CAUSES OF IMPROPER TENSE SHIFTS IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' COMPOSITION WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF THREE HIGH SCHOOLS IN MASERU

BY

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A

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this dissertation has been read and approved as having met the requirements of the Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho, for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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ABSTRACT

In the LGCSE English Language Syllabus, writing is the only mode of assessment. Creative/composition writing in particular, assesses learners on the ability to use English Language appropriately in sentence construction to create meaningful texts. Nonetheless, research and documented scholarship show that managing verb tenses in composition writing is a daunting task for most L2 learners. Their tense errors are in the form of improper shifts from one tense to another and wrong verb inflection in different tenses. These errors blur meaning and evince learners' lack of communicative competence.

This study, therefore, investigates causes of improper tense shifts in high school learners' composition writing. The study adopted a qualitative approach and an interpretive paradigm. Data was sourced from the participants through open-ended interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers from three participating schools and through the analysis of the content in Form E learners' compositions. Major findings were consolidated into language and linguistic competence deficit. The guiding principles of L2 learners' interlanguage were used to classify learners' tense-related errors into types. Learners' tense-related errors of omission, addition, misformation and misordering were interpreted in terms of interlingual and intralingual transfers, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of the rules, false concepts hypothesized and the context of learning as causes of errors.

Key words: Composition writing, tense shifts.

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this research work to my wife 'Mapaballo Lebona and my daughter Paballo Veronica Lebona. Their support in varying forms inspired me. They showed great concern in the fulfilment of this work and therefore, encouraged me to keep trying.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deliberates on the background to the study and further gives the statement of the problem as well as the purpose of the study. Moreover, it outlines the research questions, objectives and discusses the significance of the study. It further lays out the methodology, organization of the study and ends with a summary. The present study deals with language usage and structural correctness in writing. For this reason, it is essential to start with an overview on the importance of language and the need for correct mechanics.

In order to live meaningfully, human beings have to be incorporated into a social organization. The main condition for such incorporation is language as the primarily human means of communication. According to Broukal (2004, p91), "Language assumes its role as the means of human communication through not only its spoken and written forms, but also in a conventionally structured way." Broukal's position points to the importance of language as a goal-oriented code through which people express themselves for various reasons and goals. Therefore, in all its forms, language should be structured in a way that enables achievement of any of the goals. If the structure of a language is not correct, the goals may not be achieved. Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (2002, p.71), point out that "Language calls for linguistic and communicative competence in speaking and writing." Mastery of these language skills enables effective communication.

According to Swan (2014, p.68), "structural correctness of a language cannot be overemphasized." This assertion suggests that learners' deficiency in the structure of a language is a potential threat to achievement of the goals for which it (the language) is being learned.

As stated earlier in this section, language sometimes takes a written form. Rogers (2003) supports this view in his submission that writing is the medium of human communication that represents language and emotion through the inscription of signs and symbols. In language learning, writing is a complement to spoken language and it mostly relies on structures such as vocabulary, grammar and semantics. Rogers' view implies that the test of good writing is the writer's ability to transmit meaningful thoughts to the reader through print.

Writing is a purposeful process that is meant for among other purposes, to convey information, influence the public, express one's creativity and sometimes to maintain social relationships. Bell (2005) advances this idea by referring to writing as a strong communicative tool which is motivated by a number of things such as dissemination of knowledge.

The product of writing is called text resulting from different factors which include personal experiences and observations. Mutikiri (2015) states that writing is essential, therefore, time spent planning any kind of writing is time well spent. This statement infers that if writing is well planned, there will be internal consistency and ideas will flow smoothly in that piece of writing as whole. The subsequent section discusses the background to this research inquiry.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In this section, the discussion focuses on the importance of English in the world and in Lesotho, particularly. The discussion on the significance of English is dovetailed with the teaching and learning of English in Lesotho high schools.

English makes interstate communication easy. It also gives access to the world of science, technology and economics, among others. Felicity (2011) highlights this perception about the importance of English in the assertion that languages are equal but some such as English enjoy greater prestige and power than others both locally and internationally. English has become the language of national unity in some countries making international and diplomatic communication possible. It has spread geographically and immensely both in terms of coverage and stylistic variation making it one of the widely used languages in the world. Jolly (2013) furthers this idea by indicating that English is a prestigious language. It acts as a language of wider communication for people of different mother tongues, as the main language of written discourses, academic conferences and international business. Succinctly, Felicity and Jolly's claims express that English has the imperative and an enhanced status as the principal international language.

Regarding the spread of English referred to earlier in this section, Felicity (2011) points out that the spread of English throughout the world occurred when English speaking people who colonized foreign countries brought English with them. In these new environments, local people absorbed its vocabulary and other language features. As one of the former British protectorates, Lesotho is also one of the countries to which English spread.

In Lesotho, English is a language of development and assumes the status of a second official language. Jolly (2013) refers to a second language as a language that is learned in addition to a person's first language. Furthermore, the Junior Certificate (JC) English Language Syllabus (2007) articulates that it should be borne in mind that English in Lesotho is taught as a second language and should be a medium of instruction. In view of these articulations, it is apparent that

English Language is the learners' L2 which they learn in addition to their L1. It may be expected that teaching and learning English as a second language may come with some challenges as learners' L1 may exert influence on the learning of L2.

In formal teaching and learning situations and the Lesotho education system in general, English Language is a compulsory subject in both basic and secondary education. As a language, English is used as a medium of instruction in schools from upper primary. Concerning the said education system, Raselimo and Mahao (2015) state that English Language is a subject that all learners at all levels have to take and this is what has been happening in all curriculum reforms. Raselimo and Mahao (2015), therefore, affirm that English Language is a mandatory subject in the Lesotho education system. This idea is further amplified in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) of Lesotho (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009, P.3) which states that

> The framework recognizes the pluralism of Basotho nation and the existence of other languages besides the two official languages. In that regard, the framework boldly asserts that mother tongue will be used as a medium of instruction up to class 3, while English will be taught as a subject at this and other levels….

CAP's affirmation in this citation relates to what is currently happening. The language of learning and teaching is Sesotho for the first three years of primary school and English takes over in higher level primary school throughout secondary and tertiary levels. English takes precedence from upper primary; however, it is worth noting that there are some schools in which teaching is conducted in English from pre-primary. Schools which use English as a transactional language from pre-school throughout are referred to as 'English medium schools'. Using English as a transactional language in English medium schools reechoes the fact that English is a language of status.

The status of English in the world and in the education system of Lesotho dictates proper mechanics in speaking and writing because competence and proficiency in English Language is what everyone is striving for. Teaching and learning of English Language should in turn strive for the same competence and proficiency.

Teaching and learning occur in formal settings. At different schools where formal learning takes place, teachers are encouraged to speak English at all times. This is because English is a servicing subject for all the other subjects in the curriculum. It is believed that proficiency and competence in English will be achieved. Again, English is an entry requirement into institutions of higher learning for further educational development or professional training. Even at tertiary level, especially at the National University of Lesotho (NUL), English (Communication Skills course) is compulsory for all first year students in every field of study. In the 2007/2008 NUL Calendar, it is stipulated that no student can graduate without satisfying the requirements of first year English Language course. The notion regarding the prominence of English reiterates the fact that there is a dire need for English Language learners to master language structures such as parts of speech and all other components of English Language grammar.

There are numerous reasons that have led to a great upsurge of interest in the teaching and learning of English at high school. Such reasons include, among others, gaining proficiency in the language and acquisition of the linguistic competence as mentioned earlier in this section. The much desired competence includes all aspects of English language grammar such as use of articles, adverbs, adjectives, tense and other aspects outlined in the syllabus.

Formal learning at all levels is guided by the syllabuses and educational policies. The Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) English Language Syllabus states that the

teaching of English Language at LGCSE involves a number of aspects categorized under reading and writing. Writing encompasses creative and directed writing. The section on writing always takes the continuous prose form. Continuous writing at LGCSE level takes different forms such as writing compositions of different types, reports, minutes, letters, e-mails, speeches and memorandums, among others. As previously mentioned, continuous writing in the LGCSE English Language Syllabus embodies different aspects categorized under creative and directed writing. However, it is noteworthy that this study deals only with aspects of creative writing which integrates writing different types of compositions.

Creative writing is therefore, the main focus of this study not directed writing or reading. Good writing cannot be separated from good use of language thus writing is a basic language skill which learners have to master. Writing has to follow correct mechanics in order for it to be acceptable. Learners at all levels of learning are, therefore, expected to demonstrate a high level of language competence in creative writing. To this end, the LGCSE level descriptors (2014) reiterate that competence is key to learning English Language. Learners should ensure that sentence structures are varied. Vocabulary should be wide, precise, and striking, while punctuation marks should be used accurately. Spelling should be largely correct, and paragraphs should have unity. Verb forms should be correct and appropriate, while appropriate tenses should be used consistently. Concisely, the LGCSE level descriptors indicate that learners should evince comprehensive knowledge of grammar in their composition writing.

Inspite of all these expectations, it is observed that second language learning is challenging to most learners. Hudsons (2012) indicates that individual learners who have already acquired the mother tongue bring to the learning of English a different set of competences. Hudsons'

argument attests to the fact that by virtue of being the second language, English challenges teaching and learning. External examination markers often complain that errors in verb forms hamper precision and distract the reader from the content; as a result, communication is not achieved.

Verbs are central when dealing with tense and tense is a grammatical aspect which is taught from upper primary education level. For this reason, one may assume that using verb tenses in composition writing will not be problematic for learners but examiners' reports show that it is a challenge. The 2008 JC examiner's report states that tense plays a fundamental role in composition writing. Despite its significance, there is an escalating problem regarding its use in composition writing. This problem of tense usage has been a long-standing issue which negatively impacts on the learners' performance in writing which is an important assessment area in Lesotho's examinations.

Research in different language aspects such as subject-verb-agreement, tense and aspect, adverbs and adjectives has been conducted in Lesotho and abroad. However, research on possible causes of mismanagement of tense in composition writing is lacking. Lin and Chin (2018) conducted a study on debatable issues of English writing apprehensions which was a qualitative study of Taiwanese English majors' perspectives. Another study was conducted by Piniel and Katalin (2018) on advanced learners' foreign language, related emotions across the four skills. Since these studies do not point particularly to mismanagement of tense in written texts, I deemed it fit to conduct the current study hoping to improve classroom practice, effective and functional communication.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This section deals with the problem the study intends to address. Rakotsoane (2012) explains that researchers should state in clear terms what it is that is seen as a problem that needs to be unraveled. The problem in the study should stand out so that the reader can easily recognise it. The problem that this study aspires to investigate relates to the mismanagement of tense usage in composition writing.

As stated in the introduction and background, writing is a communicative tool. For Lesotho's education system, writing forms part of the main components of the LGCSE English Language Syllabus. It is emphasised in the said syllabus that writing is the main means of assessment or the examining skill.

When assessing learners at LGCSE level, teachers usually expect learners to write better than they did at the JC level. It is so because by LGCSE level, learners are expected to have acquired basic grammatical knowledge which they should be able to apply meaningfully in composition writing. Such functional knowledge should include efficient and correct management of tense.

However, research and examiners' reports as referred to in the background, indicate that learners fail to manage grammatical aspects in composition writing. The JC Examiner's Report from the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL 2006, p.3), states that "Candidates mixed up tenses especially where they were supposed to use irregular verbs." This report emphasises the idea pointed out in the background that wrong use of tense blocks effective communication because the intended meaning is not conveyed the way it was supposed to be. The 2013 COSC and 2015 LGCSE ECOL reports depict that, errors in verb forms and tense inconsistency cause uncertainty

in the sequence of events. Tense management in learners' composition writing remains a challenge to learners in Lesotho senior secondary education.

This study is informed by literature and professional experience. My teaching experience attunes to the observations made by external examinations markers. For instance, when marking learners' compositions or any piece of continuous writing, the reader (myself) is often compelled to reread several times because the meaning may be partly or completely hidden by density of linguistic errors such as wrong use of verb forms. Linguistic errors in turn culminate in blurring of the message. English Language teachers also often complain during quarterly subject association meetings that students mostly fail to use tense appropriately in composition writing. The occurrence of errors in verb forms and arbitrary changes of tenses mar clarity and confuse readers. Learners' inability to use tense in a consistent manner or in a way that could clearly convey meaning, tends to negatively affect communication. This inability and its negative impact calls for a redress through research.

Although research has been conducted on grammatical aspects and language usage in general, the central focus in such studies was not particularly on tense inappropriateness. For example, in her study, Moji (2014) focused on the role of cohesive devices and coherence in continuous writing. Boldag and Denisa (2017) conducted a study on semantic representation of newly learned L2 words and their integration in L2 lexicon. Meshari (2018) also conducted a study on *earlier is better: learning English in Saudi Arabia.* Mphunyane's (2015) investigation was on exploring the pedagogical effective ways of teaching and learning subject-verb-agreement in continuous writing. The study which was focused on tense was conducted in Sesotho in 1985 by Machobane. In that study, the main concern was on the semantics of tense and aspect with

particular reference to their interaction with temporal adverbials. Though the study was on tense, it was not specifically on the causes of tense shifts. Therefore, there is need for more research on tense related aspects.

Most research projects are on continuous writing and other language aspects other than the management of tense in composition writing. The question of causes of improper tense shifts in composition writing remains unanswered. This, therefore, leaves a gap and necessitates further research. In view of this gap, the purpose of this study was to investigate causes of learners' inability to use tense consistently and meaningfully in composition writing. The study was intended to explore the tense-related aspects such as the importance of tense in writing, its general usage, difference between tense and aspect, types of tenses, impact of improper tense shifts in composition writing and how tense errors may be addressed. The next section focuses on research questions and objectives of the study.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Research questions unpack the research topic. The problem which the study sought to address was unpacked into questions and objectives. Rakotsoane (2012) explains that research questions are a fundamental core of a research and they maintain the research focus by providing path. Research questions are associated with a study that is partly or wholly qualitative in nature. The following are the research questions of this study;

The major *research question* of this investigation is,

What are the causes of improper tense shifts in high school learners' composition writing?

The *subsidiary research questions* intended to drive this study forward in addressing the main focus are the following:

1. What skills do learners need to manage tense shifts in composition writing?

2. What challenges do learners have in relation to tense in composition writing?

3. What possible factors can improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing be attributed to?

4. What pedagogical strategies can be employed to address improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing?

The research objectives follow underneath. Objectives of the study make the purpose of the research investigation easier to address. Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2010) define research objectives as sub-problems which add up to the totality of the research problem. The objectives of this study are the following:

1. To determine basic skills required by learners to manage tense in composition writing.

2. To ascertain learners' weaknesses or challenges in tense usage particularly in composition writing.

3. To investigate the causes of erroneous tense usage in learners' written texts.

4. To identify pedagogical strategies that can be used to address tense errors in learners' composition writing.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In general terms, significance of the study spotlights the value of the research findings. It does so by pointing out who the study intends to benefit and how it is intended to provide such benefit. As Rakotsoane (2012) states, significance of the study is about the value of the research in

question. This section in research discusses both the specific and generalisable contribution of the research.

The findings from the study will hopefully benefit English Language teachers and learners. The study will bring about a desired change by giving learners and teachers tips regarding use of tense in composition writing and therefore enhance effective communication in writing. A broad spectrum of approaches will be applied based on the tense-related instructional objectives to be achieved. In doing so, this study will help teachers to be more innovative, creative and resourceful depending on the type of students and circumstances under which the teaching of English tenses is done. It will, therefore, contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning of English tenses in composition writing particularly in schools where the study will be conducted thereby bringing a transformative impact on teachers and students.

English Language Syllabus implementation regarding the section on writing will also improve. This study pointed out some ways that may be utilized to curb the prevailing problem of tense inconsistency. It suggested methods that enable the teacher to select more appropriate ones (methods) for use in teaching tense in composition writing.

Furthermore, this study revealed aspects of further research. Researchers will identify gaps that should be filled and questions that may remain unaddressed. Researchers may therefore, indulge in more research on tense related aspects.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This research project adopted the qualitative research design of a case study type. Dawson (2002) declares that the qualitative study design studies the phenomenon in its natural setting. It is conversational, interactional and proposes designs that are more open. This research design

was appropriate in the present study because learners wrote essays in their natural setting being their classrooms. The sample of this study covered three high schools in Maseru. Purposive sampling was used to select the three high schools in Maseru to participate in this study. This comprised of one school with outstanding performance in external English Language examinations. Another school was selected from schools with average performance in national English Language examinations. The last participating school was drawn from schools with the worst performance in English Language external examinations.

LGCSE English Language teachers and form E learners were sources of data for this study. Data was collected through composition writing tasks and open-ended interviews with individual LGCSE English Language teachers. These data collection strategies are preferable for a qualitative study like this one because they also generate qualitative data. The selection of the scripts collected from the composition writing tasks followed random sampling. Thus, in schools where there were more than two Form E streams, five scripts from each stream were marked. In schools where there were only two Form E streams, eight scripts from each stream were marked while schools with only one Form E class, scripts were still randomised and fifteen of them were marked as part of data collection. Furthermore, three LGCSE English Language teachers from each of the selected high schools were interviewed as data collection strategy.

Data was analysed on the basis of the theoretical framework on which the study is premised. The criterion that was followed in order to satisfy trustworthiness was as follows: the researcher followed the four strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative research as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Those strategies are credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. Furthermore, triangulation was used to develop trustworthiness and the researcher

was as consistent and as objective as possible with the data collection instruments and interpretation of data. The methodology section was fully expounded in Chapter Three. The next section outlines the organization of the study.

1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One gives the introduction and background to the study, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions and objectives, significance of the study, outline of the methodology, highlight on how trustworthiness of findings was satisfied and the organisation of the study.

Chapter Two focuses on review of related literature. The literature is on operationalisation of key terms of the study, theoretical framework, grammar, tense and aspect. Related literature is also reviewed on the research questions of the study.

Chapter Three deals with methodology. It features research design, research paradigm, participants, sample and sampling techniques, data collection techniques, procedures for data collection, data analysis, measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents data, its interpretation and discussion.

Chapter Five draws conclusions and advances recommendations based on findings on causes of mishifts in learners' composition writing.

1.7. SUMMARY

In the first place, the chapter was introduced and the background to the study was discussed. The importance of English in the world and in Lesotho was stressed. This chapter further discussed the statement of the problem and purpose of the study, research questions and objectives as well

as the significance of the study. Moreover, an overview of the study methodology was given in this chapter and the organisation of the study was featured too. In the subsequent chapter, related literature is reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter features the review of related literature. First, it operationalises the key concepts of the study which are composition writing, proper and improper tense shifts. Second, the chapter spotlights the theoretical framework for the study. In the third section, the chapter presents the review of documented scholarship on grammar, tense, aspect, types of verb tenses and importance of proper tense usage in composition writing. Literature based on the study research questions is also reviewed. The chapter moves to a close with the researcher's summative perspectives from the literature and highlights the implications of the reviewed scholarship for the proposed study. The next section provides the clarification of key terms of the study.

2.1 OPERATIONALISATION OF KEY TERMS OF THE STUDY

In research, key concepts should be defined in an operational way. Rakotsoane (2012) contends that the researcher should indicate how he has interpreted or is going to use terminology in the research. This is necessitated by the fact that some terms are understood differently by different authors and readers. The gist and implication of this statement is, concepts should be defined in terms of what they are understood to mean in the context of the present study. In this study, terms such as tense, composition writing and tense shift are clarified.

2.1.1 Composition writing

Composition writing is an aspect of continuous writing in the LGCSE English Language Syllabus. It is a discourse or piece of writing which is longer than a single sentence. Sundolls (2002) refers to composition writing as a type of writing that differs from directed writing. He

further states that in composition writing, the writer writes mainly about his experiences and imaginations depending on the type of composition. Unlike in directed writing, composition writing requires learners to write on one of the topics which are classified as narrative, descriptive, argumentative and informative. Moreover, in this kind of writing, marks are awarded on the basis of accurate use of language, wide range of appropriate vocabulary and clear organisation of relevant content. Williams (2002) defines composition writing as a sustained piece of writing in which one expresses ideas in a creative manner.

Sundolls' explanation of composition writing matches some LGCSE English Language Syllabus guidelines on writing and LGCSE level descriptors expressed in section 1.1. The definition includes all the types of compositions and some assessment requirements which are exemplified in the syllabus and level descriptors. The definition referred to does not exonerate any aspects of creative writing. For instance, it states that the analysis of grammatical errors committed by learners is done within writing and this concurs with the purpose of this study articulated in section 1.2. The study, therefore, adopted Sundolls' definition of composition writing. In the next section, tense shift as one of the key concepts of the study is defined.

2.1.2 Tense shift

Writers are advised to avoid unnecessary tense shifts in their writing. Sundolls (2002) indicates that tense shift refers to a change from one tense to another in a sentence or paragraph. Collins (2011) writes that tense shift, is a situation in which one writes on a particular topic but uses two or more tenses to discuss it in the same clause. If tense shift occurs, it should have a clear purpose. For instance, when quoting verbatim the words uttered by a particular character in a story, a shift in tense may come about. Collins further states that tenses may be switched to

enhance vividness but switching tenses without a valid reason distorts the sequence of events and can confuse the reader about the time covered in the sentence.

As emphasised in the above paragraph, use of tense in writing should be consistent. Collins (2011) maintains that writing will be easier to follow if one is sure to keep tense consistent. However, the author, in this regard, argues that sometimes it makes sense to mix tenses particularly when showing progression of actions. For example, *I am eating the food that I cooked.* Collins' assertion points out to the fact that a shift in tense is sometimes necessary in order to indicate a change in the time frame of the action. In the next section, illustrations in the form of examples on proper and improper tense shifts are given.

2.1.2.1 Example of a paragraph showing proper tense shifts

I learned to respect fine craftsmen when I *was* a young girl helping my father built the house that I lived in until I married. When he laid out the dimensions of the house or the opening of a door, he did it with an exactness and precision that would not allow for the careless kind of measurements that I would settle for. When he measured aboard and told me to cut, I knew that it would have to be cut in an unwavering line and that it would fit exactly in the place assigned to it. Doors that he installed still fit tightly, drawers slide snugly, joints in cabinets and mortices can scarcely be detected. Today when I measured a piece of new screen wire to replace the old or fence to put around the rose bushes, I can still hear the efficient clicking of his six-foot rule as he checks my calculations (Yarber et al. 2007).

In the paragraph above, the writer uses verbs in the past tense to describe events that occurred in the past and later shifts correctly to the present tense to describe events occurring in the present. The paragraph is, therefore, correct in its use of tense. The events of the past are recalled by the

author and narrated in the past (*learned*, *laid*…). When he shifts to the present, he changes tense accordingly. When I *measure*….

The paragraphs below, contrarily, are confusing because of the improper use of tenses shifting from the past to the present to refer to the same time.

2.1.2.2 Examples of paragraphs showing improper tense shifts

Flamenco *is* the traditional song and dance of the Audolucian people in Southern Spain. Developed over several centuries, Flamenco *has* roots in Rowani, Moorish, Indian and other types of music. Some songs *were* intense and profoundly sad. Others *are* moderately serious, and still other songs *will* be light tunes of joy and romance. The men's dance *features* speedy toe and heel clicking steps. The women's dance *featured* graceful hand and body movements. Guitarists usually accompany the dancers. Onlookers participated too by clapping their hands or snapping their fingers (yarber et al. 2007).

In Yarber et al.'s analytical view, the first and second sentences in the above paragraph, are in present tense indicating to the reader that the paragraph will be related in the present tense. In the third sentence, past tense is used and later on, the writer returns to the present tense in the fourth sentence is followed by the subsequent jump to the future tense and so on. The shifting of tenses jerks the reader from present to past to present to future without warning. In the next paragraph, another example of a paragraph showing improper tense shifts is given.

Most people *know* that cigarettes *were* bad for their health, but many do not know exactly how cigarettes affect their bodies. First the nicotine *speeds* up the heart beat and the blood pressure *rose*. The tar found in cigarettes *is* even more harmful because it *bore* ingredients that cause cancer. Tar also *brings* breathing problems such as shortness of breath and a chronic cough.

Your lungs also *took* in carbon monoxide when you *smoke*. It then *became* difficult for your blood to bring oxygen to vital tissues. People who hang on to smoking habits *took* chances with their health (Yarber et al. 2007).

Without, being repetitive, it is notable that, unnecessary or inconsistent shifts in tense obscure meaning and cause confusion. The most appropriate tense that should have been used in the above paragraph is simple present tense. Inversely, the writer inappropriately shifted from simple present to simple past tense. The paragraph reechoes the second research question of the present study which is on challenges that learners have with tense usage in composition writing. Moreover, the first research question of this study is on required skills for managing tense in composition writing, therefore, learners should skillfully use tense in composition writing. They should note that tense is a time marker or a linguistic quality expressing time, as a result, there has to be proper verb changes that occur within sentences and such changes sometimes affect the meaning.

Learners should always ensure that the tense forms used in their composition writing correspond with the time at which the actions take place. Second language (L2) learners should be able to analyse topics constructively in order to know which tenses are appropriate whenever they write compositions under different topics. Understanding the topic and knowing which tense to use helps them to avoid improper tense shifts in composition writing.

In a nut-shell, tense shift, is defined differently by different authors. This study adopted Collins' definition of tense shift because it accommodates and relates with the purpose of the study in that, the study investigates improper tense shifts in writing. Tense shift mostly happens in composition writing or continuous writing in general. As Collins states the LGCSE English

Language Syllabus also states that it is wrong for learners to shift tenses unnecessarily. Teachers encourage learners to shift tenses appropriately and meaningfully to demonstrate flair of language usage. The next section tersely spotlights the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is pivotal to confine a study within the context of a particular theory or some theories. Bless and Smith (1996), opine that in research, theories guide and facilitate investigation. Theory serves as an orientation for gathering data since it specifies the type of facts to be observed. Furthermore, application of literary theories guides the interpretation of findings and enhances understanding. The essence of the statements above is that, refining the research problem involves identifying a theoretical framework upon which to base the research. Theory in research determines and defines the focus of the research problem by generating and structuring research ideas.

There are many theories on which the study of L2 learning may be premised. Such theories may include, transformative professional development, contrastive analysis hypothesis, error analysis hypotheses (EAH)/L2 learners' interlanguage, to mention just a few. The present study is benchmarked on L2 learners' interlanguage. In the context of this study, L2 learners' interlanguage and EAH are used synonymously. The next subsections provide discussions on L2 learners' interlanguage and its guiding principles.

2.2.1 Second language learners' interlanguage

In the learning of ESL, learners write some sentences which are erroneous when judged by the rules of English Language (Boss 2005, Babah 2014). An error is a concern in the learning and

teaching of a second language. At first, contrastive analysis hypothesis was one of the models that were used to analyse learners' language errors. Following contrastive analysis hypothesis, emerged error analysis hypothesis (EAH). Pit Corder as the proponent of EAH argues that, errors were mainly believed to be a result of the interference of L1 in the learning of English as L2. However, not all errors can be traced back to the influence of learners' native language. Consequently, Corder (1974) proposed EAH, looking at learners' errors broadly in terms of their types and sources.

The EAH was formerly, understood as a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make in their study of a L2 (Nemser 1971, Schachter 1974, Corder 1978). The EAH falls under applied linguistics and it involves the study of learners' language errors. The analysis of such errors can help identify learners' linguistic difficulties and needs at a particular stage of language learning. It may help by devising remedial measures by making suggestions about the nature or strategies of language learning employed (Doughty and Long 2003, Endongan 2005).

Lately, authors write about L2 learners' interlanguage to refer to EAH. Desney (2009) asserts that L2 learners' interlanguage was inspired by Corder's EAH. L2 learners' interlanguage was introduced by an American linguist Larry Selinker to analyse the linguistic errors evidenced when second language learners attempt to express meanings in the language being learned. Babah (2014) states that, L2 learners' interlanguage starts with the errors learners make and studies them in the broader framework of their types and causes. The hypothesis provides data on actual attested problems and so it forms a more efficient basis for designing pedagogical strategies. Frifh (2015) espouses that L2 learners' interlanguage involves identification of errors, their classification and interpretation. Succinctly, L2 learners' interlanguage identifies, classifies,

analyses and interprets language errors in the learners' language-learning journey. Learners' tense-related errors were classified and analyzed in terms of the principles of L2 learners' interlanguage. The guiding principles of L2 learners' interlanguage are discussed underneath.

2.2.1.1 Guiding principles of second language learners' interlanguage

In accordance with L2 learners' interlanguage, it is asserted that language errors are of different types. They are categorised as errors of; *omission, addition*, *misformation* and *misordering*.

(a) **Error of omission**

An error of omission refers to an error evinced by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, Frifth 2015). By implication, errors of omission refer to the omission of grammatical elements such as morphemes, verbs, articles, conjunctions and so on. These are the grammatical components that should be there in properly constructed sentences. Due to lack of the knowledge of grammar, the meaning of the sentences in learners' compositions is affected by the absence of the required constituents of grammar. For example:

> (i) *She has umbrella.*

> (ii) *Thabo and Mpho playing.*

In the first sentence, *'an'* is missing while in the second sentence, a helping verb *'are'* is left out. The two sentences, therefore, have errors of omission. The present study deals with verbs and tense, therefore, learners' composition were analysed in order to identify errors relating to omitted verbs in sentences and errors of omission in tense formation.

(b) **Error of addition**

An error of addition means the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed utterance (Dulay et al. 1982, Boss 2005). It is an error which is reflected in the form of unnecessary inclusion of some grammatical apparatus in sentence construction. This kind of error may also prevail in learners' compositions because of the inadequate knowledge of grammar. For example: ***Me** I don't know.*

*I took it when we returned **back** from school.*

These sentences have errors of addition in the form of redundancy. '*Me*' and '*back*' were needlessly added. This study is on verbs and tense, therefore, learners' composition were analysed in order to pinpoint errors of addition in verbs and tense formation.

(c) **Misformation**

Misformation as one of the types of errors means using the wrong form of the morpheme or structure (Dulay et al. 1982). For example: *She **cutted** the cloth with a pair of scissors.*

The misformation error in the example above is reflected by the improper structure of the verb. In the context of this study the compositions were analysed and attention was focused on morphemes used to form verbs and tense in order to determine whether they are properly formed or there are some misformations.

(d) **Misordering**

Misordering refers to the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance (Dulay et al 1982, Frifth 2015). Misordering implies syntax or order of words in sentence construction For example: *What he is doing?*

In the sentence above, there is an error of misordering because in a meaningfully constructed interrogative sentence, the helping verb should come before the subject. Nevertheless, in the given example, the subject comes before the helping verb.

As mentioned in section 2.2, this study is premised on L2 learners' interlanguage. The principles of this hypothesis were used to classify the learners' errors of inconsistent tense usage. The third research question of the study focuses on the causes of improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing; therefore, learners' tense errors were interpreted in terms of the causes of errors articulated below.

2.2.1.2 Causes of errors pointed to in L2 learners' interlanguage

In the learning of ESL, there are different causes for learners' language errors. L2 learners' interlanguage points to incomplete application of rules, false concepts hypothesised, ignorance of rule restriction, context of learning, communication strategies, hypercorrection, carelessness, intralingual (overgeneralisation) and interlingual transfer as sources of errors which second language learners commit (Richards 1971, Boss 2005, Endorgan 2005). However, in the present study, only the causes that have a bearing on the study are explained below.

(a) **Interlingual transfer**

Interlingual transfer refers to the influence of the mother tongue exerted on the learning of L2. Brown (1980) defines interlingual transfer as the interference caused by the structural differences between L1 and L2. The author further writes that, some errors that second language learners make in their writing originate from their first language because the languages that learners already know can have influence on the process of learning a new one. Frifth (2015) states that, L2 learners stretch linguistic units by perceiving them as the same in meaning in both L1 and L2.

(b) **Intralingual transfer/ Overgeneralisation**

Intralingual transfer refers to the incorrect generalization of rules within the target language. It denotes instances where learners create a deviant structure on the basis of their experience and knowledge of other structures in the target language (Richards 1971, Corder 1974, Boss 2005). Overgeneralisation means using the grammatical conventions of the learned L2 in roughly the same way even where they do not apply. Having mastered a rule but does not know all the exceptions to that rule. For example: *I **runned** to the staffroom to report the matter.* The verb in this sentence overgeneralises and extends the English grammatical rule of adding the –ed morpheme to create past tense forms.

(c) **Context of learning**

The context of learning as a cause of language errors in L2 learners' interlanguage includes material induced errors, teacher talk induced errors and exercise based induced errors (Richards 1971). In a classroom context, the teacher or the text book can lead the learner to make wrong generalisations about the language.

(d) **Ignorance of rule restriction**

Ignorance of rule restrictions occurs as a result of failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures (Richards 1971, Boss 2005). Learners overlook exceptional restrictions regarding the use of rules. For example, '*was'* is a helping verb that marks the past tense form, but to have structures like '*She was wash the clothes*,' is incorrect and reflects ignorance of rule restriction.

(e) **Incomplete application of rules**

When learners fail to fully develop a certain language structure required to produce acceptable sentences, that is referred to as incomplete application of the rules (Corder 1981, Boss 2005). Learners do not use all the rules, they go for simple ones and ignore the other rules and therefore, fail to construct acceptable sentences. For example, *We all knew where was Tom hiding*. The meaning of the sentence is clear but the structure is incorrect because the helping verb comes before the subject. The sentence should read as follows; *We all knew where Tom was hiding*.

(f) **False concepts hypothesised**

False concepts hypothesised refers to false analogy or misanalysis. It involves faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language (Boss 2005, Frifth 2015). Learners operationalise false concepts of the learned L2. For example, the plural form of *boy* is *boys.* Learners sometimes add 's' to some nouns to change them into plural form even when it is inappropriate. For them, the plural form of *child* is '*childs.*' This is, therefore, an operationalised wrong hypotheses.

As referred to in Section 2.2, the guiding principles of L2 learners' interlanguage guide and facilitate this investigation. EAH/L2 learners' interlanguage situates the present study because the hypothesis focuses on the errors that learners commit. In the same manner, the study deals with tense errors that learners make in their composition writing. L2 learners' interlanguage points out that, errors are caused by different factors and errors are different in terms of types. Learners' errors were analysed, classified and interpreted according to their types and causes/sources spelled out in L2 learners' interlanguage.

Issues around L2 learners' interlanguage have a correlation with an in-depth comprehension of grammar. Grammar is a concept which provides a context within which tense is an aspect. The analysis of learners' language errors, occurs in the context of a language aspect called grammar. The next section, therefore, unpacks what grammar is and discusses what the understandings of authors on grammar situate the study.

2.3 GRAMMAR

Clarification on what grammar is understood to mean in this study is given in this section. Furthermore, types of grammar, reasons for teaching grammar, verb, aspect, tense and the types of verb tenses as elements of grammar are discussed in this section.

2.3.1 Definition of grammar

As alluded to in Section 1.0, the main function of a language is to communicate through, among other things, words. The way in which these words are modified and joined together to express thoughts and feelings differs from one language to another. The grammar of each language constitutes a system of its own. Felicity (2011) defines grammar as the arrangement of words and the way they function together in sentences. Grammar deals with the structure of words. We need an understanding of the internal structure of words and how words are related to one another in sentences so as to produce meaning. By implication, Felicity means that Words are the building blocks of a language. The words referred to in the statement may be subjects, objects or verbs.

Grammar is concerned with rules and how words are strung together to convey meaning. Gennaro and Collen-Ginet (2012) argue that the grammar of a language can be viewed as a set of abstract devices, rules and principles that serve to characterise formal properties of the well-

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formed sentences of that language. If the rules and principles relating to proper use of verbs and tense are adhered to, then grammar in this sense generates the language. This claim implies that for efficient composition writing, the guideliness of grammar should be observed. Moreover, Moodley (2013) states that language learning occurs in formal situations such as at school and is directly aimed at increasing the linguistic knowledge of the taught language because effective communication cannot take place in the absence of grammar.

The study adopted Gennaro and Collen-Ginet's (2012) understanding of grammar because it is not only about rules as other definitions are. It points particularly to rules governing verbs and tense. It should be recalled that tense as an aspect of grammar is a central phenomenon in this study. The significance of Gennaro and Ginet's (2012) declaration in the context of this study is, tense as a component of grammar and as an aspect of writing should be properly managed in order to produce meaningful texts and therefore, enhance the teaching and learning of composition writing. This understanding, therefore, relates with the investigation objective on skills that are needed for managing tense in composition writing.

Grammar deals with number and person together with other rules governing the use of standard language. As professed in the statement of the problem, tense errors and of grammar in general, block communication. While Grammar is a central component of language, tense is a component of grammar. Therefore, teaching tense improves the style of writing and communication itself.

Knowledge of the English Language grammar helps learners to write and communicate more effectively with requisite functional observance of structural rules. As grammar concerns studying morphology and syntax, it involves studying the structure of words, tense, phrases,

clauses and sentences. Grammar operates across clauses and sentences and it is, therefore, the bed rock for teaching standard language.

Grammar denotes meaningful and structurally appropriate sentences in spoken and written texts. It is, therefore, necessary to look into the types of grammar, aspects and rules of each type of grammar. The next section discusses the types of grammar and the relevance of such in the present study.

2.3.2 Types of grammar

There are different types of grammar such as descriptive, prescriptive, comparative, universal, generative and inflectional grammar. This section deliberates on the types of grammar that have implications for this study.

2.3.2.1 Prescriptive grammar

Prescriptive grammar lays down the conventions of usage regarded as being "correct". It suggests that some usages are incorrect and lack communication effect (Gaius 2009, Levison 2014, Andrews 2017). Prescriptive grammar is about a set of rules of language usage as found in the school books, as such, it establishes standard language. Based on prescriptive grammar and its aspects, the study analysed learners' composition for tense shifts looking at the rules of prescriptive grammar that were bent and appeared as challenges in learners' composition writing. Furthermore, knowledge of the rules laid by prescriptive grammar adds to the skills learners need so as to manage tense competently in composition writing.

2.3.2.2 Descriptive grammar

Descriptive grammar describes actual usage patterns. Levison (2014) argues that descriptive grammarians observe and record how language is used and their greatest concern is on the

structure of a language. Knowledge of descriptive grammar is an issue in this study because one of the research questions deals with skills which translate into usage. To manage tense properly, one has to be good and skillful with the rules of descriptive grammar.

2.3.2.3 Inflectional grammar

Inflectional grammar refers to a process of word formation in which words are modified to express different grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, number and person (Keddy 2013, Swan 2014, Martins 2016). Mavis (2011) defines inflectional grammar as the study of affixation and verb conjugation. In inflectional grammar, verbs are modified through the addition of morphemes that are used to change the grammatical meaning of words however, learners violate rules of inflectional grammar in their composition writing by improperly adding morphemes such as *–s, -es*, *-d* and *-ed*. Generally, improper tense shifts and wrong verb formations temper with rules of inflectional grammar.

In this study, tense usage is placed within the parameters of prescriptive, descriptive and inflectional grammar. It is so because tense actually prescribes rules and describes how verbs should be used or inflected by learners in their composition writing considering the time frame for whatever is written about. The types of grammar situate the study in that, grammar is dealt with in formal situations such as at school. It is in such situations where the skills for managing tense in writing are developed and challenges and their causes are addressed. It is necessary to teach grammar, therefore, the next section is on reasons for teaching grammar.

2.3.3 Reasons for teaching grammar

Teaching grammar helps learners to control the transformation processes in their own writing. If learners know grammar, they can criticize and improve their own writing. Clark (2007), on one

hand states that teaching grammar enables teachers to correct grammatical errors and improve the clarity and effectiveness of students' speech and writing. Grammar develops students' critical language awareness and extends students' control of style.

On the other hand, Otto (2007), argues that the chief objective of teaching grammar, especially that of a foreign language, is to give rules which must be obeyed if one wants to speak and write the language correctly. Thus, when correct grammar is not used, the language in learners' composition writing has no meaning. English Language teachers should teach grammar for learners to write well as grammar aids maintenance of effective communication in writing. The study deals with tense, and tense is around the verb as a grammatical aspect. It is, therefore, necessary to explain what a verb is and how verbs situate the study. The next section discusses verbs and the relevance of verbs to the present study.

2.3.4 Verb

When dealing with tense, the focus is always on the verb. We cannot talk about tense without referring to the verb. Yarber et al. (2007) indicate that a verb is a part of speech that expresses an action or state of being and thereby tells us what a noun or pronoun does. If the verb tells us what a noun or pronoun does, it is an action verb. This means that a verb is a doing word which indicates an action done by the subject involved in a particular sentence in writing. The use of verbs also reflects the time when an action was done. Yarber et al. (2007) further state that if the verb expresses a state of being rather than an action, it is a linking verb. A verb may be a single word or a verb phrase. Phrases that consist of helping verbs and the main verb are called verb phrase. Verbs change their forms and appearance more often than any other part of speech. As a result, they force us to pick our way through them carefully. This assertion means that linking

words do not express actions instead they connect a noun or a pronoun to a group of words that describe the subject.

Verbs can indicate different tenses by either ending in –d/-ed, change in spelling and/or by the helping verbs that go with them. To show additional differences in meaning, verbs often use helping words that suggest the time at which the action of the verb takes place. These helping verbs are sometimes called auxiliary verbs or modals (can, could, has, have, had, might, do, does, am) and they always come before the main verb.

As previously mentioned, the study is on tense, and verbs in their varying types are central to tense. Verbs situate the study because the statement of the problem indicates that learners do not do well in writing because of their inability to handle verbs. Verbs form part of the second research question as challenges that are investigated. Tense goes with aspect, therefore, in the next section, the difference between tense and aspect is drawn.

2.3.5 Tense and aspect

Most authors agree that the word tense means time. According to such authors, tense comes from a Latin word 'tempus' meaning time. Tense, therefore, means the time expressed by the verb. Tense relates the time of the event to the moment of speaking. Tenses which relate the time of the event to the time of speaking are referred to as absolute tenses (Yarber et al. 2007, Quinn 2007, Swan 2014). Tenses are usually manifested by the use of specific forms of verbs particularly in their conjugation patterns.

There is a controversy concerning the number of tenses English has. Some authors argue that English has three main time divisions which are present, past and future. These three-time divisions are seen as forming the three main blocks of tenses each being subdivided. On the

contrary, some grammarians argue that English has only two morphological tenses namely the present and the past. It is believed that there are two basic tenses which are the present and the past and all other forms relate to aspect; progressive and perfective aspect.

> **Progressive aspect** produces past continuous tense, present continuous tense and future continuous tense while **perfective aspect** produces past perfect, present perfect and future perfect. The category of aspect expresses how a state or action relates to time whether it is seen as a complete event, on-going or repeated. Perfective aspect is generally about complete events while imperfective/progressive aspect is about on-going events (https://www.englishclub.com).

Swan (2014) points out that aspect is not itself a tense form but a special feature of a tense form. Aspect is concerned with different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency. However, there is a close relationship between the two entities because they are both concerned with time though in different ways. While tense locates an event to either the moment of speaking or the time of another event, aspect relates the time of the event with internal constituents of the event and these time distinctions have been referred to as situation-external-time (tense) and situation-internal-time (aspect). Grammarians prefer to talk about progressive and perfective aspect rather than progressive and perfect tense since these forms express other ideas besides time (continuity and completion).

Comrie (1982) cited in Machobane (1985) differentiates between tense and aspect. He notes that tense refers to the absolute location of an event or action in time either present or past while aspect refers to how an action or an event is to be viewed with respect to time rather than to its actual location in time. Thus, tense shows time while aspect shows whether an event is seen as on-going or completed at a particular time.

As mentioned in Section 2.3.4, verbs play a vital role in tense. There are different types of verbs in English such as regular and irregular verbs, among others. Yarber et al. (2007) draw a distinction between regular and irregular verbs. According to them, irregular verbs form the past and past participle by adding '-d' or '-ed' to their present forms while irregular verbs do not just take '-d' or '-ed'. They change completely or do not change at all because of their irregular forms. For example, the following verbs do not change structure in both present and past tense; *cut, read, put* while the verbs below change completely in structure.

Take – took, Catch – caught.

These verbs are referred to as irregular because they have past tense forms that do not end in '*-d'* or '*-ed'* whereas regular verbs follow the normal rules and have the usual forms of taking '*-d'* or '*-ed'.*

Despite the noticeable differences in tense and aspect, in the school system, these differences are disregarded. Everything is subsumed under tense and so it is common to use the term tense in both cases. Tense and aspect are encompassed under a single syntactic category. This is why in language teaching in the schools, the curriculum has more than just two or three tenses. Consequently, under tense, the syllabus has the following types: Simple Present tense, Present continuous tense, Simple past tense, Past continuous tense, Simple future tense, Future continuous tense, Present perfect tense, Past perfect tense, Perfect continuous tense.

Among its research questions, the study deals with skills that learners should demonstrate in order to manage tense in composition writing. Thus, the claims in Section 2.3.4 on tense and the types of verbs imply that learners should be good with tense formation processes, ability to handle regular and irregular verbs. These are part of the much-needed skills for learners to

manage tense competently in composition writing. In the next section, different types of tenses are discussed. Further discussion is given on how the types of tenses have a place in this study.

2.3.6 Types of verb tenses

Tense is indicated by the use of a particular verb form, mostly an inflected form of the main verb. Literature indicates that handling verbs and many types of English tenses has challenges for some L2 learners. Fischer (2011) posits that some tenses are used more often than others because of the less challenge they pose in the formation processes. The study looked at learners' composition writing in terms of how tense is used and determined the extent to which using verb tenses in writing is a challenge. The different types of verb tenses are explained in the following sections.

2.3.6.1 The simple present tense

This tense is used to refer to actions or states which are true at the present moment. It expresses a condition or an action that exists now (Ngoh 1984). This tense is about the things that happen all the time or repeatedly, or are generally true (Collins 2011). Some of these activities or situations expressed through use of simple present tense may be regular or permanent.

Examples*:*   *They work six days a week.*

                He is a student.

Simple present tense may also be used to describe habitual actions or those that take place fairly regularly.

Example*:*   *The bus leaves at six a.m every day.*

                The sun rises in the east.

It is also used to express universal truths, facts or ideas which are true or believed to be true at all time (Ngoh 1984).

Example: *Living things need water.*

Simple present tense is commonly used in instructions.

Example: *How do I get to the police station? You go straight on for half a mile….*

2.3.6.2 The present continuous tense

The present continuous tense, also called present progressive tense is used to express an action or event which is taking place progressively at the present moment (Martins 2016).

Examples*:   It is raining heavily.*

          I am learning French.

Present continuous tense may sometimes be used to express futurity. When using the present continuous tense to indicate future action, a phrase or word like *tomorrow, next week* should be used to indicate future time (Ngoh 1984, Keddy 2013).

 Examples: *Where are you going for your vacation next month?*

          Tom is speaking to several organizations this afternoon.

When forming the present continuous tense, "be" verbs in their present tense form (am, is, are) are used and–*ing* is added to the main verb.

The study investigated causes of learners' inability to use tense consistently in composition writing. Learners' compositions were analysed so as to determine factors that impact or negate

the use of simple present and present continuous tenses in descriptive, argumentative and informative compositions. Again, the study is, in part, about tense-related skills that learners should portray when writing compositions. Thus, proper formation and use of simple present and present continuous tenses are part of the skills needed when creating images, ideas and atmospheres in writing. In the next subsections, the discussion focuses on simple past tense and past continuous tense.

2.3.6.3 Simple past tense

The simple past tense is used to refer to actions that have already taken place. According to Mavis (2011), the simple past tense is used to express actions or states which took place or existed and completed at some time in the past. Usually, a word or phrase referring to the past time is added.

Examples: David *stole* my money.

He *painted* the picture a long time ago.

World war two *ended* in 1945.

Though the simple past tense is used to refer to actions that have already taken place, Swan (2014) argues that a past verb is not only used to talk about the past events but also unreal or uncertain present or future events.

Example: *It would be better if we went home now.*

2.3.6.4 The past continuous tense

It is used to express an action or event which was in progress at a particular time in the past (Ngoh 1984).

Examples*:*   *He was walking home when it started raining.*

We were watching television when the doorbell rang.

When forming the past continuous tense, the 'be' verbs in their past tense form are used (was, were) and–*ing* is added to the main verb.

The narrative composition relies largely on use of past tense forms. As tense is genre specific, ability to use past tense forms in narrative composition is one of the skills that the study sought to ascertain in its investigation. Sections *2.3.6.3* and *2.3.6.4* highlight how simple past and past continuous tenses are formed so, the learners should be able to develop the tense formation skills.

2.3.6.5 The present perfect tense

The perfect tenses express the completion or perfection of an action by a given time not an act done at a given time (Collins 2011).

The present perfect tense is used for an action that started in the past and has been completed at some indefinite time. It shows result or completed activity. This tense is formed with *have* or *has* together with the past participle of the main verb.

Examples: *I have taken it to the mechanic.*

We have eaten delectable food.

She has baked some scones.

The present perfect tense is also used to show an action or event that began sometime in the past and is still continuing. Example*: I have sat here for an hour.* This is understood to mean that the person sat down there an hour ago and is still sitting here.

This tense is also used to refer to an action that took place at some time in the past but has an effect on the present situation. For example*, I have shut the door.* The sentence means that: the door is now shut, no one can go in or come out.

Present perfect tense may sometimes be used with <u>yet</u> in *question* and *negative* sentences to show that something is expected to happen (Mavis 2011).

Examples: *Has Gerard arrived yet?*

David hasn't received his grades yet.

This tense may also be used with *ever* and *never* as in the following examples:

I have never been to Japan.

Have you ever been to Japan?

This is one of the tenses that are rarely used in learners' compositions. This implies that the skill in using this tense is lacking. Learners are challenged and it is, therefore, the responsibility of teachers to address this challenge by developing the required skill in their learners.

2.3.6.6 The past perfect tense

The past perfect tense is used for an action that began and ended in the past. Furthermore, it shows that a particular action was completed before something else took place. The past perfect tense is formed with *had* added to the past participle of the verb (Keddy 2013, Martins 2016).

This tense is used to relate to two consecutive events that took place in the past. The earlier of the events is put in the past perfect tense to indicate that it belongs to a time more in the past than the other event.

Example*:*   *The lesson had started when Veronica came into the classroom.*

2.3.6.7 Simple future tense

There are different ways of talking about the future in English. The common structures are the *will/shall-future, be going to,* and *present progressive.*

Future tense expresses an action that is expected to take place in the future and future time can be expressed with the use of the auxiliary *will* or *shall. Shall* is used for the first person singular and plural while *will* is used for the second and third person (either plural or singular) (Swan 2014, Martins 2016).

Examples*:*   *We shall give the report next week.*

                You will get it whenever we meet.

Shall and *will* can be used with no difference in meaning. However, *will* is more common nowadays and *shall* is dying out.

When intention is added to the idea of futurity, *going to,* is usually used.

Example*:*   *I am going to sleep early tonight* **rather than,** *I shall sleep early tonight.*

However, the simple present tense may be used to express futurity, and in such cases, future time is indicated by use of adverbs and adverbial phrases of time such as tomorrow, next month and so on.

Example*: He leaves for England next week.*

2.3.6.8 Future continuous tense

We use this tense to say that something will be in progress at a certain time in the future. It consists of the auxiliary *shall* or *will* followed by *be* and then the main verb to which we add *–ing* (Ngoh 1984, Mavis 2011).

Examples*: We shall be making plans for our trip when you see us tonight.*

He will be thinking about the matter when he gets home this evening.

This time next Tuesday, I will be lying on the beach.

2.3.6.9 The future perfect tense

This tense is used to say that something will have been completed by a certain time in future. It is formed with *shall* or *will* followed by *have* and then by the past participle of the main verb.

Examples*: He will have finished his work when you get home.*

We shall have baked the cakes when you phone us.

The first research question of the study is on the skills that learners need to manage tense shifts in composition writing. The information on the types of tenses is, therefore, functional to the learners. It is part of the skills that the study sought to establish and the skills that learners should have to manage tense shifts in composition writing. They should understand types of tenses and be able to distinguish between different tenses thereby applying the rules of usage that govern each tense type. Ability to do so will enable them to write meaningfully using appropriate tenses depending on the theme and nature of the topic under discussion.

The use of an appropriate tense is important in establishing effective communication. This means communicating clearly, effectively and enabling one to raise the level of readability. Having learned the use of these common tenses, one should use them consistently avoiding unnecessary shifts from one tense to another. If a paragraph is started using the past tense to describe events in the past, one should not suddenly change into the present tense to describe those same events as that is abrupt shifting. This, however, does not mean one cannot use more than one tense in the same piece of writing. In the next sections, literature on the four research questions of the study is reviewed.

2.4 LITERATURE ON RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section provides literature based on the research questions of the study. In the first instance, literature on the first research question is provided.

2.4.1 Skills that learners need to manage tense shifts in composition writing

This subsection presents documented scholarship on the first research question which deals with the basic skills required by learners to manage tense in composition writing. This was provoked by the fact that Section 1.2 of the study emphasized that writing as an examining skill is threatened by the improper verb inflection and lack of skills in managing tense in composition writing.

In language teaching, tense is one of the elements deemed central to the components of the syllabus. As English Language teachers, one of our primary tasks is to develop the necessary linguistic skill in our learners so that they can recognize different language patterns. In the LGCSE English Language Syllabus (2014), the assessment objectives emphasise that one of the skills that learners should possess is the ability to communicate appropriately using accurate

grammar, sentence structures and linguistic devices. To avoid errors, it is important to know the rules that govern verb usage. Chomsky (1965) cited in Hassan (2015) contends that knowledge of grammatical rules governs proper speech formation. In the context of writing, the quoted assessment objective and Hassan's contention point to the need for development of practical writing skills through understanding the basics of English Language verbs and tenses.

Subjects and verbs should always agree in number. To this end, Deer (2014) postulates that the basic unit of thought that expresses meaning is the sentence. When constructing sentences, subjects and verbs as well as pronouns and their antecedents form a special relationship within sentences. Coetzee and Zeey (2014) and Martins (2016) support the subject-verb agreement idea in the assertion that the verb must be in concord with its subject even if a word or phrase comes between them. Linking or helping verbs should as well agree with their subjects. That is, a singular subject should take a singular verb and a plural subject should take a plural verb. These assertions connote that sentence construction in composition writing should be meaningful.

Tense involves a number of aspects that writers should understand. Awareness of the numerous verb forms and competency in using different verb types should be developed. According to Mutikiri (2015) and Schin (2016), verbs show action and time. Verbs express facts, arguments, commands and possibilities. These authors state that simple present tense is the most appropriate tense to use in argumentative and informative compositions.

Learners should be aware that a verb is an important element in the clause because it governs other parts in the rest of the sentence. To this end, Hassan (2015), states that tense is variable according to the use of the verb. Writers sometimes make a wrong choice of verbs used with collective nouns. Hassan's postulation insinuates that verbs may take different forms depending

on the noun types (collective or indefinite) used with such verbs. Learners should demonstrate the ability to use verb forms depending on different noun types used as subjects.

Quinn (2007) also posits that some verbs in their simple past tense form, do not just take the –ed morphological marker but have to undergo spelling changes before –ed is added. Examples;

Spy   *spied*

Trot   *trotted*

Refer   *referred*

When making the required spelling changes, the final consonant is sometimes doubled to form the simple past, present and past participle. If writers are aware of the verb conjugation processes in certain verb tenses, their writing will have few tense errors and will be readable.

It is the ideal linguistic competence that enables writers to produce an infinite number of sentences in a language and distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical ones. According to Deer (2014), linguistic competence helps writers to write skillfully crafted essays which are error free in grammar. Deer's contention in this paragraph recaps that knowledge of tense guidelines enables writers to use verbs in positive, negative and interrogative sentences, with no grammatical errors.

In line with the first research question of the study, the claims made in this section affirm that writing does not only rely on good content but also, on good language skills with observance of tense rules and other grammatical aspects. The next sub-section reviews literature on the second

research question which focuses on learners' challenges or weaknesses in tense usage that emerge in composition writing.

2.4.2 Challenges learners have in relation to tense management in composition writing

This sub-section presents literature on the second research question which ascertains learners' hurdles in tense usage in composition writing.

Literature and my experience as a teacher indicate that understanding how to use tenses in writing is challenging for second language learners. Swan (2014) avers that making a tense choice for different composition topics is a daunting task for some learners. They distort the meaning of their essays by shifting from one tense to another from time to time. A tense shift in sentence construction occurs when words and phrases intended for one purpose are used for another, upsetting the flow of the sentence or paragraph. This idea is espoused by Mutikiri's (2015) statement that teachers do not expect such blatant errors of tense at LGCSE level. Shifting from tense to tense is a serious grammatical error. It leads to awkwardness and blurs communication. Such errors arise because the writer is unsure about how to form the tense forms of certain verbs. This claim connotes that quite repeatedly, learners confuse tenses moving in an abrupt manner from one tense to another and back again.

The changes that take place in the simple past and past participle forms of a verb, determine whether the verb is regular or irregular. As alluded to in Section 2.3.4, a regular verb is one in which the simple past and past participle are formed by adding –d or –ed to the present form but irregular verbs do not end in the same way. Deer (2014) indicates that tense is a particularly complex feature of grammar because the functional significance of a tense inflection is hard to deduce. Mutikiri (2015) furthers this idea in the contention that trouble for most O'level learners

lies in handling past simple tense of irregular verbs. The simple past of the irregular verbs can end in a variety of ways with absolutely no consistent pattern. Writers make two frequent errors with irregular verbs. They either add an incorrect –ed to the end of an irregular verb or accidentally interchange the simple past and past participle. For example, He *feeled* like exercising so he *putted* her bathing suit and *drived* to the YMCA where she *swum*. Bevan (1993) and Mutikiri (2015) affirm that some writers treat irregular verbs as if they are regular verbs. Again, they confuse the simple past and past participle.

Learners' insufficient linguistic competence in the target language makes such learners feel challenged when using tense in their composition writing and therefore, commit tense-related errors. For example, the verb used with the singular subject in the third person form takes 's' which is added to its base form. However, some learners add 's' to the verb even when the subject refers to the first or second person. To this end, Bevan (1993) admits that examiners regularly report on errors candidates make when they use the present simple tense. Candidates sometimes lose marks for failing to add an 's' for the third person singular of the present simple tense. However, some lose marks because they add an 's' in the third person plural, the first or second person. Coetzee and Zeey (2014) attest to Bevan's contention in the assertion that linguistic competence is important as it enables one to produce meaningful texts.

Students also struggle in their composition writing with the management of infinitives, participles and gerunds. When referring to an event that transpired in the past, students usually change the verb which follows 'to' into simple past tense and this is erroneous. Deer (2014) postulates that gerunds are the verbal nouns and they carry the suffix –ing. The English rule states that 'to' should be followed by the simple form of the verb. '-S', '-es', '-ed', '-ing' cannot

be added to the base form of the verb which follows 'to'. Nevertheless, some learners usually add –ed to the verb which follows 'to'. Moodley (2013) refers to gerunds as the verb forms which function as nouns. Writers portray a perceptible challenge when using gerunds because of the confusion brought by the participles which also end in –ing. Such learners are not able to differentiate between gerunds and participles. Schin (2016) argues that gerunds can function as noun subjects, direct and indirect subjects depending on how the sentence is constructed.

Learners sometimes have difficulty with the negative form of the present simple tense. The negative form of the present simple tense is made from the appropriate form of the verb 'do'. 'Do' is used with the first and second person singular and plural. 'Does' is used with the third person singular. Contrarily, Schin (2016) argues that in the learning of English as L2, learners sometimes use 'does' in their sustained writing when forming the negative, affirmative and interrogative sentences even when they refer to the first and second person or even when the subject is in plural form.

Learners also use –ing form of certain verbs when they should use the present simple tense.

Examples: *She is seeming sick.*   *She seems sick.*

               They are liking rice.   *They like rice.*

               He is wanting a pen.   *He wants a pen.*

ESL learners struggle with the verbs that are used with indefinite pronouns. According to Hassan (2015) indefinite pronouns are the pronouns that do not refer to any specific beings. They do not indicate the exact being, object or place to which they refer. Examples of indefinite pronouns are *everyone, one, nobody, someone, everything, everybody* and so on. Indefinite pronouns take

singular verbs. Hassan further states that ESL learners reflect uncertainty in their composition writing as to whether indefinite pronouns should take singular or plural verbs. In the same piece of writing, they use indefinite pronouns with singular verbs while in some paragraphs they use the same indefinite pronouns with plural verbs. However, not all indefinite pronouns take singular verbs. My reason for this argument is that some pronouns such as '*both*, *several* and *many'* are plural indefinite pronouns. Therefore, singular indefinite pronouns should take singular verbs and plural indefinite pronouns should take plural verbs.

When a sentence has two subjects, the verb has to be in plural form. Schin (2016) asserts that subjects joined by coordinating conjunctions such as '*and'* and '*or*' are plural and must have a plural verb. However, ESL learners have a difficulty in the use of verbs where two subjects are used in one sentence. They use singular verbs with compounded subjects.

The claims made in this section show that language learning does not go without hurdles. These claims propel the study because it is asserted in such claims that the challenges affect meaning and the general performance of learners in composition writing and continuous writing in general. In connection with the second research question, factors to which tense-related challenges are attributed were established. In the next section, literature on the causes of tense-related challenges is presented.

2.4.3 Possible causes of improper tense shifts

The JC and LGCSE English Language Syllabuses (2007) and (2014) respectively profess that the ultimate end result is students' language proficiency and competent use of it. However, Khati (2009) argues that lack of language proficiency is a contributing factor to learners' inconsistent use of tense. Khati defines language proficiency as an advanced knowledge and skill in the art of

communicating in English. It is the ability to use language elements such as grammatical constructions in order to achieve the intended results.

The teaching methods and the nature of the syllabus may also contribute negatively to the teaching of English Language. Lewis and Penn (1989) argue that boring and ineffective teaching methods prohibit learners from developing competence in language usage and tense usage in particular. The school going youth memorize information on grammatical aspects instead of understanding it because of the ineffectiveness of the teaching methods. The Public Eye newspaper (2004) states that external examinations dominate the teaching-learning process. Lewis and Penn as well as the Public Eye newspaper point to a fact that English Language teachers use prosaic teaching methods because of the nature of the syllabus. Excellent results become one and the only objective.

Writing based activities are advantageous in the learning of English Language. Vallette (2000) proclaims that by writing frequently, not only one's mastery of the elements of writing could improve but also the acquisition of new vocabulary and grammatical structures. Collins (2011) also points out that learners who are not exposed to writing in English frequently have little practice in using English. Such learners end up using first language together with the second language. In a nut-shell, the assertions in this paragraph indicate that some circumstances in some learning contexts may lead to lack of writing practice. The lack of writing practice is therefore a cause for inconsistent use of tense in learners' composition writing. Learners are denied a chance to practise the right model a sufficient number of times. This fact, therefore, leads to learning grammatical aspects in isolation from writing.

As mentioned in Section 2.2, the theoretical framework of this study in its principles avers that there are different types of errors and different causes for different linguistic errors. For this study, the claims made in this section imply that learners' overt tense errors and other grammatical errors in general that are embodied in their compositions were analysed for their causes. Following the analysis for causes of tense errors, pedagogical strategies aimed at improving the situation were suggested. In the next section, pedagogical strategies are discussed.

2.4.4 Pedagogical strategies that can be employed to improve the management of tense in composition writing

This section reviews literature on pedagogical strategies that can be utilized to improve the management of tense in composition writing.

Writing like speaking is essentially communication. Learners should be able to identify tense types and understand how they are used in sentences. Scholly (2013) suggests a number of activities that can augment the teaching of English Language. The author states that teachers should not be knowledge transmitters but should let learners spot their errors of tense in writing and replace them with the correct forms. English Language tenses should be taught through systematic presentations and clear visuals. Scholly's (2013) suggestion supports Collins's (2011) postulation that learners' activities must be confined to the audio-lingual and gestural-visual bands. These suggestions illustrate that teaching English Language effectively requires interactional methods and activities. The entire teaching should be embedded in the communicative approach enabling learners to communicate in speaking and writing simultaneously allowing them to have discussion and negotiate meaning.

Games are useful in English Language lessons. They make learners feel comfortable and confident to participate during classroom activities. Pastridge (2012) points out that playing is

learning; therefore, games are pedagogically beneficial to second language learners. Learners play charades to practise the present perfect tense. They also tell stories to practise past tense forms. Pastridge's postulation points to the importance of games in the teaching and learning of English Language. Games induce English Language learners to pay attention to linguistic forms. The interest in learning is sustained and the retention of content and skills becomes reasonable.

Comprehensive didactic principles should not be compromised in the teaching of English Language. Emmit, Clopp and Emmon (2003) argue that the four language skills are facets of the same diamond. Development of one language skill enhances development of the other skill. As such, teachers should provide opportunities for students to experiment with different tenses in both oral and written codes. Khati (2009) espouses this idea by positing that all those whose responsibility is to teach English should always strive to create communicative atmospheres for learners in their different language teaching approaches and methodologies. Acbald (2015) highlights that, in ESL classrooms, learners need materials that are lively and reflect on some real-life concerns. Diagrammatic representation, comic strips, action pictures and stick charts may illustrate verbs that are not easily enacted. Action pictures draw learners' attention. When resorting to pictures, the teacher should depict the verbs in varying contexts so as to show different verb tenses. The assertions in this paragraph suggest that using creative instructional methods that involve learners increases participation and make English Language lessons more effective and interesting.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are different strategies for teaching tense. To support this, Gris (2016) states that debate enables learners to become less narrow minded and look at all sides of the argument. Gris' notion points to debate as a pedagogic requirement. The emphasis is

on the practical demands of teaching. In the same vein, Ronald (2014) contends that music is a material for language instruction. Songs may be tied to specific language skills and certain grammatical pieces. These contentions denote that teachers should not teach verb tenses in arid ways.

Glim (2016) and Gris (2016) advocate for wide ranging teaching methods in the teaching of English Language tenses in order to cater for learners' different learning needs. Glim submits that in the teaching-learning, analysis of newspaper headlines, horoscopes and current affairs are effective in the teaching-learning situations. Gris also states that story-telling and analysis of arguments presented in recommended text books aid the development of language skills. In a word, profound and diverse/assorted teaching methods are suggested in the statements given above.

Teaching English Language, in part or as a whole, should inform the accurate use of English. The essence of teaching grammar and tense in particular, should be geared towards achieving the end professed in the LGCSE English Language Syllabus. The English Language Syllabus and examinations require knowledge of formal grammar. English should, therefore, be central to theory and practice.

2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed literature on the key terms of the study which are composition writing and tense shifts. The chapter also highlighted the guiding principles of the hypothesis which underpins the study. Moreover, literature on other concepts of the study which are grammar, tense, aspect and types of verb tenses was reviewed. The chapter further reviewed literature based on the research questions of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on research design and methodology, sampling techniques, procedure for data collection, data collection techniques, analysis of data, ethical considerations and trustworthiness.

3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Paradigms commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection and interpretation. According to Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2010), paradigms are central to research design because they impact on the nature of the main research question. They provide a rationale for the research. This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm.

The interpretivist paradigm is interactional, interpretative and explanatory (Salkid 2009, Blanche et al. 2010). Cohen, Manion and Morrisson (2007) argue that the interpretivist paradigm is characterised by a concern for the individual to understand the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind the phenomenon being investigated. It strives for an understanding and interpretation of the world in terms of its actors and meanings as well as interpretations are central to this paradigm. In the present study, the actors are learners and the teachers. The researcher wanted to have an in-depth understanding of the reasons (causes) that lie behind learners' inability to use tense proficiently and other meanings that lie behind the phenomenon investigated such as required skills and alleviation strategies. Through application of the

interpretivist paradigm, the researcher was able to interact with learners and teachers as participants in the present study.

The interpretivist paradigm puts emphasis on personal involvement while at the same time investigating the taken for granted meanings. It foregrounds the meaning that is assigned to personal experiences (Ellis 2009). In trying to understand the causes of improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing, the present study broadly looked at required language skills in writing and the challenges regarding use of language by learners in their learning experiences.

I therefore, consider this paradigm lucid in this study because the sampling techniques, data collection and interpretation as well as the context of the study fit within the logic of the interpretivist paradigm and with the purpose of the research. In addition, this paradigm aligns with the qualitative case study. The paradigm itself goes about finding answers to the questions. Therefore, the study is intended to understand the subjective reasons pertaining to the causes of improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing. The study will attain this by applying the common features of the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research design. Such features relate more to the interactional and interpretive aspects.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research methods can be differentiated to whether data are submitted to a qualitative or quantitative treatment. The present study used the qualitative approach. Lemmer (2008) points out that qualitative design enables the researcher to collect an extensive amount of data. Also, in qualitative design, discussion on the literature is not confined to the beginning of the study but also, is used later to support findings. In the present study, in the analysis chapter, this feature of the qualitative design enabled the researcher to use the reviewed literature to interpret the

findings in terms of whether literature supports or contradicts the findings regarding tense-related skills, challenges and causes of such challenges. As Salkid (2009) states, researchers do not make predictions about findings but are interested in whether findings support or modify existing ideas advanced in the literature.

The qualitative research is a social and behavioural research. It is time intensive, tracks insights and explores the processes that underlie the problem under investigation (Salkid 2009). In trying to understand the causes of tense inconsistency in learners' compositions, insights from the interviewed teachers and learners' compositions were tracked so as to identify the challenges and the causes that underlie tense shifts in learners' composition writing.

Qualitative design allows the researcher to study selected issues. Markeyn (2016) states that qualitative research is reflective, interpretative, descriptive and usually reflexive. It also studies the phenomenon in its natural setting which is the school in this study. Learners wrote compositions in their classrooms. The selected issue which is studied in its own right is the use of tense in composition writing. The interpretations, reflections and descriptions are on tense with reference to its usage in composition writing. The guiding principles of qualitative design enabled the researcher to reflect on teachers' insights on use of tense and interpreted them in terms of skills required, challenges faced by learners, causes of such challenges and pedagogical strategies.

The qualitative design enables the researcher to interact directly with the participants. Glyms (2007) contends that qualitative approach obtains information from participants about the way things are, why they are like that and how participants perceive them. In this study, the researcher investigated why learners inappropriately shift from one tense to another in

composition writing. Words and sentences are used to qualify and record what is researched. Because of the descriptive nature of the qualitative design, language becomes a tool by which social reality is recorded and this feature renders the study qualitative.

The present study is a qualitative case study design in which the focus was mainly on composition writing of Form E students in the selected high schools. Challenges regarding use of tense in composition writing were dealt with in depth and suggestions were given. Salkid (2009) contends that using a case study is advantageous because case studies are descriptive in nature and they yield a great deal of detail and insight, showing interest in the existing condition. A case study enables a very close scrutiny and encourages several techniques in order to get the necessary information ranging from personal observations to interviews. In a case study, the researcher explores in depth an activity and allows the researcher to collect information using a variety of data collection tools.

Qualitative and case study research are not identical but almost all qualitative researches seek to construct representations based on in-depth, detailed knowledge of cases. Qualitative research resonates with a case study design and the interpretive paradigm because they share the common features of being interpretive, descriptive and exploratory and all rely on an in-depth understanding of the investigated phenomenon. Dealing with tense management in composition writing is also descriptive, interpretive and focuses on an in-depth investigation.

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

Neuman (2006) defines population as the abstract idea of a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample. Salkid (2009) espouses Neuman's definition in that in qualitative research, the term participants is deemed more appropriate. Learners in Lesotho high

schools may have a problem of tense inconsistency but not all of them were participants in this study. The participants in this study were the Form E learners and teachers of English Language in the three selected high schools in the Maseru district.

3.4 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Sampling refers to the selection of research participants (Dawson 2002, Neuman 2006, Glyms 2007, Salkid 2009). It is a process of selecting cases to be observed. In the present study, purposive sampling was used to select the representatives about which the researcher aims to draw conclusions. Blanche et al. (2010) assert that purposive sampling selects cases with a specific purpose in mind. Blanche further states that samples for qualitative studies are usually small because they are not meant for generalisations. They are interested in deep understanding of the phenomenon that is researched.

Purposive sampling is a sampling method based on the judgement of the qualitative researcher. It is selective and subjective (Bless 2009). In the present study, the researcher wanted to understand errors that learners commit in tense. Since the concern is an in-depth understanding of the tense-related challenges and causes of such challenges, the sample was small in numerical terms. Purposive sampling was, therefore, considered appropriate in the present study because it relates with the researcher's purpose and it enabled him to have an in-depth understanding of learners' tense errors, as well as their causes.

There are eighteen high schools around the researcher's work place. However, the sample size of this study comprised three high schools in the Maseru district. The time frame of the study could not allow for all schools to be included in the study. The researcher preferred Form E students over other students in other classes because Form E learners were believed to be more

conversant in writing since they had acquired more grammatical knowledge and know better how the grammatical rules are applied in composition writing. Also, almost all the content of the syllabus had been covered thus, they are supposedly more knowledgeable.

The participating schools were selected purposively on the basis of their performance in the external English Language examinations. They were selected as follows; through the assistance of the ECOL, one school was selected due to its outstanding performance in the LGCSE English Language external examinations. Another school's selection was influenced by its average performance in the external English Language examinations. The last school was drawn on its bad performance in the external examinations, particularly in English Language. As mentioned earlier in this section, purposive sampling is selective and judgemental. This sampling technique fitted in the research design and enabled the researcher to determine whether the problem of tense inconsistency cuts across or lies with students in outstanding, average or badly performing schools in terms of English Language.

In some schools, learners are streamed by ability. All Form E learners in the selected high schools were therefore, given a composition writing test. Scripts were selected randomly in each of the purposively selected schools. In a school where there were more than two Form E streams, five scripts from each stream were marked. In a school where there were only two Form E streams, eight scripts per stream were marked while in a school with only one form E stream, fifteen scripts were marked. When marking the scripts, the researcher analyzed the content with particular attention on tense usage. The sample size of scripts was made on the basis of Blanche et al.'s (2010) argument that a very small sample may be unrepresentative. The researcher must ensure that the sample enables him to make inferences if need be. The researcher used data

gathered from the participating schools to establish causes of problems pertaining to inconsistency in tense usage.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

There are many ways of gathering information from participants in a qualitative research. In this study, information was gathered through composition writing tests and the assessment focus of such tests was on the use of tense. Open-ended interviews were also conducted with individual LGCSE English Language teachers in the selected high schools.

3.5.1 Composition writing tasks

Learners were not asked what tense is. Instead, they were given composition topics of different types and each learner was asked to write on one. Since tense shifts and tense-related errors in general are by composition type, learners were expected to demonstrate their ability in using tense correctly in each type of composition writing. The content of learners' compositions was analysed. Ellis (2009) refers to content analysis as a systematic reading and analysis of texts. In the present study, the analytic reading was focused on the tense-related errors that learners make in composition writing.

3.5.2 Open-ended interviews

Face to face interviews were conducted with individual LGCSE English Language teachers. The researcher interviewed a total of nine teachers, three teachers from each participating school. Blanche et al. (2010) point out that an interview is a more natural form of interacting with people. An open-ended interview fits with the interpretive approach to research because it creates an environment of openness and trust within which the interviewee is able to express in depth and authentically, experiences regarding the investigation.

Open ended interviews were adopted in order for teachers to openly give their views regarding the use of tense in composition writing. The technique is in line with Bless's (2005) assertion that open ended interviews involve not only direct contact with the participants but also afford them an opportunity to respond and comment freely about what they are asked and elaborate on the research phenomenon as they see fit. Again, in open ended interviews, the researcher is able to ask for clarification.

The chosen data collection techniques fit in the research design. Open ended interviews and composition writing tests are qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative research collects data in the form of written or spoken language. It was advantageous to give learners composition writing tests because learners were tested in their natural settings. Teachers were also interviewed in the context of their schools while interacting with the learners. In the present study, I interviewed LGCSE English Language teachers for skills required for managing tense in composition writing, tense-related challenges, causes of such challenges and pedagogical strategies appropriate for combating tense-related deficiencies in writing. The open-ended interviews as part of the data collection techniques, were expected to generate qualitative data on skills, challenges, causes and pedagogical strategies.

3.6 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

This section in research is about how each one of the data collection techniques was applied. The learners in all the selected high schools were given five composition topics and they wrote on one. Arrangements for meeting individual teachers for interviews were made with the concerned teachers and interview questions were prepared well ahead of the meeting. The researcher asked the interviewees to let him record the proceedings of the interviews for quality of information.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The guiding principles of L2 learners' interlanguage hypothesis were used to analyze data. The hypothesis and its principles as explained in Section *2.2.1.1* studies errors made by the ESL learners. It is a process to observe, analyze and classify the deviations of the rules of the second language learned. Crystal (1987) also avers that this hypothesis is a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by second language learners.

The learners' errors in tense were identified from their written compositions, classified or grouped in terms of the principles of this hypothesis. Such errors were also analyzed and interpreted in terms of the principles of the said hypothesis.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In research, the researcher has to act ethically by obtaining consent from the participants. Salkid (2009) states that a fundamental principle which underpins ethical codes in research is that participants have a right to refuse or agree to take part in the study. In consideration of this, the researcher explained the necessary aspects of the study and negotiated participants' cooperation. The researcher also assured participants that collected information would be dealt with anonymously and in strict confidentiality maintaining integrity and professionalism. The participants were further assured that data would be used for the stated purpose of the research and no other person would have access to the data. The researcher also produced a letter of introduction from LASED in trying to negotiate cooperation.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Researchers should always ensure that the findings of the study are sufficiently rigorous, insightful and trustworthy. Mors (2015) documents that trustworthiness means evaluating the

quality and integrity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability as the four strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative research. Silverman (2007) suggests triangulation as another strategy for enhancing quality in research. To develop trustworthiness of the findings in this study, the researcher used all the five strategies suggested above.

(a) Credibility

Credibility involves carrying out the study in a way that enhances the believability of the findings. Efforts should be made to demonstrate credibility to external readers (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In the present study, I included some excerpts from the learners' compositions. The extracts are in learners' handwriting. Again, some snippers from the open-ended interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers were included in the write-up. The snippers and excerpts were meant to enhance believability, and therefore, ensure trustworthiness.

(b) Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and conditions. The dependability question is *'would the study findings be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same participants in the same context?'* (Erlandson 2001, silverman 2007). The answer is *yes*. In this regard, I checked the findings from the interviews against the findings from the compositions and the findings were repeated. In this way, trustworthiness was safeguarded.

(c) Confirmability

It refers to the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about the accuracy and relevance of the data. It is concerned with establishing that data represent the

information participants provided and that the interpretations of those data are not imagined by the inquirer (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Mors 2015). In this study, the findings reflect the participants' voice from the snippers. Again, some of the interviewed teachers were given chance to read through the researchers' transcribed notes so as confirm whether the notes corresponded with what they said.

(d) Transferability

The investigator's responsibility is to provide sufficient descriptive data that readers can evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts (Silverman 2007)). This study is a case study, qualitative in nature and follows the interpretative paradigm. All these aspects imply detailed description for an in-depth understanding. The study, therefore, provided the necessary descriptions that can enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as possible.

(e) Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple referents to draw conclusions about what constitutes the truth. The aim of triangulation is to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single method and single observer. Triangulation can also help to capture a more contextualized picture of the phenomenon under study (Silverman 2007, Mors 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985), mention different types of triangulation such as data, investigator, method and theory triangulation. In this study, I used data triangulation to ensure trustworthiness. Not only one teacher was interviewed but nine LGCSE English Language teachers were. They were interviewed several times where there was a need.

Consistent data collection instruments were used in order to get consistent results. For instance, classroom tests were reliable and free from biasness and distortion. The researcher, learners and teachers were proactive and took responsibility of ensuring rigor and trustworthiness. Again, data collection was carried out using multiple techniques. Appropriate activities were also conducted to ensure trustworthiness and objectivity.

3.10 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the methodology. The presentation incorporated the research paradigm and design, participants, sample and sampling techniques. Furthermore, the chapter presented data collection techniques, procedure for data collection, ethical considerations, and the strategies for ensuring trustworthiness.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports findings on each research question of the study. There are four sections in this chapter which are grounded on the four research questions spelled out in Section 1.3. The chapter further presents an analysis and interpretation of data in terms of the analysis procedure specified under Section 3.7. Findings under each section will be followed by the insightful summative perspectives. The chapter closes with a summary.

4.1 SKILLS LEARNERS NEED IN ORDER TO MANAGE TENSE IN COMPOSITION WRITING

This section reports findings in response to research question one vide (1.3.1). The discussion under this heading hubs on the data that relate to the skills that Form E learners should demonstrate in order to manage tense in composition writing. The data referred to were sourced from interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers and essay writing tasks. After reporting the major findings, the researcher gave an insightful interpretive summative perspective on them in terms of what they point to. The findings are classified into open ended interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers and essay writing tasks.

4.1.1 Findings from interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers

As stated in the methodology chapter, Section 3.5, open ended interviews were one of the data collection techniques. The researcher conducted interviews with individual teachers who teach English Language at LGCSE level. The interviews were meant to generate data on what teachers perceive to be the skills needed for management of tense in composition writing.

Initially, the interview questions were restricted to narrative composition. Therefore, the researcher anticipated findings on narrative composition during data collection. However, the interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers incited that it is unavoidable to reflect on narrative composition without addressing all the other forms of composition writing including descriptive, argumentative and factual. Data emerged classifying itself into different verb tenses showing that different tenses characterize different composition types. Inclusion of all types of composition was necessitated by the fact that the LGCSE English Language examination paper one assesses all the four forms of composition. Again, as the study is qualitative in nature as mentioned in Section 3.2, the researcher saw no harm in including all the other forms of compositions in this study.

As stated earlier in this section, tense management in composition writing is genre specific. Teachers stated that when writing descriptive, narrative, argumentative or informative compositions, different tense types are used. This finding is in line with Otto's (2007) statement expressed in Section 2.3.3. It is suggestive; therefore, that learners should be aware of the different rules that govern each tense type. With such awareness, learners will be able to use tense consistently in all types of compositions.

4.1.1.1 Skills necessary for the management of tense in descriptive composition

The study brought to surface a number of findings which point to need for linguistic competence skills. From the interview data, the findings regarding use of tense in descriptive composition are reported under the following headings: tense sequence, management of verbs and tense formation as well as subject-verb agreement. The next units present findings on each of the linguistic competence skills mentioned above.

(a) Tense sequence

Proper use of simple present tense for the description of a place, a person and an object should be maintained. It was gathered from the interviews that an important skill that learners have to demonstrate in their descriptive composition writing is the ability to use tense consistently. Quoted in part, some of the interviewed teachers stated that,

A common approach to writing a descriptive composition about a place, person or object is to use the simple present tense. Learners should give their topic sentences in simple present tense and give their supporting details in the same tense. However, when describing an event, someone who is dead or someone met a longtime ago and do not see any more, learners should use the past tense forms.

The above statements indicate that the sequence of tenses should be consistent and clear throughout learners' descriptive texts. This finding is in line with the LGCSE level descriptors (2014) expressed in Section 1.1 that verb forms should be correct and appropriate while appropriate tenses should be used consistently. Proper use of verb tenses is part of the language skills that learners should possess. Therefore, in the teaching and learning of verb tenses in writing, teachers should ensure that the control of tense sequence is adequate to sustain clear progression of ideas and events in a descriptive composition.

(b) Tense formation and management of verbs

Appropriate management of verbs and correct tense formation are the gist of the report in this subsection. The interviews revealed that for learners to manage tense aptly in descriptive composition, they need to know verb types and how they behave in tense. It was further

emphasized that learners should be aware of the affirmative, negative and interrogative forms of the simple present and simple past tenses. Some teachers stated that,

*Learners should be able to use different verb types in different ways depending on whether the subject is in singular, plural, first, second and third person forms. They should know when to add inflectional morphemes such as 's' or 'es' to the verb and when to leave the verb in its simple form. They should also know when to use auxiliary verbs such as '**do** and **does**'.*

The teachers' remarks point to the ability to manage verbs and tense formation competence. Learners should properly manage finite and auxiliary verbs. Again, when managing finite verbs, they should know when to add different inflectional morphemes. This finding confirms Chomsky's (1965) claim cited in Hassan (2015) that knowledge of grammatical rules govern proper formation of speech (vide 2.4.1). Linguistic competence enables one to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical sentences. Tense as an element of grammar can help the LGCSE English Language learners to write well-crafted descriptive compositions which are error free in grammar. It is, therefore, a linguistic competence skill that learners should possess, among many other skills.

(c) Subject-verb agreement

Correct sentence construction with agreement in verbs and subjects is the focus of the report in this section. The interviewed teachers averred that,

Leaners should understand what a sentence is so as to be able to construct meaningful sentences. Every sentence, when it is expressed in full, consists of a subject and the predicate. The subject and a verb are the basic elements of a sentence. The subject is the doer of the action and the verb

is the word that is used to form the predicate of the subject. Learners should understand the relationship between the verb and the subject. They should move towards mastery of each of these elements to construct grammatically correct sentences.

Writing communicatively requires one's ability to construct meaningful sentences with agreement of the subject and the verb. Subject-verb agreement emerged from the interviews as a linguistic competence aspect to be managed in descriptive composition. This finding is consistent with the assessment objectives described in the LGCSE English Language Syllabus (2014) that the ability to communicate appropriately requires accurate grammar, sentence structures and linguistic devices (vide 2.4.1). It is also in line with Deer's (2014) assertion on subject-verb agreement expressed in Section 2.4.1. The finding points to need for LGCSE English Language teachers to strive for helping learners develop this linguistic competence skill by using teaching aids and methods geared towards development of the said skill.

With regard to the first research question which reads as '*what skills do learners need to manage tense in composition writing?*', the major finding revealed by the interview data on tense management skills in descriptive composition points to aptitudes relating to linguistic competence. These skills encompass maintenance of the consistent tense sequence, proper management of verb types which culminates in proper tense formation. The next subsection gives the report on the skills necessary for the management of tense in narrative composition.

4.1.1.2 Skills necessary for the management of tense in narrative composition

Findings that emerge from this study vis-à-vis the tense related skills that enhance effective communication in narrative composition point to language proficiency skills. Findings are thematised into knowledge of tense rules, skill to manage different verb types and the ability to

use tense skillfully in direct quotations. The discussion that follows, reports findings on each of the stated themes.

(a) Knowledge of tense rules

One of the skills that learners need in managing tense in narrative composition writing is the ability to use tense relevantly. If learners know the rules that govern narrative tenses, they will be able to use them appositely. The majority of the interviewed teachers profess that,

Learners should be able to use narrative tenses such as simple past tense, past continuous tense, past perfect tense and past perfect continuous tense skillfully in the narrative texts. The LGCSE English Language Syllabus (2016) stipulates that the teacher and learners should discuss the rules governing each tense type before dealing with it in essay writing. With such knowledge of rules, learners will demonstrate competent use of narrative tenses.

From the teachers' views, it is equitable to conclude that learners need to be proficient with tense rules before using verb tenses in narrative composition. This finding is consistent with the demands of the LGCSE English Language syllabus (2016). Again, this finding confirms Gennaro & Collen-Ginet's (2012) claim articulated in section 2.3.1 that rules and principles such as those that relate to proper use of tense should be adhered to. Taken in sum, English proficiency remains an important goal of teaching English Language. Since it is the language of teaching and learning in the education system of Lesotho, LGCSE English Language teachers should ensure that concepts and skills are well established.

(b) Direct quotations

Capability in using past tense forms is an important skill that learners need in order to manage tense in narrative composition writing. However, it is worth noting that different tense forms may be used in direct quotations depending on how the quotation is structured. Some of the teachers affirmed that, '*For a student to do well in a narrative composition, it is safest to write in past tenses throughout the narrative essay except for the few direct quotations used to enlighten the narratives.*'

The tense used in direct quotations is not always the same as the tense used in the other parts of the narrative composition. Learners need the knack of using tense appropriately in direct quotations. This finding confirms Collins' (2011) claim about switching tenses in direct quotations (vide 2.1.2). When writing narratively, LGCSE English Language learners are to narrate stories. In doing so, they should demonstrate their skills in using any verb tense when quoting, some characters involved in their narratives verbatim.

(c) Ability to manage different verb types

The tense of a sentence comes from the verb. Upon being interviewed, teachers emphasized that for learners to develop practical writing skills, they must understand the basics of English Language tenses and all types of verbs, finite or non-finite, regular and irregular, transitive or intransitive. Learners should know what a verb is and how it functions in a meaningfully constructed sentence. This finding is consistent with Yarber et al.'s (2007) claim expressed in Section 2.3.4 that verbs change their forms and appearance more often than any other part of speech as a result, they force us to pick our way through them carefully.

On the basis of the finding discussed above, it is logical and reasonable to state that learners should know how different verb types function in sentences. This knowledge will enable them to use verbs appropriately so as to attain a high level of communicative competence in narrative composition writing and continuous writing in general.

In relation to the use of tense in narrative composition, the main findings point to language proficiency which in this regard covers knowledge of tense rules, ability to manage different verb types and the ability to use tense skillfully in direct quotations.

4.1.1.3 Skills necessary for the management of tense in argumentative composition

Tense, like other grammatical aspects, forms a bed-rock for the development of learners' writing skills. Data from the interviews revealed that proper use of simple present tense is a skill that learners need to master when presenting their arguments. More emphasis was on the use of simple present tense as the mainly correct form of tense in writing argumentatively. This finding is consistent with Schin's (2016) notion expressed in Section 2.4.1.

With my experience as a teacher of English Language at LGCSE level, I have learnt that verb tenses may be mixed in writing argumentative composition. Though teachers accentuated that LGCSE English Language learners should possess the ability to develop their arguments in simple present tense, experience shows that to some extent, other verb tenses may be used with simple present tense. For instance, if learners are asked to present arguments on '*life in the 19th century was better than life in the 21st century*' they will have to write using simple past and simple present tenses when creating comparative arguments.

In a nutshell, the major finding that the study has discovered in this subsection is that simple present tense should be maintained when writing argumentative compositions.

4.1.1.4 Skills necessary for the management of tense in informative composition

As emphasized in section 4.1.1, the use of tense depends on the type of a composition one is writing. This subdivision reports findings on the skills necessary for the management of tense in writing informative composition. Appropriate use of simple present tense emerged as a primary skill. When interviewed, teachers pointed out that,

An informative composition presents factual information on a situation or subject such as sports, tourism, accidents and wars to mention just a few. Learners may be asked to present facts on the importance of sports or of tourism, causes of road accidents or their preventive measures. In this case, the much-needed skill in presenting facts is the simple present tense.

The above quotation points that simple present tense is the mostly appropriate tense used in informative composition. This finding is consistent with Mutikiri's (2015) contention expressed in Section 2.4.1.

In some rare cases, simple past tense may be used in informative composition especially where LGCSE English Language learners present facts on a situation or subject relating to the past. Taken in sum, learners should dexterously use simple present or simple past tenses when writing an informative composition depending on how the composition topic is structured, whether it relates to the present or past facts.

4.1.2 Findings from learners' marked scripts

As stated in 4.1.1, the interview data revealed that it is unavoidable to talk about learners and narrative composition without talking about the other composition types. Form E learners in the three participating schools sat for an essay writing task. It was an invigilated task in which individual learners were expected to write a maximum of two and half pages on one of the five

given composition topics in an hour. Following the structure of the LGCSE English Language examination paper one, the composition topics covered all the four types of compositions. Two topics were narrative while the other types had one topic each. The compositions were analyzed and marked for students' management of tense in sentence construction.

4.1.2.1 Skills necessary for managing tense in descriptive composition

In analyzing data from the marked scripts, the weaknesses that learners portrayed in their written outputs revealed that learners need language mechanics skills that aid the management of tense in descriptive composition. Findings in this section are reported under language mechanics skills such as consistent use of tense and competent use of verbs used with collective nouns as subjects.

(a) Consistent use of tense

The skills that learners need for the management of tense in descriptive composition writing were implied in their writing. Unswerving use of tense is reported on in this section. As gathered from the interviews with teachers in Section 4.1.1, it is mostly appropriate to describe a place, an object and a person using the simple present tense. On the contrary, most of the learners' descriptive compositions were characterized by shifty tenses. The extract below is an example of an essay part showing recurring tense errors. It is one of many composition parts that show that learners fail to use tense consistently.

Old people fall in love with small children with the hope that this child (will gave) her money. It happened that one of my friend fall in love with the old man. This man was a rich and have a gigantic house where my friend need to go anywhere. She like this man will take her with his cars. The man even buy my friend a laptop. Later on my friend told him she don't love him anymore. The man was angry and insult my friend.

Marginal annotations: -Tenses mixed up -subject agreement errors -Shifty tenses / wrong use of tenses

On the basis of the above excerpt, it is justified to conclude that learners are challenged in using simple present tense unswervingly. In the excerpt, the learner's errors of tense are marked with a letter 'T' where the learner mixed up future and simple past tenses as well as simple present tense towards the end of the paragraph. Using tense consistently is a necessary skill that should be developed. This finding which surfaced through shifty tenses in learners' descriptive composition contradicts the principles of prescriptive and descriptive grammar explained in sections *2.3.2.1* and *2.3.2.2* respectively. To develop the said skill, teachers should help learners meet the standards and conventions.

(b) Basics on verbs used with collective nouns

What emerged as the much needed skill in this subsection is the ability to use collective nouns with correct verbs. Appropriate use of verbs with collective nouns appeared as a challenge in some learners' compositions. It was not easy for some learners to decide whether collective nouns should take singular or plural verbs. In some paragraphs, collective nouns were used with

singular verbs while in some paragraphs they were used with plural verbs. The following are examples of sentences in which collective nouns were used with wrong helping verbs.

*A **group** of **teenagers** <u>are</u> planning a trip to the Orange River.*

*A **bunch of youngsters** <u>are</u> jealous of my beautiful girl friend.*

The above sentences reflect inapt and incongruous use of verbs used with collective nouns. The learners ignored the words 'group and bunch' and therefore focused on teenagers and youngsters, that is why they used incorrect helping verbs. The inaptness above shows that there is a need for the development of the skill relating to the use of correct verbs used with collective nouns. This finding is in line with Hassan's (2015) statement in Section 2.4.1 that writers make a wrong choice of verbs used with collective nouns.

Taken in sum, a collective noun is a group of a single unit and a collective noun takes a singular verb. Ability to use collective nouns with correct verbs is one of the primary skills that aid writing to create readable descriptive texts.

Major findings in this subsection point to the development of language mechanics that aid the management of tense in descriptive composition. Such language mechanics comprise unswerving use of tense and basics on verbs used with collective nouns.

4.1.2.2 Skills necessary for managing tense in narrative composition
Proper usage of tense is a significant factor in composition writing. If writers are not able to manage verb tenses, readers will have a difficulty following the progression of events in a piece of writing. The skills that learners need to manage tense in narrative composition were reflected through an analysis of learners' narrative compositions. Findings in this subsection point to the

ability to inflect verbs properly as a principal skill to be developed. This finding is consistent with the findings from the interviews with teachers from which teachers emphasized development of the same skills (vide *4.1.1.2*).

In the teaching and learning process, learners should be familiarized with different verb types and how they should be inflected to form tense. More emphasis should be on regular and irregular verbs, helping verbs, finite and non-finite verbs to mention just a few. With this knowledge, learners will be able to manage verb types and handle narrative tenses deftly. The main finding in this subsection points to the ability to inflect verbs as an elementary skill in writing the narrative composition.

4.1.2.3 Skills necessary for managing tense in argumentative and informative compositions
This subsection gives the report of findings on skills that are necessary for managing tense in argumentative and informative compositions. Findings point to the ability to use simple present tense when presenting facts and arguments. This finding is in line with the finding revealed in the interviews that the most appropriately used tense in arguments and presentation of facts is simple present tense (vide *4.1.1.3* and *4.1.1.4*).

In this subsection, the study showed that learners lack verb tense rules especially of simple present tense. They garble the flow of their compositions by abruptly shifting from one verb tense to another. The main finding, therefore, points to the skillful use of simple present tense in both argumentative and informative compositions.

All the skills expounded show that it is necessary for LGCSE English Language teachers to increase learners' linguistic repertoire and improve their communicative competence by emphasizing the characteristics of Standard English and its importance in education. If such

skills are well developed, learners will be able to adhere to them in formal classroom settings and examination situations.

The first research question revealed a niche for further research. As mentioned in Section 2.2, this study is premised on L2 learners' interlanguage. However, the principles of L2 learners' interlanguage discussed in section *2.2.1.1* were not compatible with the first research question. On one hand, L2 learners' interlanguage deals more with the errors that are committed in L2 learning. On the other hand, the first research question deals with skills not errors; therefore, the principles of the theory did not underpin the findings from the first research question. Some of the issues that the principles of this hypothesis did not address, may be addressed by further research using other theories.

4.2 CHALLENGES LEARNERS HAVE IN RELATION TO TENSE IN COMPOSITION WRITING

As stated in Chapter two (vide 2.2.1), there is no learning without challenges. Errors are indispensable to the learners in the learning of a second language. In Section *2.2.1.1*, Dulay (1982) and Corder (1971) cited in Babah (2014) refer to the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn. The discussion in this part focuses on the tense related challenges that learners reflect in composition writing.

4.2.1 Analysis of data from the learners' marked scripts

This subdivision presents the discussion on the data sourced to address research question two of this study itemized in 1.3.2 as *'what challenges do learners have in relation to tense in composition writing?'* In analyzing the data from the marked scripts, tense related errors in learners' descriptive, informative, argumentative and narrative essays were identified and

categorized. The challenges reflected in learners' compositions were interpreted in terms of the guiding principles of L2 learners' interlanguage explained in Section *2.2.1.1*.

4.2.1.1 Tense-related challenges learners reflect in descriptive composition

Learners' inability to apply verb/tense rules correctly emerged as a challenge. Findings in this subsection are reported under mismanagement of subject-verb agreement and inaccurate use of auxiliary verbs. A report on each of these themes follows in the next subsections.

(a) Mismanagement of subject-verb agreement

Data from the marked descriptive composition scripts indicate that some learners do not master English Language verb/tense rules. They do not consider the rules of the components of ESL particularly of subject-verb agreement in this regard. The extract below is an example of a paragraph from one learner's composition. This extract shows that LGCSE English Language learners are faced with a challenge concerning subject-verb agreement. The subject-verb agreement errors are marked with '*SVA*' in this excerpt.
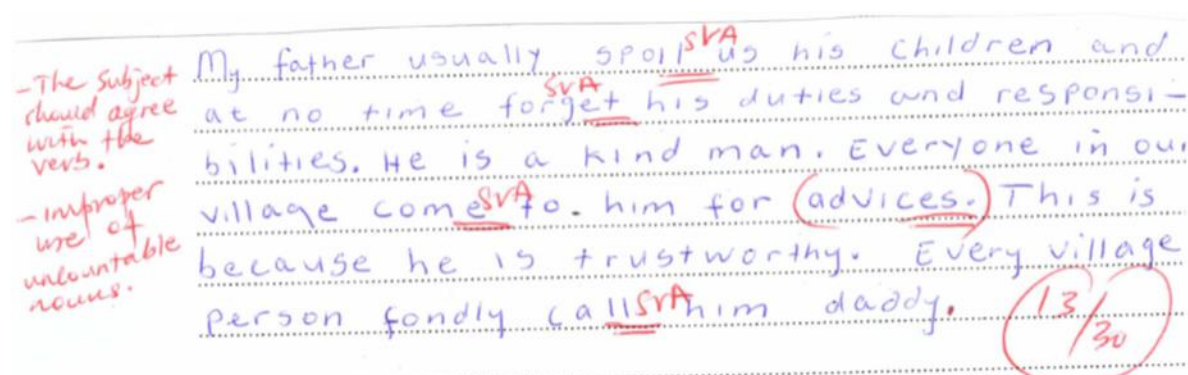
The above extract indicates that some LGCSE English Language learners are troubled by subject-verb agreement. The finding is consistent with teachers' perceptions expressed in Section *4.1.1.1* (b & c). The finding is also in line with Bevan's (1993) claim expressed in Section 2.4.2

that candidates sometimes lose marks for failing to add 's' for the third person singular of the simple present tense. However, some lose marks because they add 's' in the third person plural, the first or second person. Bevan's affirmation recapitulates that the present form of a verb is the same as the verb's base form, except for the third person singular which adds –es and –s.

With reference to the finding referred to above, it is fitting to explain learners' mismanagement of subject-verb agreement in terms of the principles of L2 learners' interlanguage. This model is explained in Chapter two (vide *2.2.1.1*). Learners' mismanagement of subject-verb agreement relates to errors of addition and omission of the grammatical morphemes '-s and –es'. In the following subdivision, one more tense related challenge in descriptive composition is discussed.

(b) Inaccurate use of auxiliary verbs

The report in this subdivision focuses on the inaccurate use of some auxiliary verbs. It surfaced in the learners' compositions that they used auxiliary verbs inaccurately especially in negative sentences. Sentences that contained inaccurately used auxiliary verbs were such as the following:

    (i) *My ideal woman likes food but she **does not eats** pork.*

    (ii) ***Farewells does** not end well always.*

The above sentences show that learners are challenged in using auxiliary verbs in negative sentence construction. This finding is in line with the finding from the interviews with teachers expressed under tense formation and management of verbs (vide *4.1.1.1*). It is appropriate to explain learners' inaccurate use of auxiliary verbs in terms of the principles of EAH expressed in *2.2.1.1*. Through application of this hypothesis, learners' inaccurate use of auxiliary verbs is classified as an error in finite verbs used with auxiliary verbs. This kind of error pertains to

unnecessary addition of 's' to the finite verb which follows an auxiliary verb. Learners' inability to apply tense rules properly emerged as a major challenge in this subsection. This challenge recurred in the form of subject-verb agreement errors and inaccurate use of auxiliary verbs. In the next part, findings on tense-related challenges portrayed in learners' narrative compositions are reported.

4.2.1.2 Tense-related challenges learners portray in narrative composition

Data from learners' marked scripts revealed tense usage as an overriding common grammatical error in narrative composition. This challenge surfaced in the glaring tense errors learners committed in their narrative essays. Findings in this section are reported under learners' inability to deal with inflectional endings in regular and irregular verbs. Also, findings focus on omission of grammatical morphemes and mismanagement of infinitives. Each of these themes is reported on in the next subsections.

(a) Inaccurate addition of inflectional morphemes

Findings in this subsection point to learners' inability to deal with inflectional endings in irregular verbs. Learners sometimes do not know when to inflect verbs or how to deal with inflectional endings such as *-d* or *–ed* morphemes particularly in simple past tense of irregular verbs. Below is an example of a paragraph from a learner's composition. In this paragraph, a learner overgeneralized a grammatical rule concerning the addition of *–d* and *–ed*. The improperly added –d and –ed on irregular verbs are marked with '*irr*' in this excerpt.

Handwritten essay extract with margin annotations:

Margin notes (left, red): "- repetition", "- improper use of a finite verb following an auxiliary verb", "* addition of –ed to the irregular verb", "- spelling"

To commence, I had a friend with whom I was pleased with and being with her was the most vibrantious moment ever. Noma did not only liked what I buy for her but She really admired me. One day, we weared our best clothes, leaped into the air with felicity. we rided on to Setsoto Stadium attending the party. However, Noma did not asked for permission to atted the party, instead She lied that she is going out for a Church Conference at AME hall.

It can be drawn from the above extract that learners struggle with changing irregular verbs into past tense. This finding confirms Deer's (2014) claim expressed in Section 2.4.2 that the functional significance of tense inflection is hard to deduce. It is also in line with Mutikiri's (2015) avowal expressed in Section 2.4.2 that trouble for most O level learners lies in handling past simple tense of irregular verbs.

In accordance with L2 learners' interlanguage, an error of addition means the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-constructed sentence. Learners' tense errors in this regard are classified as errors of addition and misformation because such learners extended the grammatical rule inappropriately by adding –d and –ed to the end of some irregular verbs to form the simple past tense. In the next subdivision, another tense-related challenge reflected in learners' narrative essays is enunciated.

(b) Omission of grammatical morphemes

Some learners omitted the grammatical morpheme –d and –ed which should be added to the regular verbs when forming the simple past tense. Unawareness of the grammatical conventions

contradicts the LGCSE English Language level descriptors (2014) which assert that wrong use of tense and wrong verb formation should be treated as gross errors in the marking process. The finding also contradicts Mutikiri's (2015) postulation expressed in Section 2.4.2.

The errors of this nature are classified as errors of omission and misformation. These kinds of tense errors arise because the writer is unsure about how tense forms of certain verbs are created.

(c) Mismanagement of infinitives

Learners struggle with main verbs which are preceded by the word '*to*'. When a finite verb is preceded by a 'to', it is known as an infinitive. The infinitives cannot stand alone. The infinitives must be followed by a finite verb in its simple present tense form. Nonetheless, some learners ignored this rule restriction and therefore used 'to' followed by the main verb in its simple past tense form. The below excerpt illustrates the situation.
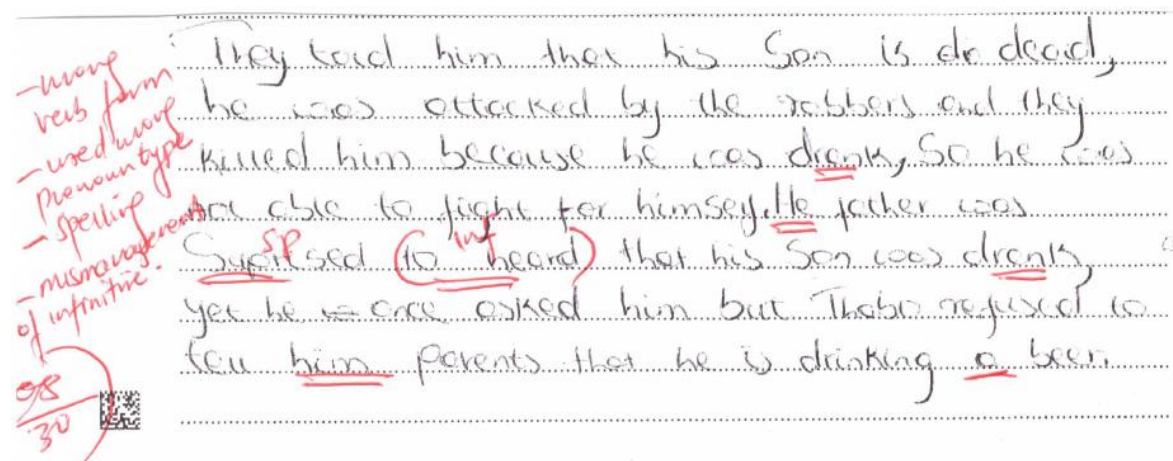
In the above insert, mismanaged infinitives are marked with '*inf*'. The insert illustrates that learners are faced with a challenge on how to form the verb tenses accurately and therefore mismanage infinitives. This finding contradicts Coetzee et al.'s (2014) assertion on the importance of linguistic competence expressed in Section 2.4.2.

In a nut-shell, narrative compositions are about past events. They should, therefore, be written in past tenses. Nonetheless, for the fact that reference is made to past experiences, learners believe that the finite verb should be in past tense even when it comes after 'to'. This is a challenge caused by overgeralisation and ignorance of the rule restriction. This challenge calls for concern in the teaching and learning of ESL.

Following the guiding principles of EAH, this challenge can be classified as an error of addition and misformation because the wrong structures were used. Misformation errors in this regard were characterized by misformation of verbs and tense. The major findings in this subsection point to learners' inability to deal with inflectional endings. They either add or omit grammatical morphemes, and in accordance with EAH, these are errors of omission and addition. Another finding points to learners' mismanagement of infinitives.

4.2.1.3 Challenges learners have with tense usage in argumentative composition

This subsection gives the report on tense-related challenges reflected in learners' argumentative compositions. Learners' insufficient linguistic competence in the target language makes such learners feel challenged when using tense in argumentative composition writing. Findings in this subsection are reported under incorrect use of verbs with uncountable nouns.

Incorrect use of verbs with uncountable nouns

Learners' argumentative compositions portrayed a challenge that pertains to verbs used with uncountable nouns. In their essays, learners used most of the uncountable nouns with plural verbs**.** The following sentences are examples from learners' argumentative essays in which verbs were used incompetently with uncountable nouns.

(i) ***Advices are*** *good when given out of parental love.*

(ii) *Forcing learners to take atleast one practical subject **are** good **news**.*

'*Advice*' and '*news*' are uncountable nouns and they should take singular verbs. The above sentences show that learners are incompetent in using verbs with uncountable nouns. This finding contradicts Schin's (2016) assertion that uncountable nouns take singular verbs (vide 2.4.2). In relation to the finding mentioned above, it is reasonable to explain learners' incompetent use of verbs with uncountable nouns in line with EAH. This is an error of verb usage brought by the confusion emanating from the nature of the uncountable nouns. It is the error of misformation where learners use the wrong structures.

Wrong verb forms used with uncountable nouns functioning as subjects in sentence construction emerged as a major challenge in this subsection.

4.2.1.4 Challenges learners have with tense usage in informative composition

When analyzing the learners' written texts, it was observed that writing is a complex skill and a difficult task, for some ESL learners. Findings in this subsection show that, a great number of learners bungle gerunds in writing informative compositions. When a verb is used as a noun, it is called a gerund and gerunds are, therefore, verbal nouns. Gerunds carry the suffix –ing and are used in the same way as nouns. For example, *Talking is what I am good at.* 'Talking' in this sentence functions as a noun. It is, therefore, a gerund. Some Form E learners confuse gerunds with the participles that take *–ing*.

Another finding is that, learners have a difficulty in using verb tenses where two subjects are used in one sentence. The sentences below show learners' inept management of helping verbs used with compounded subjects.

(i) *Jeff and his sister **is** clever.*

(ii) *You and I **am** working together.*

When a sentence has two subjects, the verb has to be in plural form. However, learners used singular verbs with compounded subjects instead of using the helping verb in its plural form. In the previous sentences, learners seem to have focused on one of the subjects and ignored the other subject. They dealt with the subject as if it is a singular subject that is why they erroneously used singular verbs. The finding expressed in this subsection is consistent with a claim on compounded subjects in Section 2.4.2 (Schin 2016).

Inability to use gerunds emerged as a main finding. Another finding pertains to wrong use of verbs where two subjects are used in one sentence.

4.2.2 Analysis of data from the interviews with teachers

Individual teachers were interviewed. The focus of the interview questions was on challenges that Form E English Language learners have regarding the management of tense in continuous writing. In the next subdivisions, findings on learners' tense related challenges in descriptive composition writing are reported.

4.2.2.1 Tense-related challenges learners reflect in descriptive composition

Upon being interviewed, teachers pointed out that learners learn verb tenses in isolation from other grammatical aspects such as subject-verb agreement. Learners are not able to manage

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subject-verb agreement proficiently. This finding is consistent with the finding from the interviews with teachers where it was explained that learners do not know when to add inflectional morphemes such as –s and –es to the main verb in the sentence. They add the inflectional morphemes to the main verb even when the subject of the sentence refers to the first or second person or even the third person plural.

The main finding in this subsection points to a fact that learners learn verb tenses in isolation from other grammatical elements. Most of their errors in this subsection are errors of addition.

4.2.2.2 Challenges learners have regarding tense usage in narrative composition

Findings in this subsection reveal that lack of the knowledge of grammar affects mechanical accuracy. Findings are reported under mismanagement of auxiliary verbs, irregular verbs and subject verb agreement. Each of these themes is reported on in the subsequent subsections.

(a) Mismanagement of auxiliary verbs

Upon being interviewed, teachers reiterated that learners mismanage auxiliary and main verbs in negative sentence construction. This articulation was common among most of the interviewed teachers. Quoted in part, teachers stated that *the main verb after the auxiliary '**did**' should be in simple present tense. However, some learners usually write the main verb in simple past tense even when it follows the auxiliary '**did**'.*

With reference to the quotation above, it is equitable to conclude that learners are challenged in using some auxiliary verbs such as '***did***' in negative sentence construction. This finding is consistent with the findings drawn from learners' essays that learners are challenged in managing main verbs that follow auxiliary verbs in sentence construction. In EAH, this error is classified as

misformation error which means use of the wrong morpheme or structure. The wrong morpheme or structure in this regard refer to the simple past tense form of the main verb that follows '***did'***. Again, it may be classified as an error of addition because of the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed sentence. This is an item such as *–d* or *-ed* unnecessarily added on the main verb. EAH enables teachers to identify learners' linguistic difficulties and needs. It also enables teachers to devise remedial measures (Endongan, 2005), vide (2.2.1). LGCSE English Language teachers should do as Endongan suggests and devise remedial measures.

(b) Mismanagement of subject verb agreement

Inability to manage subject-verb agreement is reported on in this subsection. The subject must always match the verb. On the contrary, teachers stated that *learners fail to control the transformation processes in their own writing because they construct sentences with too many subject-verb agreement errors.*

On the basis of the quotation above, it is rational to say subject-verb agreement is intricate for most learners to manage. This finding is consistent with Coetzee's (2014) citation on subject-verb agreement expressed in Section 2.4.2. It is also in line with the findings on skills necessary for the management of tense drawn from the interviews and learners' essays.

(c) Mismanagement of irregular verbs

In this subsection, learners' incompetence in using irregular verbs is reported on. The interviewed teachers profess that learners' incompetence is manifested in their inability to inflect verbs properly and therefore, confuse rules applied on regular and irregular verbs when dealing with simple past tense in particular. This finding is consistent with Mutikiri's (2015) and

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Bevan's (1993) postulations conveyed in Section 2.4.2. These kinds of errors add confusion instead of clarity and are a result of the inadequate application of the rules that govern tense formation.

Data also revealed a major finding that learners lack the knowledge of grammar and this affects mechanical accuracy. Lack of the knowledge of grammar in this regard surfaced in the form of mismanagement of auxiliary verbs, subject verb agreement errors and mismanagement of irregular verbs. These are the errors of misformation as per EAH principles.

4.2.2.3 Challenges learners have with use of tense in argumentative composition

Failure to properly use simple present tense with indefinite pronouns emerged as a major challenge in this section. Simple present tense confuses learners especially when verbs are used with indefinite pronouns. According to the interviewed teachers, most of the learners use singular indefinite pronouns with singular verbs and/or singular indefinite pronouns with plural verbs in the same piece of writing. Learners show uncertainty when using verbs with indefinite pronouns. This finding contradicts Deer's (2014) assertion in Section 2.4.1 that singular verbs should be used with singular indefinite pronouns. This kind of error explained above is classified in EAH as misformation error.

Indefinite pronouns are used to refer to people or things without saying exactly who or what they are. As Deer states, singular indefinite pronouns take singular verbs. For example, *Everyone wants my food.*

In the learning of English Language at LGCSE level, learners' gaps in the knowledge of grammar indicate that they cannot differentiate between what is correct and what is incorrect.

Such gaps should be filled. The major finding reflected here is the failure to use simple present tense with indefinite pronouns. The failure referred to is related to errors of misformation.

4.2.2.4 Tense-related challenges learners portray in informative composition

Use of language in informative composition writing is to a large extent characterized by use of simple present tense. However, it emerged that some learners were not able to use simple present tense consistently in informative composition. They mixed up other tense forms with simple present tense. This finding is in line with the findings from the interviews with teachers in which teachers complained about the inconsistency in the use of tense. The findings, therefore, revealed that learners' inconsistent use of simple present tense in factual composition emerged as a major challenge

On the basis of the challenges illustrated under the second research question, it is reasonable to say teachers should work on improving learners' linguistic ability. As emphasized in Section 2.2.1, EAH starts with the errors learners make and studies them in their broader framework of their sources. EAH forms a more efficient basis for designing pedagogical strategies. In accordance with the guiding principles of L2 learners' interlanguage, teachers should therefore, deepen learners' understanding of grammatical elements and improve their competencies so that these challenges cannot persist into higher learning and disadvantage their learning.

4.3 CAUSES OF IMPROPER TENSE SHIFTS IN LEARNERS' COMPOSITION WRITING

This part of the study provides discussions on the data generated to answer the third research question specified in Section 1.3.3 as *'to what possible factors can improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing be attributed?* Data was sourced through essay writing tests and open-ended interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers. This section reports findings

under each data collection technique. The causes of tense inconsistency in learners' composition writing are interpreted in terms of L2 learners' interlanguage. This model is explained in Section *2.2.1.2*. The model includes overgeneralization/intralingual transfer, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, interlingual transfer and false concepts hypothesized, among others. Findings are not reported separately on each composition type because each of the findings on causes discussed in this section applies to all the composition types.

4.3.1 Analysis of data from the interviews with teachers

Learners' errors of tense in composition writing are ascribed to different factors. As mentioned above, findings relating to causes of tense inconsistency are reported collectively on different composition types. Findings on causes of tense inconsistency are reported on lack of language proficiency, nature of the syllabus, absence of teaching aids, learning backgrounds and lack of practice.

(a) Lack of language proficiency

Most of the tense errors that learners commit in writing different composition types are attributed to lack of language proficiency. A common articulation by most of the interviewed teachers was that,

At LGCSE, language proficiency forms part of the syllabus. Language proficiency is an assessment detail in both LGCSE examination papers 1 & 2. Tense is incorporated in the language proficiency that learners should demonstrate their ability in its use. However, learners lack the language skills which are more structural and formal aspects of language competence because teachers make assumptions regarding the prerequisite knowledge of learners and

sometimes do not teach what they should teach. This therefore, contributes negatively to the development of learners' language proficiency.

Most of the interviewed teachers stressed a point that they do not teach tense at LGCSE level because different verb tenses are dealt with in depth at JC level. Learners' tense-related challenges in the form of subject-verb agreement, mismanagement of finite and auxiliary verbs, inaccurate addition of inflectional morphemes, mismanagement of regular and irregular verbs all point to lack of language proficiency as a cause of tense inconsistency in composition writing. The finding on lack of language proficiency as a cause is explained in reference to Corder's (1971) classification of errors. According to Corder's model, the error in the finding is classified as an error of competence which refers to the application of rules which do not correspond to the target language norm. It occurs when FL learners do not know the rules of the target language adequately. Drawing on Dulay & Krashen's (1982) postulation on EAH expressed in *2.2.1.1*, when learners add or omit grammatical morphemes such as –es or –s, they show lack of language proficiency. When they overgeneralize the inflection rule regarding the addition of –d or –ed on irregular verbs, they show lack of language proficiency.

The dominant errors caused by lack of language proficiency were in the form of addition, omission and misformation as explained in Section 4.2 and its subsequent subsections. These errors are categorized under overgeneralisation/intralingual transfer concerning addition of inflectional morphemes as explained above. Errors are also classified as errors resulting from incomplete application of the rules and ignorance of rule restriction when applying grammatical morphemes explained in the above paragraph. The finding stated in this subsection contradicts

the LGCSE English Language Syllabus (2014) which asserts that the ultimate end result is students' language proficiency and competent use of it.

(b) Nature of the syllabus

The nature of the LGCSE English Language Syllabus has a negative impact on the learning and teaching of tense in writing. Teachers affirm that at times, the meaning of some grammatical aspects such as tense is not communicated well. They further state that their greatest concern is on writing and they are mostly pressured by the examinations expectations. Therefore, they are not able to teach verb tenses in a conversational way because of the syllabus which is examination driven. Drawing on Brown's (1980) explanation on sources/causes of errors in Section *2.2.1.2*, the finding on the nature of the syllabus as a cause, is interpreted in terms of the principles of L2 learners' interlanguage as the context of learning. Ineffective teaching methods such as the grammar translation method are used as teachers actually teach for examinations. The LGCSE English Language syllabus is, however, detailed and it gives teachers instructional objectives, aspired skills and suggested learning experiences. What to assess and resources are suggested too. Nevertheless, teachers sometimes just give learners notes on tense because of the examinations pressure. Learners read what they do not even understand. The boring and uninteresting teaching methods relate to the context of learning and can negatively affect teaching and learning.

(c) Learning backgrounds and lack of writing practice

Different learning backgrounds emerge as factors that cause tense inconsistency in learners' composition. These learning backgrounds are in some schools characterized by too many students in some classrooms and teachers' unbearable workloads. Teachers opine that writing

frequently does not only improve one's mastery of the writing elements but also improves the acquisition of the grammatical structures. However, because of these factors, there is lack of writing practice given to learners. This finding contradicts Vallette's (2000) statement expressed in Section 2.4.3 that by writing frequently, not only your mastering of elements of writing could improve but also the acquisition of new vocabulary and grammatical structures. In the learning and teaching of English Language, factors such as those that impact negatively on learners' development of language skills should be minimized.

(d) Absence of teaching aids

Data from the interviews revealed that some schools do not have resources that aid learning and this is one of the causes of tense inconsistency in learners' composition writing. One of the participating schools in this study is situated in the foothills of Lesotho, in the outskirts of Maseru where learners neither have access to internet nor newspapers which are regarded as effective tools that enhance the teaching and learning of English. However, teachers' view on the unavailability of resources is surprising to the researcher because the average performing school is from the foothills where such resources are not there while the school with the worst performance in LGCSE English Language external examinations is right in the middle of the capital city where such resources are in abundance.

Lack of adequate language proficiency and nature of the LGCSE English Language syllabus surfaced as main findings. Again, other findings relating to causes of improper tense shifts in composition writing point to lack of frequent writing practice and different learning backgrounds as well as absence of teaching aids.

4.3.2 Analysis of data from learners' marked scripts

Findings in this section point to lack of basics in other language aspects as a cause for inconsistent use of verb tenses. Findings are reported under learners' carelessness and ignorance.

Learners' carelessness and ignorance

Carelessness and ignorance as causes of tense inconsistency are reported on in this section. In Section 2.2.2, Richards (1985) asserts that mistakes made by a learner when writing are caused by lack of attention, carelessness and other aspects of performance. Even the learners whose writing was coherent and did not have too many grammatical errors, committed what may be referred to as 'silly mistakes'. One or two sentences in few paragraphs contained shifty tenses which were attributed to carelessness. Some learners' carelessness was characterized by malapropism where nouns were used in place of verbs. For example, *Our principal always* **advices** *us to be on our best behavior.*

Those learners who wrote well with few grammatical errors did not edit/proofread their texts for omission of errors. These are the learners who showed a high level of communicative competence but committed some silly tense mistakes in one or two paragraphs due to carelessness and ignorance. Therefore, lack of basics in other language aspects and learners' carelessness and ignorance emerged as major findings in this subsection.

Large classes, lack of exposure to English and absence of required facilities such as pictorial materials that give lively illustrations as well as books, hinder the effective learning of English Language verb tenses. It is therefore, the responsibility of parents, learners, teachers and education officials to work together and play an active part in learners' education aiming at

successful future because English Language is and will always be a language of interaction and universalism.

4.4 PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES THAT CAN IMPROVE TENSE MANAGEMENT IN LEARNERS' COMPOSITION WRITING

In Corder's (1976) postulation, expressed in Section *2.2.1.1*, the occurrence of errors in learners' written work may be a sign of inadequacy of our present teaching methods. EAH has pedagogical benefits because it gives useful input for designing and carrying out teaching and learning process. This part deals with pedagogical strategies that can be used in order to improve learners' abilities in managing tense in composition writing.

4.4.1 Analysis of data from the interviews with teachers

This section provides the discussion on the data generated to answer the fourth research question stated in Section 1.3.4 as *'what pedagogical strategies can be employed to address improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing?* LGCSE English Language teachers in the three participating schools were interviewed. The gist of the discussion was primarily on the classroom activities and teaching methods that can be put in place so as to espouse the teaching and learning of verb tenses in composition writing.

4.4.1.1 Pedagogical strategies for the management of tense in descriptive composition

Findings point to communicative and interactional activities and methods as strategies that can augment the management of tense in descriptive composition. Upon being interviewed, teachers pointed to the utilization of the conversational activities that involve learners and give them an opportunity to experiment. These kinds of activities and methods are synthesized into oral descriptions, analysis of action pictures and acting out verbs. Findings on each of the themes will be reported in the ensuing subsections.

(a) Oral descriptions

Teachers believe that language competence develops through practice. They assert that giving learners an opportunity to talk about real life situations such as orally describing their friends, their classrooms or a farewell party they once attended can enable them to practise simple present and past tenses. Oral descriptions play a vital role in developing descriptions. The finding is in line with CAP which advocates for learner centred approaches. It is also consistent with Khati's (2009) assertion expressed in Section 2.4.4 that all those whose responsibility is to teach English should create communicative atmosphere for their different language approaches. Again, the finding is in line with Emmit et al.'s (2003) assertion expressed in Section 2.4.4 that development of one language skill enhances development of the other skills.

In view of all the assertions above, it is evident that teachers should provide opportunities for learners to experiment with different verb tenses in oral and written texts.

(b) Analysis of action pictures

Action pictures or stick charts with figure drawings illustrate verbs and tense. This finding is in line with Lewis and Penn's (1989) postulation, on action pictures expressed in 2.4.4 that action pictures draw learners' attention. When resorting to pictures, teachers should try to depict verbs in their varying contexts and relate them to descriptive tenses such as simple present tense and past tense forms. For example, picture cards depicting a boy who jumps, a boy who jumped and a boy who is jumping will enhance learners' understanding of descriptive tenses.

(c) Acting out verbs

Role play activities provide a meaningful context for learning. Learners should be given chance to act out verbs because this will help them understand better. Learners should own their learning by taking active part in all classroom activities. This finding is consistent with Scholly's (2013) claim expressed in 2.4.4 that teachers should not be knowledge transmitters but let learners spot their errors of tense and replace them with the correct forms.

Another finding is that, eclectic teaching methods are helpful in reinforcing grammar points and develop the writing skill. Teachers state that learners may analyse descriptive comprehension passages from which to extract different verbs and indicate their tense. Also, learners should be asked to fill in the correct forms of tenses in a given descriptive passage. They may also construct own paragraphs using descriptive tenses. The finding discussed in this subsection is consistent with Glim's (2016) claim discussed in Section 2.4.4.

Taken in sum, varied teaching methods and activities are effective in English Language lessons; therefore, teachers should vary their strategies in the teaching of English Language as there is no sole method that can be applied wholesome. The major finding in this subsection points to use of varied communicative and interactional techniques as well as activities which cover oral descriptions, analysis of action pictures and acting out verbs.

4.4.1.2 Pedagogical strategies for the management of tense in narrative composition

Data emerged pointing to the use of games in the teaching and learning of verb tenses in narrative composition as significant. Games in English Language lessons reinforce the writing skill and grammar points. Findings in this section are reported under; story-telling and story board games.

Story-telling and story board games

Story telling or sharing personal views, feelings and experiences verbally or in writing help learners to relate learning with experiences. A narrative composition is about relating a story about something imaginary or something that one has experienced. Learners will understand tense information better and be able to create connections between narrative tenses and avoid learning them in isolation. They will be able to write with clear understanding of the rules. This finding is consistent with an assertion in Chapter two (vide 2.4.4). Telling stories helps learners to pay attention to linguistic forms; therefore, learners should be given chance to narrate stories and enlighten their learning.

Another finding points to the importance and effectiveness of presentations in English Language lessons. When teaching narrative tenses interwoven with the narrative composition, the teacher may ask the learners to present on what they did on the previous day or how they spent their holidays. On the basis of the findings, oral presentations, story-telling and story board games are effective activities that can enhance learners' ability in using tense in narrative composition.

4.4.1.3 Pedagogical strategies for the management of tense in the argumentative composition
Upon being interviewed, teachers' accentuation pointed to the incorporation of the practical aspect in the teaching and learning of English Language. Quoted in part, some of the interviewed teachers emphasized that *when developing the syllabus for teaching English tenses, the practical aspects of English Language and its functional usage should be kept in mind. Constructivist teaching methods depend largely on practice not on theory only.* Findings in this section are reported under debate and analysis of arguments.

(a) Debate

This section reports on debate as an important stratagem for teaching argumentative composition. In a debate competition, arguments are presented from two sides, the proposing and opposing sides. Similarly, in an argumentative composition, arguments are presented and according to the LGCSE English Language syllabus (2016), writers argue both for and against. Because of the similar features, debate is, therefore, a useful tool for teaching argumentative composition. This finding is in line with Gris' (2016) postulation expressed in Section 2.4.4 that debate enables one to become less narrow minded and look at all sides of the argument. On the basis of this postulation, it is essential to utilise teaching strategies like debate in the teaching of argumentative composition. If the practical aspect is incorporated in the teaching and learning of argumentative composition, learners will be able to identify their tense errors and correct them.

(b) Analysis of arguments

The ability to analyse arguments is a teaching approach for developing tense management skills in argumentative composition. The interviewees state that the teacher may focus learners' attention on a particular argumentative passage in their books and ask them to analyse the passage in terms of the use of tense in sentence construction. Learners may form buzz groups, argue among themselves and critic the passage in terms of the development of the argument through use of tense. This finding on the ability to analyse arguments for development of tense management skills confirms Gris' (2016) claim expressed in 2.4.4. The major finding here is that the incorporation of the practical aspect in the LGCSE English Language Syllabus and lessons can enhance learners' communicative competence in using tense. The practical aspect referred to should involve debate and analysis of arguments.

4.4.1.4 Pedagogical strategies for the management of tense in informative composition

Using creative instructional methods increases participation and make English Language lessons more effective and interesting. Findings in this section are reported under the effectiveness of the school magazine.

School magazine

A school magazine is a stimulating vehicle for integrating all writing skills. The interviewed teachers stated that the magazine allows learners to show case their particular interests and talents while at the same time reinforcing the writing skills. English Language teachers may give learners factual composition topics and ask them to write articles for publication in the school magazine so as to practise the basic language skills such as tense usage in factual composition.

Writing articles for publication will maximise the writing time and give learners enough practice with simple present tense while at the same time improving learners' linguistic accuracy. Therefore, writing articles and reports for publication in the school magazine appeared as a major pedagogical strategy that can improve the use of tense in factual composition writing.

4.4.2 Analysis of data from learners' marked scripts

Writing in English is not a spontaneous activity. It is learnt in formal instruction. The LGCSE English Language syllabus is skill-based and it emphasises the communicative and the structural approach. This section provides discussion on the data from the learners' marked scripts relating to the fourth research question.

4.4.2.1 Pedagogical strategies for managing tense in descriptive composition

It will be a great help if learners receive error correction feedback from the teacher. Data from the marked scripts reveal that English Language teachers have a duty to help learners improve by

providing error correction feedback. Through making errors and hearing the correct forms from the teacher, learners can develop their writing skills and know which verb tenses are appropriate when writing descriptively. This translates into highlighting marking and giving feedback as important pedagogical strategies as they help learners to recognise their linguistic errors and therefore, develop a better use of tense in descriptive composition writing.

4.4.2.2 Pedagogical strategies for managing tense in narrative composition

Teachers should be aware that their main task is to provide minimal guidance in the learning process. Some of the tense errors that learners committed in their narrative compositions were so common and frequent such that the researcher concluded that they were teacher-induced errors. It was evident that some lessons are teacher-dominated and learners rely greatly on what is usually said by a teacher as the source of knowledge. All the experiences that learners have, help them achieve self-realisation. Active participation, cooperative and independent learning, and some social activities are some of the pedagogical strategies that can improve the management of tense in a narrative composition writing.

Individual learners should construct own sentences using regular and irregular verbs. This finding confirms Mutikiri's (2013) claim expressed in Section 2.4.4 that the teacher should create situations in which learners are involved in different actions and have to use regular and irregular verbs. In view of Mutikiri's assertion, it is reasonable to say teachers should not only give learners practice with regular and irregular verbs but with all the aspects of grammar that learners are troubled with. Therefore, the major finding is that Constructivist teaching methods should be used when teaching verb tenses.

4.4.2.3 Pedagogical strategies for managing tense in informative composition

Errors are analysed so as to create effective learning strategies. Teaching methods should be varied and learners should be given chance to learn in pairs and groups, using reference material and activity sheets. Findings in this section are reported under reading newspapers, inviting guest speakers and taking field trips.

Reading newspapers

Drawing on Gris' (2016) assertion on informative composition in Section 2.4.4, an informative composition requires one to present accurate and realistic information about a situation or subjects such as economy, natural disasters, road accidents, tourism and the like. It emerged that newspapers have a great essence in aiding teaching and learning of tense in the informative composition because newspapers present factual information. This finding is similar to what was gathered from the interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers. Consequently, variation of teaching methods in the form of pair or group discussions, field trips and invitation of guest speakers can cater for learners' different learning needs.

Learning English verb tenses does not involve one-way flow of information. Teachers and learners should exchange insights and perceptions in the learning process and initiate the shared exploration. If the correct techniques and the right materials are used, learners will exercise their linguistic ability. Teaching methods should accommodate learners in their individualistic learning and develop their cognitive skills.

Without being repetitive, one major finding regarding the first research question, points to linguistic competence and language proficiency as the much-needed skills. The major finding regarding the second research question points to lack of language proficiency. With reference to

the third research question, the major findings point to the nature of the syllabus, learning styles and backgrounds as well as lack of language competence as the causes for tense inconsistency. In relation to the fourth research question, the main finding points to the importance of interactional and conversational methods in the teaching of English Language verb tenses.

As mentioned in Section 3.9, researchers should make sure that the findings of the study are satisfactorily rigorous, insightful and trustworthy. Excerpts from learners' compositions and snippers from the open-ended interviews with LGCSE English Language teachers are included in this chapter to show that the findings are factual. The snippers and extracts echo data triangulation. Additionally, the findings from the interviews and those from the compositions are recurrent. Teachers talked about language proficiency as one of the required skills for managing tense in composition writing and the compositions pointed to the same skill. The interviewed teachers complained about lack of language proficiency as a challenge that learners are faced with in dealing with tense and the findings from the learners' compositions pointed to the same challenge. For example, in Section *4.1.1.1*, the teachers referred to linguistic competence skills in the form of tense sequence, tense formation and skillful management of verbs. In section *4.1.2.1*, the learners' compositions also pointed to the linguistic competence skills in the form of consistent use of tense and verb inflection.

Regarding the challenges, in Section *4.2.2.2* (b), teachers emphasised that learners face a challenge of mismanaging subject-verb agreement. In the same manner, in Section *4.2.1.1* (a), the subject-verb agreement challenge is emphasised. In Sections *4.2.2.2* (a) and *4.2.1.1* (b), it is indicated in both the interviews and learners' compositions that learners mismanage auxiliary

verbs. The findings of this study are credible, dependable, confirmable and transferable and they should therefore, be believable or be regarded as trustworthy.

4.5 SUMMARY

The chapter reported findings on the inconsistent use of tense by Form E learners in their composition writing. Furthermore, the chapter presented an analysis and interpretation of the findings per research question.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents conclusions and recommendations. Conclusions are discussed by main findings per research question. Recommendations are made on the basis of the discussed conclusions and such recommendations are grounded in each of the main findings. The chapter closes with a summary.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

As indicated in Section 5.0, conclusions are by main findings per research question.

5.1.1 CONCLUSIONS RELEVANT TO FINDINGS ON THE SKILLS FORM E LEARNERS NEED IN ORDER TO MANAGE TENSE IN COMPOSITION WRITING

Among many skills required for a consistent management of tense in composition writing, LGCSE English Language learners need linguistic competence skills such as management of verbs, tense formation and subject-verb agreement. The need for linguistic competence skills was pointed to in the interviews and essays written by Form E learners. It was stated by teachers that learners *fail* to maintain the tense sequence in their composition writing and also mismanage different types of verbs. Again, proper tense formation and subject-verb agreement were pointed to as the much-needed linguistic competence skills. The essays written by Form E learners also revealed learners' *inability* to maintain the sequence of tense, incompetent management of verb types, inability to form tense properly and failure to observe subject agreement rules (vide 4.2.2). Failure and inability referred to were translated into required competencies such as the ability to manage subject-verb agreement, proper tense formation and management of verbs. The study,

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therefore, concludes that learners need linguistic competence skills for proper management of tense in composition writing. Deer (2014) and Hassan (2015) affirm that knowledge of grammatical rules govern proper formation of speech (vide 2.4.1).

The need for the development of language proficiency emerged as a major finding regarding skills needed by Form E English Language learners for management of tense in composition writing. According to the interviewed teachers, language proficiency in this regard involves knowledge of tense rules and the ability to manage different verb types. As mentioned in Section 4.1.4 (a), the skills that learners need for the management of tense in composition writing were implied in their written texts. The weaknesses that learners reflected in their essays showed that they need proficiency in using English Language. Such weaknesses included wrong use of verb forms and subject-verb agreement errors. Since the tense of a sentence comes from a verb, it is equitable to conclude that learners need to be proficient with the management of different verb types and application of tense rules. The notion on English Language proficiency is affirmed by Collen-Ginet & Gennaro (1991) who express that rules and principles such as those that relate to the proper use of tense should be adhered to in order to enhance language proficiency.

5.1.2 CONCLUSIONS RELATED TO THE FINDINGS ON THE CHALLENGES THAT FORM E LEARNERS HAVE IN RELATION TO TENSE IN COMPOSITION WRITING

Failure to apply tense rules appropriately appeared as a major finding. Learners' writing was to a large extent characterized by mismanagement of subject-verb agreement and the inaccurate use of some auxiliary verbs. The interviewed teachers' insights on learners' tense-related challenges were similar to the observations from the essays. Teachers reiterated that learners are troubled by subject-verb agreement and also misuse some *did'* auxiliary verbs particularly in negative sentence construction. These challenges surface when learners improperly add grammatical

morphemes '-s' and '-es' to the finite verbs used with plural subjects. Again, learners add '-s' to the main verb even when the auxiliary verb '*does*' has been used to construct negative sentences. Also, it was discovered that learners add '-d' and '-ed' to the main verb of the sentence even when the main verb follows the auxiliary 'in negative sentence construction. With reference to EAH, these were classified as errors of addition and misformation. In view of these observations depicted in the essays and insights from teachers, it is justified to conclude that learners lack mastery of English Language tense rules because they do not deal with verb inflectional endings competently. The idea on improper addition of inflectional endings is affirmed by Bevan's (1993) claim expressed in Section 2.4.2.

Insufficient linguistic competence also emerged as a main finding. This finding was mostly evident where learners overgeneralized the grammatical rule by adding '-d' and '-ed' to the irregular verbs when forming the simple past tense. This is an error of addition and misformation with regard to the principles of EAH. The study, therefore, concludes that inflectional endings in simple past tense of irregular verbs trouble Form E learners due to insufficient linguistic competence. This affirms Mutikiri's (2013) claim that trouble for most O level learners lies in handling past simple tense of irregular verbs (vide 2.4.2).

It also emerged that Form E learners learn tense in isolation from other grammatical elements. From both the interviews and essays, this challenge was manifested in the mismanagement of infinitives, wrong use of verb forms where two subjects are used in one sentence, wrong use of verb forms used with uncountable nouns and indefinite pronouns. All these errors are the errors of addition, omission and misformation and are related to lack of grammar knowledge. It is,

therefore, concluded that learners deal with tense information in isolation from other grammatical aspects while in actual fact, such aspects interrelate.

5.1.3 CONCLUSIONS PERTINENT TO FINDINGS ON THE CAUSES OF TENSE INCONSISTENCY IN FORM E LEARNERS' COMPOSITION WRITING

The study discovered that different causes of tense inconsistency in Form E learners' composition writing are ascribed to a number of factors. As alluded to in Section 2.4.2, language proficiency plays an important role in writing. From the interviews and learners' essays, it was gathered that learners' tense-related challenges in the form of subject-verb agreement errors, mismanagement of finite and auxiliary verbs, inaccurate addition of inflectional morphemes, mismanagement of regular and irregular verbs all point to lack of language proficiency. These language proficiency dearth errors were generally characterized by overgeneralisation of some grammatical rules, ignorance of the rule restriction and incomplete application of rules. Therefore, it is concluded that the tense errors that Form E learners commit in composition writing are caused by language proficiency deficit. These language proficiency insufficiency errors contradict Khati's (2009) assertion on language proficiency in Section 2.4.2.

The findings also indicate that the nature of the LGCSE English Language syllabus impedes the effective learning of English Language tenses. On paper, the syllabus emphasizes development of learners' communicative skills and learners should participate actively in the learning process. However, practice contradicts the syllabus guidelines and aspirations. This finding points to a conclusion that by virtue of being exam driven, the syllabus does not give learners the required optimal participation in the teaching-learning situations. This conclusion is in line with Farrant's (1997) assertion that some teachers think of active participation of learners in the teaching and learning situations as writing notes, question and answer as well as classwork.

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Data also revealed that different learning backgrounds affect the learning of English Language verb tenses. Overcrowded classrooms, teachers' unbearable work-loads, absence of teaching aids or resources characterise some classrooms. Some of these factors compromise the extent to which writing activities and language proficiency tests are given while at the same time, feedback on writing is not frequently given. The study concludes that to some extent, some learning contexts inhibit the effective learning of English Language verb tenses mainly because of the lack of enough content based material and other factors that prevail in some contexts of learning.

5.1.4 CONCLUSIONS ON FINDINGS PERTINENT TO PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES THAT CAN IMPROVE TENSE MANAGEMENT IN COMPOSITION WRITING

It was gathered from the interviews with teachers that learners differ in terms of abilities. Even so, they should all be involved in learning and be given an opportunity to experiment. When teaching tense in composition writing, teachers may involve learners by focusing their attention on oral descriptions, analysis of action pictures, acting out verbs and talking about real life situations using different tenses. These activities may stimulate learners and enhance language competence as Emmit et al. (2003) state in Section 2.4.4 that teachers should create collaborative learning environments for the better development of concepts and skills. It is, therefore, concluded that communicative and interactional activities and teaching methods can augment the management of tense in composition writing.

Using varied teaching methods when teaching tense in writing emerged as a main finding. The variation of teaching methods may be executed by assigning learners a task to extract verbs from comprehension passages and state the tense of the extracted verbs. Also, learners may fill in the correct forms of tenses in the given passages or construct own paragraphs using different tenses.

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Furthermore, learners may discuss tense information in groups or in pairs using reference material and activity sheets. The finding referred to in this paragraph points to a conclusion that, use of eclectic teaching methods and activities improve tense management in composition writing.

With reference to 4.4.3 (a), data revealed that story-telling and story board games reinforce grammar points and develop the writing skills. Story telling enables learners to share personal views, feelings and experiences. It is logical to conclude that use of games when teaching tense in composition writing provides a meaningful context for learning and enables learners to communicate effectively. Story-telling and story board games cultivate and nurture the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor domains.

Use of presentations is a useful and effective strategy for teaching tense in composition writing. Learners may present on what they do at different times. They can also present factual information on effects of floods or even describe qualities of a good friend. These presentation activities will require use of different tenses and therefore improve learners' linguistic accuracy.

Debate and the ability to analyze arguments emerged as a major finding. As Emmit et al. (2003) state in Section 2.4.4, development of one language skill enhances development of the other language skills. In this study, it was gathered that if learners are able to demonstrate their speaking skills in debate and are able to engage in active verbal discussions of some passages presented in their text books, their writing will also improve. It is, therefore, justified to conclude that debate is an important stratagem for teaching tense in writing.

Writing articles and reports that are suitable for publication in the school magazine gives learners ample practice with different verb tenses. This helps the teacher to identify areas of weaknesses

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so as to offer error correction feedback or remedial teaching. It is, therefore, concluded that creative instructional methods strengthen the writing skill.

It also emerged that language competence develops through practice. As Mutikiri (2015) states in Section 2.4.4, teachers should create situations in which learners are involved in different activities and have to use regular and irregular verbs. They may also read and analyse newspaper articles and reports. These activities can enhance the teaching and learning of tense in composition writing.

Generally, the study concludes that

- Learners need linguistic competence skills for the proper management of tense;

- Learners need to be proficient with the management of different verb types;

- Learners lack mastery of English Language tense rules;

- Inflectional endings in simple past tense of irregular verbs trouble learners;

- Learners isolate tense from other grammatical aspects;

- Tense errors are caused by language proficiency deficit;

- The nature of the LGCSE English Language Syllabus impedes the effective learning of English Language tenses;

- Learners' learning backgrounds negatively impact the learning of verb tenses;

- Communicative and interactional methods/activities provide a meaningful context for learning and can augment the management of tense;

- Use of eclectic teaching methods;

- Language competence develops through practice and

- Involving learners in learning develops language competence and promotes cooperative and independent learning.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations on how to improve the situation regarding tense inconsistency in Form E learners' composition writing. As alluded to in Section 5.0, the recommendations are grounded in each of the main findings.

In the conclusions previously discussed in this chapter, the findings revealed that the skills needed for managing tense and the tense related challenges faced by Form E learners as well as the causes of tense inconsistency point to linguistic competence, language proficiency or mastery of English Language grammar, in general. These aspects were so recurring in the findings where they surfaced in the form of tense sequence, management of different verb types, tense formation, subject-verb agreement and application of tense rules in inflectional endings.

In order to improve the management of tense in composition writing, it is recommended that language proficiency and linguistic competence should be given a greater concern by all teachers at all levels of learning. As mentioned in Section 1.1, English is important in the education system of Lesotho as a medium of instruction or a servicing subject for all other subjects in the curriculum. The study, further, recommends that English Language should be taught across curriculum. All other subject teachers should not only be concerned with the content of their subjects when teaching and marking but should also make an effort to develop learners' mastery of English Language. When language is taught across curriculum, tense sequence will be consistent, different types of verbs will be well managed, tense rules will be applied

meaningfully, tense formation and subject-verb agreement will be dealt with proficiently. All the indicators of low proficiency in English and tense, in particular, will be minimized.

Tense is a grammatical element that is taught in the primary schools, at JC and LGCSE levels. However, performance weaknesses in tense usage are observed in texts written by Form E learners. These performance weaknesses hinder attainment of the learning objectives. Since tense is a common grammatical aspect in all the syllabuses from basic education to senior secondary, the study recommends that high school and primary school teachers work together and have frequent meetings in which they discuss strategies that will work towards improving the tense usage in writing and the standard of English, in general. The cooperation between primary and high school teachers will gradually do away with the blame that high school teachers usually put on the primary school teachers whenever learners show performance weaknesses in tense usage.

The study also recommends the evaluation of the language policy. This study suggests that in the reviewed language policy, English Language should be a medium of instruction from grade one, unlike in the current policy where mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction from grade one to three. The current Lesotho language policy highlighted in CAP is supported by Felicity (2011) in the proclamation that it is important that a child receives at least the foundation phase of education through the medium of his mother tongue or primary language before an additional language is taught. Mother tongue proficiency is the bedrock for learning as it is essential to mastering the second language. Felicity (2011) gives a lucid argument; however, this is not how I see it. With reference to the brain plasticity theory, Mays (2014) asserts that one of the main benefits of learning a second language at an early stage is that, children learn languages easier and faster. The young child's brain has a cellular receptivity to language acquisition. Again, the

brain system specialized in learning languages grow rapidly from around six years. In view of Mays' assertion on neuroplasticity, the idea is not to alienate learners from the language within which they grew up. If the recommendation on the evaluation of the language policy is effected, tense usage will improve at an early stage.

Regarding the conclusion on the nature of the syllabus, the study recommends that the practical aspect should be incorporated into the teaching and learning of tense. The English Language syllabus should expose learners to story board games, story-telling or any games that involve learners in the learning and teaching of tense. Learners should be offered the intrinsic involvement and should be encouraged not to rely only on prescribed text books. It is, therefore, the duty of the English Language teachers to emancipate learners by ensuring that learners are involved in learning. English Language learning will in turn be more practical and learners will use a diversity of linguistic structures and adhere to conventions.

In an effort to improve tense usage in Form E learners' composition writing, the study further recommends that all high schools should join the English Language subject associations. In these subject associations, frequent workshops on syllabus content points are held. Teachers share professional skills, ideas and some teaching experiences on different grammatical aspects such as use of tense in writing. Subject officers from ECOL and NCDC as well as external examinations markers are invited to familiarize teachers with the key areas which are assessed in writing. Writing and speaking competitions that are meant to improve learners' use of grammar are held and feedback is given.

It was concluded earlier that some causes of tense inconsistency in Form E learners' composition writing rest largely on the ineffective teaching methods. The study, therefore, recommends use of

interactional and communicative methods and activities in order to help Form E learners to avoid learning tense in isolation from other grammatical aspects. Such activities, among others, include presentations, debate, taking field trips or using flash cards that bring action words in to life.

Taken in sum, the study gives the following recommendations:

- Language proficiency and linguistic competence should be given a greater concern by all English Language teachers at all levels of learning;

- English Language should be taught across curriculum;

- There should be cooperation between primary and high school teachers;

- Evaluation of the language policy;

- The practical aspect should be incorporated into the teaching and learning of tense;

- All high schools should join the English Language subject associations and

- Interactional and communicative methods as well as activities should be used in the teaching and learning of English Language.

5.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As alluded to in Section 1.2, the purpose of this study was to investigate causes of improper tense shifts in Form E learners' composition writing. In its findings, the study raised questions for further research. The study revealed that some tenses are used more often than others while other verb tenses are not used in learners' composition writing. This fact implies avoidance due to lack of competence in using the other tenses. Therefore, future research may look into the challenges that go with particular tenses that are not used in learners' composition writing. It was stated in Section 1.1 that tense is a grammatical element that is taught from upper primary, at JC and LGCSE. However, the inconsistency of tense usage is recurring at these levels of learning.

Therefore, the teaching of tense should be looked in to in future research. Reasons for subsuming tense and aspect under the same syntactic category should also be explored.

5.4 SUMMARY

This chapter presented conclusions by main findings per research question. The chapter further presented recommendations which stem from the discussed conclusions. The suggestions for further research are given in this chapter and the chapter closed with a summary.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: interview questions

1. What skills do learners need to manage tense in composition writing?

(a) When teaching tense at LGCSE level, what are the targeted learning outcomes or instructional objectives?

(b) With your knowledge of the LGCSE English Language Syllabus and teaching experience, what can you say are the skills that learners need to have to manage tense in composition writing?

2. What challenges do learners have in relation to tense usage in composition writing?

(a) In your experience, what specific tense type problems or challenges do your Form E learners have in composition writing?

(b) From your reading of the external examiner's reports by year, what kind of tense-related errors do learners commit in their composition writing?

(c) In what context do you teach verb tenses?

(d) Since tense is related to verbs, what can you say about tense in relation to verbs?

3. What possible causes can improper tense shifts in learners' composition writing be attributed to?

(a) What are the causes of improper tense shifts in Form E learners' compositions?

(b) How do these causes characterise learners' composition writing?

(c) Which are the causes that are tense type specific?

(d) During your training, to what extent were you prepared to address these kinds of problems? How do you relate learners' tense errors to your training?

(e) What can you say about the resources you have that aid the teaching of tense?

4. What pedagogical strategies can be employed to improve the management of tense in composition writing?

(a) Which methods do you normally use to enable learners to develop skills in managing tense in composition writing?

(b) Which methods and activities do you consider effective when teaching different types of verb tenses?

(c) How are those methods and activities effective with different verb tenses?

(d) What are the anticipated long-term solutions to the tense-related problems in learners' compositions?

(e) Is there anything else you want to add?

Appendix B: interview consent form

I understand what is requested of me as a participant in the research. Therefore, I freely consent to participate.

Name of the interviewee…………………………………………………………

Signature of the interviewee………………………………………………….

Name of the interviewer…………………………………………………………

Signature of the interviewer…………………………………………………..

Appendix C: Composition Writing Test for Schools A and C *(The best and the worst performing schools)*

SECTION 1: CREATIVE WRITING

Write on the dotted lines provided in the question paper.

At the head of your essay put the number of the question you have chosen.

You are advised to write 350-500 words or 2-2½ pages.   [30 marks]

Write on **one** of the following topics.

1. Write a story about a poor man who unexpectedly became rich.

2. Describe an ideal beauty of someone you would want to marry.

3. Discuss some of the challenges that are faced by farmers as result of soil erosion.

4. Write about someone who was given a bad advice.

5. Teachers should be allowed to have cell phones in the classroom. To what extent do you agree?

Appendix D: Composition Writing Test for School with an average performance in English Language Exernal Exams. (B)

SECTION 1: Creative Writing

Write on the dotted lines provided in the question paper.

At the head of your essay put the number of the question you have chosen.

You are advised to write 350–500 words or 2–2½ pages.   [30 marks]

Write on **one** of the following topics.

1.   Write a story in which you learned that money cannot buy love.

2.   Describe a typical farewell ceremony at your school.

3.   Discuss some of the challenges that are faced by your country as a result of climate change.

4.   Write about someone who almost lost his/her life because of telling a lie.

5.   Students should be required to do at least one practical subject in high school. To what extent do you agree?

Appendix E: Letter from LASED