KRT1: I have been teaching at the Senior High School for 8 years now. I have experience teaching all the forms. I am currently teaching the third-year class.

MAT2: I have been teaching at the Senior High School for 6 years now. I currently teach the third-year students.

KRT2: I have been teaching at the Senior High School for 12 years now. I currently teach third and second-year students.

AKMT1: I currently teach all three streams. I have been teaching at the Senior High School for 18 years.

AKT2: I have been teaching at the Senior High School for 10 years now. I currently teach third-year students.

While warm-up responses highlight participants' experience, they help establish a rapport between the researcher and the participants. The researcher continues with the warm-up, seeking knowledge about the term, verbal group. This involves both teachers and students participants. As a preliminary enquiry, teachers' experience informs the detailed insight they have about the English verbal group. Below are their responses:

KRT4: I have never come across the grammatical term, verbal group; rather, it is a verb phrase, which means a phrase that has a verb as its head.

KRT2: eeh, verbal group? I am not sure, but I think they are verbs that appear in a sentence.

MAT1: verbal group! Okay, I have heard of a nominal group but not a verbal group. I think they are a group of verbs in any communication.

AKMT2: I am not sure, but I think verbal group are all the elements that form the predicate in a sentence.

AKT1: I think verbal group is action words in spoken or written communication.

MAG2.3: We have not heard of the verbal group in grammar but we know of verbs and nouns, for example irregular verbs and actions verbs.

The participants express some ideas about the term “verbal group”, but have little confidence. Some are surprised to hear about the word for the first time. With the responses from the participants, the researcher asks a follow-up question to ascertain more information. By so doing, she asks the participants to mention the aspects of the verbal group they enjoy teaching most and how they introduce the concept to students.

Below are their responses:

AKT1: I love to teach main verbs and how to conjugate it appropriately. I usually introduce the base forms of the verbs by writing them on the board and help students add the inflections before they use them in sentences.

KRT4: I enjoy teaching tenses by writing various sentences on the board for students to identify them in context.

KRT1: I prioritise teaching the primary auxiliary verbs, because students face challenges in selecting the appropriate auxiliary verbs to make meaning in their writings. I usually introduce them in simple sentences on the board and sometimes present short paragraphs that contain these verbs.

MAT2: I prioritise teaching the primary auxiliary verbs by listing them first on the board and helping students to use them in simple sentences. Sometimes the students are asked to underline the verbs in sentences.

MAT1: I love teaching the primary auxiliary verbs based on students' background knowledge of the verbs. I always use fill- the –blank spaces as an introduction.

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the warm-up section of an interview prevents frontloading complex questions, reduces participants' anxiety, and improves data quality. Explanation and the priorities of participants teaching the verbal group aspects bring the researcher and the participants to share the same lexical common

ground in avoiding misinterpretation of later responses. Responses also pave the way for theoretical knowledge and classroom practice, showing how teachers simplify or adapt complex concepts for students.

Participants' teaching experience ranges from 6 to 18 years. Analysis of the interview data revealed that a lack of familiarity with the term 'verbal group' was evident across this range of experiences. Teachers with both moderate and extensive teaching experience were unable to clearly define the concept, often equating it with the main verb or tense alone. For instance, a teacher with ten years of experience described the verbal group as *action words in spoken or written communication*, while a teacher with sixteen years of experience offered a similar explanation. From a Systemic Functional Grammar perspective, these responses indicate a restricted conceptualisation of the verbal group that does not vary substantially with years of teaching experience. Notably, participants across experience levels also reported a few challenges in teaching the verbal group and expressed confidence in their instructional practices

4.3.2 Challenges in teaching and learning the *interpersonal metafunction* of the Verbal Group

During the interview session, the researcher, to explore the structural teaching challenges, asked participants about the concept of verbal group that are most difficult for students to grasp. Most teachers mention tense formation, particularly the extended combinations, as a key challenge. Some of the participants stated:

KRT3: Our students are very lazy. No matter how you explain the forms of the verbal group to them, they continue to make mistakes in the writing process. For instance, the third person singular tense.

KRT4: When I teach forms like "has been going," the students do not understand how each part functions. They just memorise the words.

Another teacher also confirms that,

AKRT2: No matter how I drill the students with the auxiliary verbs and irregular verb forms, they always have challenges in using them correctly in their essays. For instance, a student writes, “have” instead of “has”. Additionally, they have challenges with the use of “do” and “does”, been and being. I have always corrected these in their exercises but they repeat the same mistakes.

With the focus group discussions, students confirm their difficulties in the choice of an appropriate verbal group in context. Below are their responses.

AKMG3.4: Madam, it is very difficult. Sometimes, most of us don't know what to write, so we write what we think is correct, but our teacher marks it wrong.

AKG1.2: It is very, very difficult. At the JHS, verbs were not difficult for me to learn; I just memorized them. Madam, here in the Senior High School everything about the verbs has changed, especially when I write something small, the verbs are underlined with red ink. Madam, I am always confused.

This highlights the challenges within the interpersonal metafunction of Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar Framework, where understanding morph syntactic structure is crucial. The challenges, as mentioned, not only stem from students' unfamiliarity with these verb forms but also from their limited awareness of appropriate combinations and verb sequencing. Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the correct verbal group form that aligns with person and number. This confirms Larsen-Freeman's (2014) explanation that students rely on the knowledge and experience they already have, which makes it difficult for them to form and restructure their grammatical knowledge. She further explained that even when learners appear to have mastered a particular construction, it is not uncommon to find new errors.

Given this, the researcher further asked respondents how confident they feel teaching the extended structure of the verbal group, like passive voice, perfect aspects

and many others. Several participants expressed a lack of confidence, especially when teaching verb combinations that are not commonly used in everyday speech. A participant explained:

MAT1: I can teach simple past and simple present tense, but once we get to “should have been done”, I get stuck. It's difficult to break down all the parts.

AKMT1: With my confidence level, to be very sincere, some of these extended structures of the verbal group are hard to explain, so I mostly skip them. An example is the tense-aspect combination.

This suggests that teacher preparedness and grammatical metalinguistic knowledge are often insufficient to deal with the extended structure of the verbal group. It also explained that there is a need for professional development in teaching form-intensive grammar, more importantly, the verbal group. Overall, the responses show a consistent challenge with the form of the verbal group, in teaching both simple and extended structures. This supports Larsen-Freeman's (2001) argument that grammar instruction should not only expose learners to correct forms but also help teachers understand and scaffold them effectively.

Following the Systemic Functional Grammar framework, the observation checklist helps clarify how teachers handle the forms of the verbal group that express mood and modality. During the observation in the grammar lesson class, on the simple present tense, specifically the third-person singular form, several students expressed confusion while completing exercises. A few students asked questions for clarification about the difference between “*he goes*” and “*they goes*”. The teacher responded by using simple examples and role-play that aligned with what was described during the interview by *KRT3*. Despite the teacher's efforts, students continue to express confusion. Some of these students whispered among themselves, while others copied answers from their peers. This aligns with the response from the focus group discussion

AKG1, where students expressed their confusion by struggling to select appropriate verb forms and relying on their intuition rather than grammatical rules. These findings align with Larsen-Freeman's (2000) claim that the most common error of students with the third person singular is when they simplify and leave off the –s inflection or interpret it as a plural marker on the verb to be used in agreement with the plural subject. On the other hand, research on L2 morpheme acquisition has shown that the third-person singular present tense –s inflection causes persistent problems for learners even at a more advanced stage of proficiency.

Additionally, exercises intended to involve active student participation and effective use of auxiliaries were missing during the lesson. This aligns with participants' MAT1 and KRT4 responses. It reflects a gap in addressing the forms of the verbal group, which is part of the interpersonal metafunction explained by Larsen-Freeman (2001), that students are exposed to correct structures but lack opportunities to internalise and apply them effectively, leading to grammatical errors. It also indicates that teaching tends to emphasize recall over construction, which limits students' engagement with grammatical forms. In other words, teachers often focus on helping students remember rules rather than encouraging them to construct sentences creatively and meaningfully. Therefore, the observation lesson contradicts the fact that “teachers need description of language to help learners in their understanding of choice in text and in relating these understandings to the system and back to text/new text and back to system as they help learners to expand their register potential in the L2” (McCabe, 2021, pp. 599).

In conclusion, in terms of form, classroom instructions emphasised rules and patterns, tense formation, and auxiliary combinations, but often fell short of facilitating students to construct new verbal group instances. This aligns with Larsen-Freeman's

(2001) claim that traditional grammar teaching prioritises discrete-point knowledge over dynamic usage. The Systemic Functional Grammar framework explains that, to teach forms effectively, a significant amount of meaningful iteration is necessary. In this case, the language game is most effective when it limits students to using only the specific target form. In other words, structural diversity is not allowed. For proceduralisation to occur, it is important to focus on just one or two forms at a time, or the target can be introduced in contrast to forms that students already master. Without these strategies, teachers' lack of preparedness for lessons becomes evident.

4.3.3 Challenges in teaching and learning the *experiential metafunction* of the Verbal Group

Here, the researcher seeks from participants how they help students notice, explore and practice the meaning of the experiential/ideational metafunction of the verbal group. With this, participants were asked how they teach this focusing on the element of transitivity (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral and existential), participants and circumstances of a text. Most participants explained that they teach by the use of different text forms to assist students grasp the concepts. A participant noted:

AKT2: I make photocopies of different text forms and share to the students in their mixed ability groups, which I assist them to identify the verbal group focusing on the types of process, and participants. I also help them to practice by speaking or writing what they have explored.

MAT2: It is very challenging because there is not enough text, so I do my best to copy some paragraphs on the board for the class to explore and identify the types of verbal group and how they are used to make meaning in context.

This is a very common issue owing to a lack of sufficient teaching materials and large class enrollment. According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), teachers are supposed to handle grammar instructions beyond structure to include meaning because these

concepts are often underemphasized in classroom teaching. For more insight about the experiential/ideational meaning of the verbal group, the researcher finds out from participants how they help students understand and interact with the text before them by focusing on process, participants and circumstances. Below are some responses:

KRT1: After teaching the forms of the verbal group, whether simple or extended structure, I then assist my students to identify them in various texts with the other elements that aid their meaning. This is done by engaging students in WH-questions.

AKMT2: First, I assist students to read the text and then follow up with some questions like who are the actions involved? Or who is carrying out the actions in each sentence? Or when are the actions supposed to happen? and so on. This helps them notice, explore and practice the type of verbal group, the participants and the circumstances of the text.

The researcher tries to find out from focus groups whether the way the verbal group is taught is easy for them to understand, and which ones they find most difficult.

Below are some responses:

AKMG1. 4: The lessons are not at all easy; they are also confusing, with few examples. I wish we were given more examples. As for me, the way the teacher gets angry when I ask for an explanation puts me off, so I don't pay attention to him at all. I think it is better to sleep while he teaches rather than to listen and ask questions. Everything about the verbal group is difficult, Madam.

*AKG2.3: Our teacher is always angry with us when we make mistakes. This puts fear in me to ask for explanations and even to answer questions during the lessons. The most difficult aspect now is the **tenses**. When I sometimes ask our teacher when to use the **simple present tense** and the **simple past tense** in an essay, his response is, "It depends on the context.*

An observation, which confirmed the theoretical claim that grammar instruction often focuses on form at the expense of its functions, revealed a pattern lesson structured around modal verbs. During the lesson, the teacher did not help students explore and practice the experiential meaning of the verbal group with the help of sample texts and discussions. The teacher wrote few sentences on the board for students to identify the verbal group only. This contradicts both *KRT1* and *AKMT2*'s responses

of using text and interactive measures to assist students identify how the verbal group and its components are used in context to express the appropriate processes. Students were not guided through the meaning negotiation of the modal verbs. The teacher relies heavily on form-based teaching, assuming meaning will be inferred. Yet without guidance, students cannot internalise modal distinctions, which will result in incorrect or limited use.

The experiential/ideational meaning, although acknowledged by teachers, was treated superficially in most lessons. There was minimal effort to contextualise the little semantic differences in the verbal group, resulting in students learning forms without their communicative implications or meaning. In addressing the challenge of teaching the functions aligning with the principles of Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar framework, the teacher needs to plan a different sort of practice activity, which should enable students to grasp the concept. Here, students must be allowed to explore various texts, which would help them to use language with the same purpose in mind but with different genres, which requires a few items at a time (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). By practising this several times, while students name the action and transform another text that could feature the characteristics of the one explored, they can learn to associate the form and meaning in no time (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

4.3.4 Challenges in teaching and learning the *textual metafunction* of the Verbal Group

This theme focuses on theme-rheme and cohesion in context. How students apply verbal group forms meaningfully to achieve cohesion and coherence in their L2 writing. For the researcher to ascertain that teachers help students use the verbal group for communicative purposes, participants are asked how they relate the teaching of the verbal group to helping students write cohesive text. Many participants state that the

exam-oriented curriculum leaves little room for students to explore how verbal group function in authentic communication. A respondent explains:

KRT1: We rush through verbal group lessons to prepare students for WAEC examinations. There is no time for essay writing tasks that show how the verbal group, especially the tense, are used naturally.

This shows the major challenge in the teaching and learning of the verbal group. According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), students must not only learn forms and meanings but also how to use them appropriately in different social or discourse contexts. It is identified that, often, the textual metafunction is not effectively attended to owing to curricular time constraints and rigid syllabi. Furthermore, the researcher indirectly seeks another participant's responses from the teacher's reflection on how students get opportunities to use modal or tense combinations in real writing. Responses indicate that, in most cases, verbal group are taught in isolation. A participant noted:

KRT2: Most of us teach the verbal group but rarely help students to combine and use them in their writings. That is why they stick to the simple structures, those ones are easier.

The report of students' default to simpler verb forms reflects the disconnection between grammatical instruction and communicative application. This is due to limited practice using a more extended structure of verbal group functions. Furthermore, the issue is about a lack of contextualized input and output activities rather than just a lack of practice. Additionally, when discussing how to reinforce use, participants commented.

KRT3: We have large classes that make it difficult for me to engage students in enough practice after teaching the verbal group. However, I try my best.

KRT4: I give students essays to write sometimes in groups and individually. I mark and give them feedback, but they always repeat the errors they have committed.

MAT2: I do not teach the concept of voice because my students can use it based on their background knowledge. I always skip it.

This shows the gap in teaching the communicative purpose of voice. Larsen-Freeman's (2014) explains that grammar must be understood in terms of pragmatic use, explaining why a speaker chooses a passive form, not how to form it alone. The findings suggest that while form is often taught, functions remain untouched in the case of teaching the verbal group. Teaching in context is necessary because it ties verbal group form to the functions they encode in time, agency, and certainty.

The response from KRT4 suggests that the textual metafunction is strengthened through task-based instruction, where students are engaged in choosing verb forms based on context and intention, not just grammatical correctness, to express their intended meaning for easy reader flow. With the focus group discussion, the researcher aims to ascertain the fact on assessment results from teachers, and how students respond to feedback given afterwards.

AKMG1.2: We sometimes do classroom assignments to maintain individual participation. With that type of assignment, those who don't understand manage to copy from their friends. Our teacher does not mark the exercises immediately. So, we don't get to know about our mistakes early, and sometimes we don't receive the exercise books at all.

AKG2.1: Our teacher does not give us any exercises after lessons. The essays we write are during examinations. When there are corrections, I don't really understand. Sometimes I see red marks, but I don't know what they mean. So I ignore them and repeat the same mistakes.

Another observation lesson that provided a practical lens to highlight a gap in the textual metafunction of grammar is that students often fail to connect verb forms to communicative contexts. During the observation lesson on tenses, many students did not express engagement; some rested their heads on the table, yawned frequently, or looked away while the teacher explained the verb structure. The teacher wrote a few

sentences on the board. The students watched the teacher without any English textbooks for reference, which confirms KRT4's response about limited teaching materials. The lesson ended abruptly without any assessment due to limited time allocation, as confirmed by participants' KRT1 and KRT2. According to Larsen-Freeman (1999), form and meaning are incomplete without use. This aligns with the response of AKG2, which explains that without interaction or application, verbal group remain decontextualized and inert. Bourke (2020) explained that in many teaching situations, the constraints of time, periodic texts, and syllabus categories might well prevent the type of exploratory learning necessary to establish semantics and pragmatic parameters of the verbal group. On the other hand, Celce-Murcia (2014) explained that it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that students learn a checklist of grammatical items by the end of a given period. This depends on the teacher's selection of the approach sequence and the students' needs.

Ultimately, the three metafunctions reveal the tension between using grammar and knowing grammar, a central concern in grammar that has been mentioned several times in relevant studies. The findings show that teachers are constrained by a combination of curricular demands, assessment pressures, and insufficient training in functional grammar pedagogy. These limitations hinder the implementation of a more grammar-oriented approach, one that views grammar not only as structure but also as a meaningful choice in context. Nevertheless, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (1985) framework advocates that if the challenge lies in the textual metafunction, it is because students have shown that they have a hard time selecting the right construction for a particular context.

In this case, Celce-Murcia (2014) explained that role-play is best provided with relevant practice activities and an opportunity to choose from two or more semantically

equivalent items, the one best suited for the context. Having students work with the same construction in speaking and writing activities can highlight differences between spoken and written verbal group (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2001). To cap it all, the findings made it clear that it does not matter the number of years a teacher has been teaching a concept. Teachers must be abreast of the best strategies to handle verbal group instruction for effective communication.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In summary, the chapter extensively explored the analysis and discussion of the research study. The analytical focus encompassed the forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing and the challenges in teaching the verbal group. The analysis was methodically categorised into three main segments, each addressing a specific research question.

The initial segment, corresponding to research question one, was guided by distinct themes: **simple structure and extended structure (mood/ modality + predicate)**. These themes provided a systematic framework for exploring the forms of the verbal group in students' L2 writings.

The second segment delved into the functions of the verbal group in students' L2 writing by focusing on the following themes: **Transitivity (process), textual organization and interpersonal function**. Analysing verbal group functions using the experiential/ideational and textual metafunctions deepens both theoretical insight and pedagogical effectiveness through form, meaning, and use. It bridges the gap between grammatical accuracy and communicative ability, which helps students not just to know the verbal group but also how to use it appropriately and meaningfully.

The third segment, which addressed research question three, discussed the following themes: **challenges in teaching the verbal group forms and functions with**

the three metafunctions – interpersonal, experiential/ideational, and textual. These challenges are linked to participants’ experiences of years in teaching and their knowledge about the term ‘verbal group.’ These themes encapsulate the challenges teachers faced in teaching the verbal group



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises the study's findings, recommendations, and conclusions. The overall goal of this study was to identify the forms and functions of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing. The specific objectives were to examine the forms of English verbal groups in students' L2 writing in the Lower Manya municipality, assess the functions of English verbal groups in students' L2 writing, and investigate the challenges in teaching English verbal groups. A qualitative approach and textual analysis were used for this research, as the aim was to uncover the forms and functions of the English verbal group used by students in their L2 writing. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and lesson observations. In addition to summarising the findings, the chapter highlights the importance of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing and offers suggestions for future research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The primary aim of the study was to examine the forms of the English verbal group in students' L2 writing. The findings of this study indicate that students have acquired **explicit grammatical knowledge and verb pattern rules**, enabling them to select verbal group forms to achieve their writing purposes. This finding is consistent with **related empirical studies**, which show that explicit grammatical knowledge supports learners' ability to manipulate grammatical forms in L2 writing. For instance, Biber et al. (2011) and Byrnes (2009) found that learners with stronger control of grammatical patterns demonstrate improved lexical choice and syntactic accuracy in written production. Similarly, Ellis (2006) reports that explicit knowledge facilitates

learners' ability to apply grammatical rules during language production, particularly in writing tasks that require careful planning. The use of precise lexical verbs observed in this study strongly indicates students' **overall lexical proficiency and writing quality**. This finding aligns with **previous empirical studies**, which demonstrate that lexical verb choice is a strong indicator of writing development in second language learners (Crossley & McNamara, 2014; Ortega, 2012). These studies show that more proficient learners tend to rely less on general-purpose verbs and instead use more specific lexical verbs, thereby improving clarity and meaning in writing. Further analysis revealed that students possess explicit knowledge of the formation of the English verbal group in both **finite and non-finite forms**, enabling them to produce **simple and extended verbal group structures**. This finding supports Halliday's (1985) **interpersonal metafunction**, emphasizing that grammatical choices are resources for meaning-making. Related studies using functional and usage-based perspectives have similarly reported that learners gradually develop control over extended verbal group structures as their grammatical resources expand (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). These empirical studies suggest that learners' ability to combine auxiliary verbs reflects an emerging capacity to express stance, temporality, and modality in writing.

The second objective examined the **functions of the English verbal group** in students' L2 writing, focusing on the **experiential/ideational** and **textual metafunctions**. Data from classroom observations, interviews, and focus group discussions revealed that teachers tend to focus more on **grammar rules** than on the **functional reasons for grammatical choices**. This finding is supported by **related classroom-based studies**, which report that form-focused instruction often dominates grammar teaching in ESL contexts, sometimes at the expense of meaning and use (Hinkel, 2004; Ellis, 2006). Although students were able to select and combine verbal

groups in their essays, many of these combinations failed to express their intended meanings appropriately in context. Errors such as **inconsistent tense chains, omission of finite operators, subject–verb disagreement, faulty punctuation, and non-standard structures** negatively affected meaning realization in both ideational and textual metafunctions. **Related empirical studies** have documented similar difficulties, particularly in learners’ use of tense, aspect, and agreement in written discourse (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010; Fadanelli, 2022). These studies show that grammatical accuracy alone does not guarantee effective meaning-making unless learners understand how grammatical choices function within discourse. This finding further supports the view that **learners do not acquire grammatical constructions one at a time**. Instead, they develop grammatical systems dynamically through use. As reported in **related studies on usage-based grammar learning**, insufficient attention to the functional formation of verbal groups often results in persistent grammatical errors in L2 writing (Ellis, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). This explains why students continue to struggle with meaning despite possessing explicit rule-based knowledge.

The third objective investigated the **challenges in teaching and learning the English verbal group**. The findings reveal that many teachers lack sufficient knowledge and confidence to teach **extended verbal group structures**, leading to their omission in instruction. This challenge has also been identified in **related empirical studies**, which report that teachers often avoid complex grammatical structures due to limited pedagogical confidence or curriculum pressure (Celce-Murcia, 2016; Hinkel, 2004). Additionally, **time constraints** were found to limit assessment and feedback opportunities, reducing students’ exposure to effective practice. This finding aligns with **previous studies** emphasizing the importance of repeated exposure and feedback for grammatical development (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Ellis, 2006). According to

Celce-Murcia (2016), learning grammar, particularly complex systems such as the English verbal group involves restructuring learners' grammatical systems rather than simply reducing sentence length or memorising rules. Moreover, related studies indicate that their first language influences learners' grammatical development. Celce-Murcia (2001) explains that beginner learners rely heavily on their first language (L1) when interpreting new grammatical systems, while increasing proficiency leads to greater reliance on L2 input. This is consistent with findings from **second language acquisition research**, which show that learners gradually restructure grammatical knowledge as they progress (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

Finally, the findings of this study align with **related research on learning processes**, which identifies **pattern recognition, association, and discrimination** as key mechanisms in grammar acquisition. Empirical studies emphasise that learners cannot master the entire verbal group system in a single learning process, highlighting the need for instructional approaches that respect individual differences and support gradual development (Larsen-Freeman, 2014, 2015).

5.2 The Importance of the Forms and Functions of English Verbal Group in Students' L2 Writings

The verbal group is a central component of L2 writing, without which it is difficult to conceive of any language, including English. Occurring in almost every clause, verbal groups animate language by expressing processes, time, stance, and relationships, thereby making meaning dynamic. In L2 writing, the verbal group typically functions as the core element of the clause, operating as the driving force of meaning construction. As Larsen-Freeman (2001) observes, the forms and functions of the verbal group constitute a focal point around which many debates in second language writing and grammar instruction have revolved.

Against this background, the present study is significant because it offers a comprehensive examination of students' use of the verbal group, addressing not only formal accuracy but also meaning and use—that is, its functions in context. Unlike earlier studies that focus on grammatical correctness, this research is grounded in the Systemic Functional Grammar framework (Halliday, 1985), which views grammar as a resource for making meaning and emphasizes the integration of form and function. Through an analysis of students' written texts and teachers' instructional practices across different school contexts, the study reveals a noticeable gap between grammatical instruction and actual writing performance. The findings indicate that students' limited control of tense, aspect, modality, and thematic organization (theme–rheme) often constrains their ability to express ideas fully, resulting in restricted and underdeveloped L2 writing. Consequently, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of learners' difficulties paying attention to the limitations of form-focused teaching approaches. It therefore reinforces the need for verbal groups to be taught not in isolation but as an integral component of writing instruction, which enables learners to effectively express time, attitude, and voice in meaningful and creative contexts.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several important pedagogical implications for the teaching and learning of the English verbal group in L2 writing. First, the results highlight the need for a shift from predominantly form-focused grammar instruction to an **integrated approach that connects form, meaning, and use**. While explicit teaching of grammatical rules enables learners to recognise and construct verbal group forms, it is insufficient for developing functional control in writing. Teachers should therefore guide learners to understand how verbal group choices realise meaning in

context, particularly in relation to tense, aspect, modality, and voice. This implication aligns with the Systemic Functional Grammar perspective, which views grammar as a resource for meaning-making rather than a set of isolated rules (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Another important pedagogical implication is that verbal group instruction should be **embedded within writing tasks and genres** rather than taught as decontextualised sentence-level exercises. Students need opportunities to explore why particular verbal group forms are more appropriate in specific genres, such as narratives, argumentative essays, or reports. For example, tense selection and modality play different roles in recounting events, expressing evaluation, or presenting claims. Teaching verbal groups through genre-based pedagogy can therefore enhance learners' ability to make purposeful grammatical choices in extended texts (Hyland, 2007; Christie & Derewianka, 2008).

On the other hand, an implication emerging from the findings relates to the study, suggesting the need for **focused and function-oriented feedback** on students' writing. Instead of correcting all grammatical errors indiscriminately, teachers should identify whether learners' difficulties stem from misunderstandings of verbal group functions or from formal inaccuracies. Focused feedback that draws learners' attention to recurrent issues such as tense sequencing, omission of finite operators or inappropriate modality can promote noticing and facilitate deeper learning. Empirical research indicates that such targeted feedback is more effective in improving grammatical accuracy and functional use in L2 writing than unfocused correction (Ellis et al., 2008; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Additionally, the use of peer and self-assessment activities helps learners in developing greater awareness of verbal group usage in their own and others' writing.

A further issue highlighted by the study is the importance of **teacher grammatical confidence and subject knowledge**, particularly about extended verbal group structures. Teachers who lack confidence in explaining complex verbal group patterns may avoid teaching them altogether, thereby limiting students' exposure to the full range of grammatical resources available in English. Professional development programmes should therefore include explicit support for teachers' understanding of verbal group systems within the three metafunctions, especially transitivity and modality. Providing instructional materials and textbooks that explicitly integrate SFG principles can further assist teachers in translating grammatical theory into classroom practice (Downing & Locke, 2006; Andrews, 2007).

Finally, the study highlights the need for **adequate instructional time and manageable class sizes** to support effective writing instruction. Developing control over verbal group forms and functions is a recursive process that requires sustained practice, feedback, and reflection. Schools and curriculum planners should therefore consider allocating sufficient time for writing-focused instruction and assessment, enabling teachers to engage learners in meaningful grammar-learning activities that promote long-term development rather than short-term accuracy.

5.4 Suggestions for future studie

Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions for future research emerged. Firstly, future research could investigate the forms and functions of the verbal group in students' L2 writing across genders or different programs (for instance, science, visual arts, home economics and many others) to examine whether a gender has less challenge in usage. This can be done with the control and experimental group for a successful result. Secondly, a Mixed-Method approach can be adopted, with both qualitative and quantitative methods used for a clearer result. Additionally, for a

longitudinal study or design, a researcher would track SHS 1 students through to SHS 3 to see how their tense-aspect-modality choices and clause structures evolve with experience and instructions. On the other hand, comparing different educational and cultural contexts can reveal how verbal group use varies by environment. For instance, a researcher can contrast L2 writing in a Ghanaian Public SHS with that of a Private SHS. This cross-context research can generalize which verbal group patterns are universal versus context-specific.

5.5 Conclusion

The study on the forms and functions of English verbal group in students' L2 writing in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality focuses on examining the verbal group forms and their functions in students' essays. It also investigated the challenges of teaching and learning in the verbal group. The results provide several noteworthy conclusions that affirm and build on the existing literature. A central finding was that, in students' L2 writings, both simple and extended structural forms of the verbal group manifested in various shades. These were in the simple present and past tenses, which they used in expressing immediate factual and habitual action by creating a conversational tone with readers. This aligns with Leech (2012), Larsen-Freeman (2014), who claim that an expository essay that has a touch of narration and description accepts simple present and past tense, creating a historical conversational tone for readers. Furthermore, the findings revealed that students have received explicit instruction based on the interpersonal metafunction of Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar Framework, which enabled them to select various shades of verbal group in their L2 writing. This confirms Luvuno & Ajeni's (2021) claim that explicit teaching of grammar rules is necessary for ESL students to become effective users of the language explicitly in writing.

Additionally, the functions of the verbal group in students' L2 writing revealed students' choice of many material processes, some relational and a few mental processes. This explains that because learners are also introduced to action or doing verbs at the early stages of grammar instructions, they find it easier to select material process rather than the other verbal processes. In another vein, material process clauses in experiential/ideational metafunction naturally have a clear structure (SVO), which aligns with common sentence patterns taught in the classroom. In addition, students often learn to write straightforward sentences, which are mostly material. In expository essays, students' goal is to inform or explain, which leads them to emphasise the action content (Septianti & Kurniawan, 2024). They tend to adopt an ostensibly objective, impersonal voice; ironically expressed through active material processes rather than explicitly marking their stance. This aligns with the findings that students in these essays often wrote in the declarative mood, relying on material processes to show rather than tell information (Dewi, 2021).

Nevertheless, the choice of students' verbal group reveals their difficulties, especially in the combinations of extended structures, which led to numerous grammatical errors in their L2 writings. Some of these errors originate from students' L1 interference, incorrect subject-verb agreement, saliency issues, non-standard English usage, omissions of finite operators, inappropriate use of conjunctions, and missing punctuation marks. All of these affected the three metafunctions of Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar Framework. Grammatical errors also disrupted the flow for readers and the intended message of students' L2 writing.

Critically, students and teachers faced numerous challenges during the teaching and learning of the verbal group. Some of these challenges included teachers' unpreparedness or lack of knowledge of the extended structures of the verbal group,

regardless of the number of years spent teaching the concept. Students' low motivation in the learning process also significantly contributed to these challenges. Time constraints, lack of materials, large class enrolment, and the absence of meaningful feedback were all factors that hindered the teaching and learning of the verbal group, thereby exposing students who made grammatical errors in their L2 writing.

In conclusion, pedagogical implications such as student motivation, providing appropriate materials focused on functional grammar, and strategies for teaching the English verbal group, along with assessment based on various texts, can help students use the verbal group in an interesting, meaningful, and appropriate manner. Finally, teachers are also encouraged to pursue further studies to enable them to teach the English verbal group as expected.



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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST UNDER THE THREE METAFUNCTIONS

Metafunction	Observation focus	Observed (\sqrt{x})	Notes
Interpersonal	<p>The teacher focuses on form correctness only (memorization).</p> <p>The teacher encourages students to use verbal group to express their stance.</p> <p>The teacher provides feedback beyond form to include appropriateness in context.</p> <p>The Teacher scaffolds learning of forms with examples that position students as active participants.</p>		
Experiential	The Teacher expresses verbal group type as a process.		

	<p>The Teacher links verb type to contexts of use.</p> <p>Students show confusion in differentiating the verb tenses.</p>		
<p>Textual</p>	<p>The teacher highlights how verbal group choices contribute to text cohesion in essays.</p> <p>The teacher demonstrates how the simple present tense creates cohesion in expository essays.</p> <p>Students use verbal group consistently or inconsistently, revealing confusion across a text.</p> <p>Teacher models how verbal group work within theme-rheme progression.</p>		

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teacher Interview

- 1a. How many years have you been teaching?
- 1b. Which year group do you teach?
- 2a. Have you ever heard of the term verbal group?
- 2b. what does it mean? or what is a verbal group?
3. Mention some forms under the English verbal group.
4. How do you introduce these to your students?
- 5a. Which form of the English verbal group, are very challenging to teach?
- 5b. How do you go about teaching them for your students to understand and use them appropriately?
6. How do you assist your students to construct the extended structures like the passive voice, perfective and the progressive aspects? If not, why?
7. How do you explain differences in verbs to students? (action and state verbs)
- 8a. How do you integrate real writing tasks into your verbal group teaching, which is not only drills?
- 8b. Do you give assignments that naturally require correct verb use, or do you isolate verbal group practice first?
- 9a. How do you teach verb tenses and forms?
- 9b. Do you present them as rules to memorize or through examples in context? (Storytelling, text explorations, conjugation tables).
10. What kind of practice do students do with the verbal group? Can you give a concrete example?

- 11a. Can you explain why you tend to teach the verbal group the way you do?
- 11b. Do you believe the approach helps students become writers who are more creative?
- 12a. How do you relate the teaching of verbal group forms (tense, aspect, modal) to helping students write cohesive texts?
- 12b. Do you incorporate writing examples where verb choice affects the organization of ideas in a text?
- 13a. When marking students' written texts for cohesion and information flow, what specific feedback do you give related to verbal group and transition?
- 13b. Can you share how you comment on sentence transitions, verb choices, or clarity of topic sentences to guide students towards more coherent texts?

Focus Group Discussions

1. Have you ever heard of the term verbal group?
2. What are some of the challenges you face in the formation of the verbal group?
3. Do you think learning about the verbal group is easier or difficult than learning about other grammar topics? Why?
4. Which part of the verbal group do you find easier or challenging?
5. Has the way your teachers teach the verbal group made you feel more confident or less confident in using them in your writing?
- 6a. When you use the verbal group in your essays, do you think the classroom lessons help you apply what you have learnt?
- 6b. Can you share an example?
7. What type of feedback from your teachers helps you understand how to use the verbal group better?

APPENDIX C
PERMISSION LETTER

Krobo Girls' Presbyterian SHS

P. O. Box 47

Odumase - Krobo

21st October, 2023.

The Headmaster

XXX Senior High Tech. School

Dear Sir,

PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA

I write to seek permission to enable me to collect data from your school to help complete my research work. I am currently undertaking studies at the University of Education, Winneba, on the topic: *Forms and Functions of the English verbal Group in students' L2 writing: A case of Lower Manya Krobo Municipality.*

I am counting on your cooperation.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Vera Selorm Zokli

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