

IMPACT OF ERROR ANALYSIS ON ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) PUPILS' WRITING ABILITY IN ASABA, DELTA STATE

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Abstract

Writing is considered as one of the most important skills, particularly in any academic setting. The study examined the impact of error analysis on second language pupils writing ability in Asaba, Delta State. The research design adopted for this was a descriptive survey design. Three research questions guided the study. A total of forty upper primary school teachers were sampled for the study using purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled impact of error analysis on second language pupils' writing ability (IEASLPWA). The instrument was validated by two experts. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the most common errors found in second language pupils' writing were grammatical errors, subject-verb agreement, punctuations and spelling errors. Some causes of errors were revealed such as; teachers methodology, lack of constant writing practice, and lack of feedback on pupils errors. The finding of the study also revealed that identifying, analyzing and correcting pupils' errors in writing could greatly enhance their writing ability. Based on the finding, the study recommended that

Introduction

English language in Nigeria is used for national and international purposes as a second language and as a medium of instruction in schools. This implies that English is the major language of government, education politics, law, business, media, commerce, literature, art, science and technology and the civil service (Akindele&Adegbite, 2000). The all important and multi-faceted functions of English language in the country makes it imperative for every individual who desires any form of social mobility, either horizontal or vertical to attain some acceptable proficiency in the use of the language. To promote the learning of the language among young learners, the National Policy on Education (FME, 2004) made English a compulsory subject at the primary school levels. It is also the language of instruction at all levels.

The attainment of proficiency in the use of English is possible through the four language skills, (listening, speaking, reading and writing). It is a known fact that all languages are first of all listened to and spoken but not all languages are written and read. Therefore, reading and writing in languages not codified is impossible. Again reading and reading writing skills are not easily acquired naturally like listening and speaking skills because of the difficulties and complexities involved. It therefore, means that writing cannot be acquired without some form of guided instruction.

Writing is one of the language skills and the fourth in the row among the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). It is an important skill for effective education and communication that must be developed at an appropriate age. It does not come naturally as speaking. It is a school exercise that is continuous and cannot be neglected in the system. This is because writing is a prime means of developing thinking and emotions and of defining oneself. Writing helps to consider one's thought, and to analyse feelings because it gives time to do so (Efriliant, 2010).

Writing is a 'hard copy' of one's intellectual level of expression (Lorena, 2015). Hence, this shows that pupils who are not able to write cannot cope with their academic demands. Writing is considered as one of the most important skills, particularly in any academic setting. To buttress this fact Muodumogu and Orbura (2019) highlight that writing is a production language skill that is very important to education. The authors state further that without writing skills, formal teaching and learning cannot take place between teachers and learners.

Although, writing can be an enjoyable, creative and cathartic experience the way (ESL) English as a second language writing is taught and learned in our classrooms has led to negative perceptions among learners who view it as a skill they like least (Lin & Maarof, 2013). In another view, Tagor and Sondary (2018) maintain that writing is complex and sometimes difficult to teach, requiring mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also conceptual and judgmental elements. This implies that writing should be practiced and learned gradually in order to enable pupils master it well. Mastering English writing skill is a very difficult task for learners of English as a second language (ESL) and most of them tend to commit errors in writing regardless of how long period of English study (Mourssi, 2013).

It is quite obvious that writing in English language is accounted as a complex process for English as second language (ESL) learners therefore committing errors in writing is seen as an inevitable part of language learners' writing. Writing is considered as one of the fundamental tools in the process of learning to achieve academic success. However, pupils' academic performance in the skill is usually low due to errors pupils make in the skill (Gaham & Herbert 2011). This is why Ridha cited in Al-Ghubra and Najim, (2019) stressed that the errors learners make in learning writing translate to poor performances in internal and external examinations.

It has also been observed that the low percentage pass in other subjects at the common entrance examination is partially due to the errors pupils make in writing. Mohamed (2013) lists three reasons for poor writing in school as teachers incompetence and lack of preparedness of teachers, teachers underestimation of the skill and poor methodology. The poor performance of pupils in public examination is also traced to minimal daily contact with the language skill (Oyetunde, 2002). This may be why Mohamed (2013), Graham and Herbert (2011) and Al-Ghubra and Najim (2019) contend that achievement in writing enhances the performance of other subjects in the school curriculum.

Effective teaching of writing is an important first step in the match towards the sustenance of academic success. Notwithstanding, it is obvious that teachers still use mainly conventional methods to deliver skills and knowledge to learners (Akpoghol, 2006). However, it is pertinent that pupils should be helped to acquire appropriate learning strategies that would equip them in learning writing principles and knowledge for effective outcomes. Teachers should understand that the use of conventional methods in teaching have not really produced the desired result or effectiveness judging by the recurring poor performance of pupils in public examinations and this appears to be a direct consequence in English language. Another issue is that writing is not taught as a subject in the Nigerian school system. Rather, it is considered as a part of English language curriculum.

For pupils to develop effective writing skills and understand certain concepts, English language teachers need to recognize the manner in which pupils write, identify and analyze the errors they make and give them feedback on those areas.

Error analysis is a teaching approach that emphasizes what constitutes errors in a subject and allows related errors to be taught alongside the content (Hebden 2005). It is a teaching approach that clearly defines what errors are and what should be done, when faced with challenges in writing. It encourages good learning habits, pin-points areas of confusion, clarifies thinking and promotes intellectual development.

In a similar vein, (Mourssi, 2013) posits that the approach helps to clarify issues, eliminate confusion and make understanding of facts easier. The author states further that errors represent a lack of learners competence, are systematic, and might occur many times unrecognized by the learner. Error analysis is a systematic and organized way of finding out the rules and strategies that influence the thought or thinking of learners in the errors they make. Amin and Puteh (2017) describe error

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analysis as a set of procedures to identify, describe and explain learners errors. The authors explain further that error analysis not only deals with identifying and detecting errors but also explains the reason for occurrence of the errors. This proves that it is valuable in pin-pointing the difficulties that learners face and in getting learners feedback. It is also a tool for deciding which remedial programme is suitable to establish.

According to Hedben (2005) incorporating error analysis approach eliminates confusion and causes meaningful learning to take place. This implies that error analysis is an essential source of information to teachers. It provides information on pupils' errors which in turn helps teachers to correct pupils' errors and also improves the effectiveness of their teaching. Therefore, teachers should be willing to analyse pupils' grammatical errors and to investigate the reasons behind their frequent occurrences and find a remedy to minimize committing such errors.

Statement of the Problem

Writing is an essential component of a pupil's academic career. This is why pupil's knowledge of the skill is tested at the Common Entrance Examination. However, it has been observed over the years that pupils' performance in the skill has been poor (Ozkayran & Yilmaz, 2020). Observation has shown that pupils' commit various errors whenever they are given a writing task and as a result perform poorly in the skill.

Many scholars like Amiri & Puteh (2017) have become concerned about the related factors responsible for the decline and poor performance of pupils' in writing. The root cause of this among other factors could be the use of inappropriate teaching methods employed by the teachers of English Language to convey knowledge and writing skills to pupils'.

Although some research works have been done in an attempt to find solution to the problem, there are limits to the relevance of the previous studies to the central issue being explained here. In recent times, no attempt has been made in Asaba as to establish the effect, if any by incorporating error analysis in teaching writing. At the moment it is a costly assumption to say that incorporating error analysis in teaching writing will enhance pupils' performance in writing Asaba, Delta State. This is the thrust of this paper.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the impact of error analysis on ESL pupils' writing ability in Asaba, Delta State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the most common errors found in ESL pupils' writing ability
2. Ascertain the causes of errors found in ESL pupils' writing ability
3. Examine the impact of error analysis on ESL pupils' writing ability

Research Questions

1. What are the most common errors found in ESL pupils' writing ability?
2. What are the causes of errors found in ESL pupils' writing ability?
3. What is the impact of error analysis on ESL pupils' writing ability?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design is preferred because data was collected, organized, analysed and then described to draw generalization for the study. The study was conducted in public primary schools Asaba, Delta State. The population of the study comprised 40 primary school teachers who teach English language at the upper primary selected from 8 primary schools in Asaba, Delta State through purposive sampling technique, the choice of this sampling technique was a result of the limited size of the population. The instrument used for data collection was a self structured questionnaire titled "Impact of Error Analysis on English as a Second Language Pupils' Writing Ability Questionnaire (IEAESLPNAQ). The instrument has two sections: section A which comprised personal data of the respondents and section 'B' comprised the questionnaire items.

The instrument has a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) – 4, Agree (A)-3, Disagree (D) – 2, Strongly Agree (SD) -1. The instrument was validated by two experts in the Department of Educational Psychology, Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba, Delta State. A total of forty (40) copies of the instrument were administered on primary school teachers in 8 selected schools. The researcher retrieved all the forty (40) copies distributed. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistic, on a four point rating scale. The cutoff point was pegged at 2.50, this implies that any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above were accepted while 2.50 below were rejected.

Results

Research Question 2

What are the most common errors found in second language pupils writing ability?

Table 1: Mean scores of the most common errors found in English as a second language pupils writing ability

S/N	Statements	Mean	STD	Remark
1.	Grammatical errors (e.g. use of wrong verb tense and form)	3.3	0.77	Agreed
2.	Subject – verb agreement (e.g plural subject +plural verb (some people does not)	3.09	0.80	Agreed
3.	Word order errors (e.g. misplacement of words)	2.51	0.73	Agreed
4.	Punctuation errors (e.g. omissions, additions or wrong choice)	3.12	0.60	Agreed
5.	Preposition errors (omissions, additions or wrong choice).	2.57	0.81	Agreed
6.	Spelling errors (wrong spellings e.g. admission instead of admission etc)	3.24	0.59	Agreed
7.	Passive voice errors (using active for passive voice)	2.51	0.73	Agreed
8.	Pronoun errors (omission, addition or wrong choice)	2.66	0.83	Agreed
Grand Mean		2.86		Agreed

The result from the data analysis in Table 1 shows that all the respondents agreed to the eight items. The means were above the cut-off point of 2.50 indicating that the respondents agreed that there are many common errors found in second language pupils writing ability. This was further shown in the grand mean of 2.86 which is above the decision rule mean of 2.50.

Research Question 2

What are the causes of errors found in English as a second language pupils writing ability?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the response on the causes of errors in second language pupils writing ability

S/N	Statements	Mean	STD	Remark
1.	The teaching methods employed by teachers.	2.87	0.85	Agree
2.	Mother tongue interference.	3.32	0.57	Agree
3.	Lack of constant writing practice/activities.	3.10	0.64	Agree
4.	Lack of feedback from teachers on pupils errors.	2.87	.068	Agree
5.	Large class size prevents teachers from carrying out analysis pupils errors.	2.67	0.79	Agree
6.	Lack of time limits teachers' concentration on pupils writing.	2.75	0.73	Agree
7.	Poor remuneration makes teachers reluctant in carrying out error analysis on pupils writing.	2.74	0.79	Agree
8.	Burn out effect as a result of work load hinders teachers from analyzing pupils errors in writing.	2.79	0.73	Agree
Grand Mean		2.89		Agree

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The data on Table 2 shows that the mean values for the eight items were ranged from 2.67 to 3.32. The responses from the items were above 2.50 which indicated they all agreed on the causes of errors found in second language pupils' writing.

Research Question 3

What is the impact of error analysis on English as a second language pupils writing ability?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the responses of teachers on the impact of error analysis in second language pupils writing ability

S/N	Statements	Mean	STD	Remark
1.	Identifying and analysng pupils errors in writing composition often improves their writing ability	3.03	0.70	Agree
2.	Correcting pupils errors helps to minimize errors and improve their writing ability	3.37	0.61	Agree
3.	Paying more attention to pupils with frequent and serious errors regularly enhances their writing ability.	2.98	0.87	Agree
4.	Marking pupils class work/ assignment on writing often enables them to improve on their writing ability	3.75	0.77	Agree
5.	Drilling/Giving remedial lesson on pupils' area of difficulties in writing helps in strengthening their writing ability.	2.98	.087	Agree
6.	Engaging pupils in the rules of writing daily enables them to write well	3.12	060	Agree
7.	Ensuring that pupils spell and use words appropriately often strengthens their writing ability.	2.66	086	Agree
8.	Encouraging pupils to read often enhances their writing ability.	2.57	0.81	Agree
Grand Mean		3.05		Agree

The result from table 3 which elicited responses on the impact of error analysis on second language pupils writing ability showed that the respondents accepted all the eight item statements. The means were above the cut-off point of 2.50 indicating that the respondents agreed that error analysis approach has an impact on pupils writing ability.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that pupils commit errors of grammar, verb tense and form sub-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, punctuations, spelling, passive voice and pronoun errors in writing. This finding is in consonance with Ozkayram and Yilmaz (2020) that pupils commit errors of spelling, word order, tense, word choice, subject-verb agreement, preposition and capitalization whenever they are given a writing task. The authors emphasized that the most common errors found in the writing of pupils are errors on omissions of prepositions. This finding is also closely related to the finding of Al-Ghara and Najim (2019) that the most common and frequent errors found in pupils' writing are grammar, capitalization, spelling punctuation and coherence errors. Thus, there is need for teachers to adopt a specific rubric to help in examining the errors pupils make in writing.

The findings from research question two indicate that the causes of errors found in pupils' writing are method of teaching, mother tongue inference, lack of constant writing practice, lack of feedback from teachers on pupils' errors, large class size, and lack of time, poor remuneration and burn out effect as a result of workload scheduled activities. This agrees with Amiri and Puteh (2017) who found out that the causes of errors include: language transfer interlingua interferences, strategies of second language learning and strategies for second language communication. Also a similar finding by Hourani (2008) revealed the causes of errors in pupils' writing as teachers methodology, lack of constant writing practice, lack of feedback from teachers, workload, mother tongue inference and

weakness in English writing skill. Hence there is need for teachers to incorporate error analysis approach in teaching writing as it is important strategy in enhancing pupils writing ability.

It is also found that identifying, analyzing, correcting, paying more attention on pupils frequent and serious errors, marking class work/assignment, drilling/giving remedial lessons areas of difficulties, providing constructive daily feedback, engaging pupils in the rules of writing, ensuring they spell and use words appropriately and encouraging them to read often could have a great impact on their writing. This finding corresponds with the finding of Ozkayran and Yilmaz (2020) that there is clear evidence regarding the contribution of corrective feedback to learners. Thus, teachers should use innovative teaching techniques in teaching writing and get acquainted with the errors pupils' make so as to provide the necessary feedback on the problematic areas.

Conclusion

It is quite natural to make errors while learning a second language and it is an essential phase before mastering the target language completely. If pupils are forced not to make errors during the process of writing in a second language, they may avoid writing in the target language which is fairly necessary to improve the writing skills. It is very hard to eliminate errors in the target language without using the language. The more they practice, the fewer errors they will make. What is more is that, errors provide teachers with valuable information regarding the difficulties learners encounter while learning the target language. Moreover, errors aid teachers to spot what areas of writing are problematic for pupils and implement the required interventions.

It is therefore, essential to analyse pupils' errors in writing and provide them with corrective feedback. This will both provide an insight into the difficulties learners pupils face and help them to make a self-assessment regarding their writing ability.

Recommendations

1. Federal and state government should provide in service training for primary school teachers on use of error analysis approach and by so doing improve the writing ability of pupils. Thus, emphasis should be laid on feedback system to ensure that teachers score class work, assignment, tests and exams and return same to pupils especially in writing classes to allow them take necessary precautions.
2. Teachers and parents should encourage pupils to read more in order to familiarize themselves with the correct usage of Standard English.
3. Teachers should compel pupils to correct their errors in order to master the art of writing.
4. Grammar rules should be taught explicitly and not implicitly.
5. Publishers of books should incorporate error analysis in their books. In that way, teachers will be encouraged to use the strategy or help pupils' improve their writing ability.

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