

**ERROR ANALYSIS OF TENSES IN THE WRITINGS OF REMEDIAL  
STUDENTS OF KEBBI STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY, ALIERO**

**BY**

**MARYAM USMAN  
ADM. NO: 10211110004**

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## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my late father Alhaji Abubakar Jombali Dakin-Gari who laid down the foundation to my education, also my loving mother Hajia Mama Aishatu Dakin-Gari and to my husband Alhaji Usman Koko, whose support and encouragement would forever be remembered.

## CERTIFICATION

This Dissertation by **Mrs. Maryam Usman** with Admission Number **10/21111/0004** has met the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts (English Language) of the Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto and is approved for its contribution to knowledge.

---

Prof. Gbenga Ibileye Solomon  
Major Supervisor

---

Date

---

Dr. Umar Kiro Kalgo  
Co- Supervisor I

---

Date

---

Dr. Muhammad Arzika Dan Zaki  
Co-Supervisor II

---

Date

---

External Examiner

---

Date

---

Dr. Muhammad Aminu Mode  
Head of Department

---

Date

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates tense errors in the writings of the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero 2011/2012 academic session. Error analysis of tenses is the main focus of the study. The main aim of the study is to identify the tense errors, their causes and proffer pedagogical solution. Essays and multiple choice questions written by 42 male and female students were used as samples for the study. The study discovers that most of the students commit tense errors. This suggests that teachers in the university assumed that some elementary topics had already been taken care of in the learner's previous education. Therefore, errors by the remedial students were not always traceable to mother tongue interference.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

This chapter deals with a general introduction to the research. It provides the background of the study and statement of the research problem. It also specifies the objectives and the research questions. The final part of the chapter outlines the scope and limitation of the study.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The lamentable state of students' use of the English language and the indiscriminate use of tenses is what urged the researcher to study the errors of their written performance; Identifying their types and how to minimize them, for the use of English is made mandatory for all students wishing to undergo degree courses, hence the medium of instruction for various disciplines in the university. The remedial students are no exception since it serves as a make up for them at the remedial level. This goes to say that students learn only because it is made compulsory for them, not that they have interest to learn. Some may want to pick up quickly at new words, sentences and may wish to write them, while others worry when they do not understand what they have to learn and may try to look for explanations while others are less concerned to tolerate ambiguity. Many of them are shy and are afraid to make mistakes while others do not want to be corrected.

Studies of the role of aptitude motivation and difference in cognitive style have done much to clear out contribution of these factors to success or failure in language learning (Brown 1980; 116). Richards, points out that students differs in the goals of why they learn English such as interest, learning habits and purpose which crucially affect how they do well in their learning activities. For this, many errors could be notice in the

students' written work as well as in their spoken English. This is therefore what prompted the present study on students' errors of tenses in the writing of remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero.

According to Lyons (1970:73) tense analyzes reality in terms of temporal or sequential relationship of an event to another or some fixed or moving part of reference, while aspect sees reality in terms of how speaker uses language to exert control over events or how events themselves exert control over the speaker. In grammar tense is a category that locates a situation in time, to indicate when the event takes place. Tense is the grammaticalisation of time reference, often using three basic categories of "before now" i.e the past; "now", i.e the present and "after now", i.e the future. The "unmarked" reference for tense is the temporal distance from the time of utterance, the "here and now", this being absolute tense. Relative tense indicates temporal distance from a point of time established in the discourse that is not the present i.e reference to a point in the past or future. Such as the future in -future, or the future of the future (at some time in the future after the reference point, which is in the future) and future-in-the-past or future of the past (at some time after a point in the past with the reference point being in the past).

Tense is normally indicated by a verb form, either on the main verb or on an auxiliary verb. The tense markers are normally affixes but also stem modification such as ablaut or reduplication can express tense reference and in some cases tense can be shown by clitics. Often combinations of these can interact, such as in 'Irish', where there is a proclitic past tense marker *do* (various surface forms) used in conjunction with the affix or ablaut modified past tense form of the verb. Languages that do not have grammatical tense, such as Chinese, express their time reference through adverbials, time phrases and

so on. English is a two-tense language which expresses past and non past, thus covering both present and future in one verb form.

This explains the sequence of time reference where an action that has taken place in the past shows the past tense, action that is happening at the time of speaking may be referred to as the present tense, while future occurrence shows the time when an action is taking place. This is what explain the basic categories of time.

Bernard (1976:6) opines that;

The semantic concept of time reference (absolute or relative) may be grammaticalised in a language, i.e. a language may have a grammatical category that expresses time reference, in which case we say that the language has tenses. Some languages lack tense i.e. do not have grammatical time reference, though probably all languages can lexicalize time reference, i.e. have temporal adverbials that locate situations in time.

The term tense is therefore at times used in language descriptions to represent any combination of tense proper, aspect, and mood, as many languages include more than one such reference in portmanteau TAM (tense-aspect-mood) affixes or verb forms. Conversely, languages that grammaticalise aspect can have tense as a secondary use of an aspect. In many languages, such as Latin, Celtic and Slavic, a verb may be inflected for both tense and aspect together, as in the *passé compose/passé simple* (historique) and *imparfait* of French. Verbs can also be marked for both mood and tense together, such as the present subjunctive (*so be it*) and the past subjunctive (*Were it so*), or all three, such as the past perfect subjunctive (*Had it been so*).

English, like other Germanic languages, Japanese, Persian, and so on, has only two morphological tenses, past and non-past (present-future). These are distinguished by verb form, by either ablaut or suffix (sings-sang, walks-walked). The non-past may be

used to reference the future e.g. *The examination comes up tomorrow* like in the participle future tense *The examination is coming up tomorrow*. This example shows that the ‘s’ form and the ‘ing’ form of the verb can be interchanged to reference future time. However, this proves difficult to most of the students of the study as some of them resort to constructing sentence such as *I be having an examination tomorrow*. The use of tense is very crucial in English Language, as tense formation is taught in school at all the levels of education from primary up to tertiary level in Nigeria. This goes to suggest how important tense is, as no sentence is expressed without a verb which indicates the time of an action.

No matter what amount of teaching done on tenses, students still commit errors which are indicative of their deficiency in understanding of this grammatical aspect. This is even more so at the tertiary level where it is expected that the students would have demonstrated a firm understanding of the use of the tenses.

It is on record, that students do commit errors in using the target language (which is L<sub>2</sub>) in accordance with situation. As Lawal (2004:27), points out,

Errors of usage are attributable to the complexity of the English language itself. The level at which people commit errors in terms of language usage vary from one person to another, depending on linguistic background of the speakers or users of the language.

There are various reports from examination bodies such as West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and other agencies which show that the students’ performance in English language has been very low particularly in the West African School Certificate Examinations (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) as

students were unable to learn all the grammatical rules, nouns, verbs, phrases, clauses and sentences, hence fail to apply the correct rules.

The study therefore, investigates tense problems in the writings of remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero. It also intends to find out the nature and frequency of the errors, their causes and suggest pedagogical solution.

The aim of the remedial course is to improve the performance of the students, with regard to the course, while attempt is made to correct some of the deficiencies caused by the school certificate English curriculum. Yet, as it is observed by Yankson, (1989) that without adequate knowledge of what precisely students' difficulties are, years of precious remedial teaching and learning can be wasted.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

There has been widespread criticism of the examination system in Nigeria, especially with the school certificate examinations. The universities are not however, satisfied with the low standard of English of many entrants who score reasonable marks in the examination but are handicapped in their studies by their inability to read with understanding or write with clarity.

Learning a new language is such a complex process that it is hardly surprising that things sometimes go wrong. No matter the amount of time expended to teaching, errors are bound to occur, as rules will be forgotten or half remembered, similar forms and structures will be wrongly associated. The need to communicate may demand pieces of language for which no rules are known except those of the mother tongue. The remedial work should focus its attention in the form of frequent revision of problem areas. This can be done in the early stages of the course when problem areas are likely to be fairly few



and clearly defined. It is also of interest to note that students need a high level of competence and performance as to internalize the structure of the language to the point of automacity. However critics of the product of our educational institution believed that our students are poor in the English language because they have not (as they themselves did) internalized the grammar of the language to the point of automacity. To back up their stand, they brandish examples of ungrammatical sentences culled from the writings of students particularly in the West African School Certificate Examinations.

In addition, one of the major language requirements in the teaching and learning of science and technology at all levels is the ability to acquire the use of certain vocabulary (words, symbols, pictorial information) in the field of science and technology.

However, despite frequent studies done on error analysis in the teaching and learning of second language, students are prone to committing errors in their writings. This problem has led to poor performance in essay writing most of the marks allotted are lost due to poor expression. In view of this when the effectiveness of using tense as a skill is examined, one can argue that indiscriminate use of tenses is one of the serious problems facing the remedial students.

The remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero, are prone to making errors, more so in the use of the perfectives, when they attempt to produce the following I have eating for the present perfect: I have eaten I have been worked as a baker” instead of I have been working as a baker. The general observation made is that majority of students at the end of secondary school education still have difficulties in reading and understanding, as many could not organize ideas into simple sentences free of errors; both spoken and written.

It is also observed despite the fact that the learning of English started at the primary and secondary school levels, many learners lack the ability when it comes to the use of basic structures in both spoken and written forms. This is based on sampled errors collected out of the written work of the remedial students of the university under study.

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The general aim of this research work is to investigate and analyze tense problems of remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- (i) To investigate and analyze the types of tense errors of remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero, 2011/2012 session.
- (ii) To identify the underlying causes of the tense errors of remedial students' writing in English language in Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero.
- (iii) To proffer some pedagogical solutions to the identified problems.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the types of tense errors made by the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero?
- (2) What are the causes of tense errors of the remedial students of the institution under the study?
- (3) What are the solutions to be proffer to the identified tense errors?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The aim of this study will contribute to teaching and learning of English as a second language in Nigeria. This is done by identifying reasons why students' English performance are poor. Then it will also goes to identifying students' level of achievement

in their English language writing skills and the problem faced by the students learning English as a second language. Scholars are of the view that when errors are persistent, more so if shared by all students in a class, it is useful for teachers to bring the problem to the students' attention, Light Bown and Spada (2000:176-192).

Corder (1974:125) notes that Error Analysis (EA) serves as a useful tool in language learning because it reveals the problem areas to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers. "Errors can tell the teacher how far towards the goals the learner has progressed and consequently, what remains for him or her to learn. So, students' errors are valuable feed backs". Error Analysis helps teachers understand common language problems students have, so that they can focus more attention on these types of errors.

The significance of this study is important as it gears towards informing educators and language study material developers about the kind of errors that the remedial students of the study make, and to show the errors' frequency of occurrence. It is believed that if educators and study material developers become conscious of likely problem areas that face specific groups of remedial students, they would be in a better position to put appropriate strategies in place.

This study is also valuable to learners, as researchers such as Kaplan (1966:1-20) and Nunan (2001:87-92) have reflected that learners errors are systematic, rather random, as many learners tend to commit the same kinds of errors during a certain stage of language learning.

It is therefore, an obligation upon teachers to summarize these frequently appearing errors, and remind students of these errors as often as possible, in order for them to make greater effort to avoid them during their future learning.

Error analysis is also significant, use as a guidance to teachers on how to assist learner to become better writers and to draw their attention to the commonly misuse tenses. As Corder (1974:126) puts it, “we should be aware that different types of written material may produce a different distribution of error or a different set of errors types”.

The common wrong verbs forms indicated in this study are only a sample; teachers should explore to identify other commonly misuse forms of grammar that could not be part of the instruments used in the study. As the result of the study are not only beneficial to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers by showing them students’ progress, but also significant to researchers. The findings can further be used to serve as a reference for those who would choose to conduct future research in error analysis.

#### **1.6 Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

The focus of the study is investigating tense errors in the writing of remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero. The study is limited to a selection of the written data both essay and objective of the remedial students 2011/2012 academic session only, in which 42 out of 130 students were selected as the subjects for the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter consists of review of related literature in the area of error analysis. It is mainly concerned with a review of the area considered relevant to the research topic of the study. The chapter seeks to look at the status of English language in Nigeria, English language teaching within the Nigeria context, tense in English and classification of tense aspects.

Finally, reference is made to some works in the area of error analysis done by other scholars or researchers.

#### **2.1 The Status of English Language in Nigeria**

English is considered as the most widely spoken language in Nigeria, as the second language users of English are therefore deemed to be multilingual with dominance in English language. (Banjo, 1996 as cited in Godwin 2014). English however serves as Nigeria's official language such that government records, administrative instructions and debates in the National Assembly are normally conducted in English. Also records of courts proceedings, the Nigerian constitutions and party manifestoes were also originally drafted in English (Kure, 2001; 216).

Orubite, (2013:13) emphasizes on the role of English language, posits that, it is an international language for science and technology and cannot therefore be ignored in Nigeria. He stated that any child that is denied access to English language will be seriously handicapped economically, politically and socially.

Muhammed (2000;30) asserts that there is a close correlation between failure in English language and failure in other subjects, most particularly Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics.

English is also used for a range of functions among those that use it in the region where it is predominantly used. A new variety of English is use for specific purposes such as, in letter writing, literary writing, in parliament, the media and use as lingua franca (a general language of communication among different tribal groups).

The most important role of English language is in the area of education, as a language of science and technology as well as passport to educational advancement and prestigious employment, while admission into universities and other post secondary institutions depends on ones performance in English, which is the medium of instruction from primary to the university level. Thus, parents happily await their children's good performance in English so that their children could become lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, teachers etc, as they feel that the earlier their children got better in English, the greater will be their chances of getting on in life. Thus, It is believed that the importance of English cannot be over emphasized. It is so because Nigerians believe that the country cannot forge ahead without English, which serves as one of the unifying factors that brings together people of different tribal and ethnic groups to communicate with one another. Afolayan (1991: 8) cited in Kure (2001), puts this point more forcefully when he says "it is unrealistic for anybody in Nigeria today to think that national unity can forge ahead in the country without recourse to the utilization of English language in Nigeria. Other scholars share the same view on the role and status of English language in Nigeria, such as Mann (1996:93), Achebe (1996).

## **2.2 English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria**

English is learnt as a second language (ESL) in Nigeria and is indispensable to modern living. Our children must be given maximum encouragement and opportunity to learn it effectively in our schools. The point however, is that the best medium for teaching the children at the initial stages of their education is their mother tongue, and it is after a firm linguistic foundation has been laid in it that there should be a change to the use of English as a medium of instruction at a later stage.

For Nigeria to achieve its goals on democracy, unity, peace, international co-operation, promotion and preservation of positive cultural values; and well as the socio-economic and technological development, English language is the answer. All these and many others could not be realized without the English language which has dominated all aspects of our lives, as it provides a window to the world and made rapid development a feasible proposition (Banjo, 1996 cited in Godwin 2004).

English language plays a major role in areas such as commerce, while business transactions are conducted in English. In addition, English language is also used in bilateral discussions and agreements among different countries of the world. It is the language use by legislators, judiciary and executives.

Newspaper, which serves for national coverage, is published in English. As no African country is better served with English medium newspaper than Nigeria, all these therefore, confirmed that English is the language of literacy in Nigeria.

However, apart from being the language of instruction in Nigerian schools and colleges it is made a compulsory school subject which student which students must pass before proceeding to the next level of their education, or to any civil service; be it federal, state or local government. In the tertiary institutions for instance, there are compulsory

courses like Qualifying English, General English, Use of English and Communication Skills, that students must undertake and pass before they could graduate. English language therefore according to Mohammed (2000; 130), is the most central school subject because of its pivotal role as the most versatile means of communication and as the principal medium for acquiring knowledge in other subjects. One of the main aims of learning English is to aid student to acquire the linguistic skills which are necessary for the study of science and technology. The task involves the process of achieving communicative competence which determines the learning needs in Science and Technology, English as a medium of instruction is expected to serve. At the heart of science and Technology are certain concepts, which are not normally found in non-Science and Technology fields. Strevens (1978:204) says that;

Being a scientist or technologist entails learning a number of habits of thought, that these habits of thought directly affect his use of language, and that the scientist can only function as a scientist if he learns how to use language appropriately to these habits of thought.

### **2.3 Error Analysis**

Research studies have cited three approaches to the analysis of “learner’s English” namely contrastive analysis, error analysis, and transfer analysis (Swan & Smith, 1995:7).

Contrastive analysis compares the structure of two language systems and predicts errors. Transfer analysis on the other hand, compares “learner English” with  $L_1$  and attempts to explain the structure of those errors that can be traced to language transfer. Error analysis compares “learner English” with English ( $L_2$ ) itself and judges how learners are “ignorant” (James, 1998:304). So therefore, the present study focuses its attention on error analysis.



Error analysis (EA) examines errors made by L<sub>2</sub> learners, Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) defined it as the study and analysis of the errors made by the second language learners. Corder (1967:19-27) was the first to advocate the importance of studying errors in students' writing.

According to Corder, learners' errors are important in and of themselves. For learners, errors are indispensable, since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. Gass and Selinker (2001:67) define errors as "red flags", that means they are warning signals, that provide evidence of the learner's knowledge of the L<sub>2</sub>.

The investigation of errors can be diagnostic and prognostic. It is diagnostic because it tells us the learner's state of the language (Corder, 1967, in Richards, 1984:33) at a given point during the learning process, prognostic because it can tell course organizers to reorient language learning materials on the basis of the learner's current problems.

On the whole, Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) point out that EA may be carried out in order to:

- (1) Identify strategies which learners use in language learning.
- (2) Try to identify the causes of learner's errors.
- (3) Obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

The above discussion which states the goal of error analysis in the preceding paragraphs is also applicable to the students who undertake English course at the remedial level, since the major aim of the study is to identify the types of errors the subjects make and the frequency of these errors.

### 2.3.1 The Concept of Language Error and its Analysis

The field of error analysis (EA) in second language acquisition was established in the 1970s by Corder and his colleagues. EA is a type of linguistic study that focuses on the errors learners make. This consists of a comparison between the errors made in target language (TL) and within that TL itself.

Error analysis is one of the most influential theories of second language acquisition. It is concerned with the analysis of the errors committed by L<sub>2</sub> learners by comparing the learners' acquired norms with the target language norms and explaining the identified errors, James (1998). For (Crystal 1999; 108), Error Analysis in language teaching and learning is the study of the unacceptable form produced by someone learning a language, especially a foreign language. According to James (2001:62), EA refers to *the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance*. In Applied Linguistics, an error is a deviation from accepted rules of a language made by a learner of a second language. Such errors result from the learner's lack of knowledge of correct rules of the target language. A significant distinction is generally made between errors and mistakes which are not treated the same from a linguistic point of view.

The study of learners' errors was the main area of investigation by linguists in the history of second-language acquisition research. In linguistics, it is considered important to distinguish errors from mistakes. Distinction is always made between errors and mistakes where errors are seen to have resulted from learner's lack of proper grammatical knowledge i.e competence, while mistakes are as a result of the learner's failure to utilize a known system correctly i.e performance.

Brown, (1994:202), terms these mistakes as performance error. Such mistakes are generally made by both the native speakers and second language learners. However, native speakers are generally able to correct themselves quickly. Such mistakes include slip of the tongue, random ungrammatical formations. On the other hand, errors are systematic in that they occur repeatedly and are not recognizable by the learner. They are part of the learner's inter-language, and the learner does not generally consider them as errors. They are errors only from teachers' and others' perspectives who are aware of the possible grammatical deviations. Corder (1967) views errors as valuable information for three beneficiaries; for teachers, it clues them on the progress of the students; for researchers, it provides evidence as to how language is acquired or learned; for learners themselves, it gives them resources in order to learn.

Brown (2000; 224) states that there are two main sources of errors, namely inter-lingual errors and intra-lingual errors.

Inter-lingual (interference) errors are those errors that are traceable to first language interference. These errors are attributable to negative inter-lingual transfer. The term "inter-lingual" was first introduced by Selinker (1972:209). He used this term to refer to systematic knowledge of an L<sub>2</sub> which is dependent on both the learners L<sub>1</sub> and the target language. Transfer is of two kinds positive and negative. The transfer may prove to be justified because the structure of the two languages are similar-this case is called "positive transfer" or facilitation', or it may prove unjustified because the structure of the two languages are different; that case is called 'negative transfer' or 'interference' (Wilkins 1972, p.199).

As far as the intra-lingual errors are concerned, they result from faulty or partial 'learning of the target language rather than language transfer (Keshavarz 2003:63),

Richards (1972:204) cites four main types of interlingual errors, namely (1) over generalization (2) ignorance of rule restrictions (3) incomplete application of rules and (4) false concepts hypothesized. Later he identifies six sources of errors; (1) interference. (2) over generalization (3) performance errors (4) markers of transitional competence (5) strategies of communication and assimilation, and (6) teacher-induced errors. Stenson (1974) stated three main reasons for errors, namely (1) incomplete acquisition of the target grammar, (2) exigencies of the learning/teaching situation and (3) errors due to normal problems of language performance. Committing errors is one of the most unavoidable things in the world. Students, in the process of learning language, profit from errors that they make by obtaining feed back to make new attempts that successively approximate their desired objectives.

Weireesh (1991:12-13) views learners errors to be of particular importance because making errors is a device learners use in order to learn. According to him, EA is a valuable aid to identifying and explaining difficulties faced by learners. He goes on to say that EA serves as reliable feed back to design a remedial teaching method. Candling (2001) states that L<sub>2</sub> learner's errors are potentially important for the understanding processes of second language acquisition.

Olasheinde (2002) also argues that it is inevitable that learners make errors. He also suggested that errors are unavoidable and necessary part of the learning process.

Sercombe (2000) explains that EA serves three purposes. Firstly, to find out the level of language proficiency the learners has reached, Secondly, to obtain information about common difficulties in language learning, and thirdly, to find out how people learn a language.

Error analysis considers three categories namely, slips, mistakes or lapses and errors, whose difference lies in the ability of the user or speaker to readily correct any transposition, substitution, addition of a speech sound in consistent verbs, tense, morphemes, words or complete phrase or a blend of these. Many of these lapses seem to increase in frequency under conditions of stress, indecision and fatigue among the native speakers.

It is presumed that if this occurs among the native speakers then the second language learner will 'demonstrate similar lapses in performance, where the mention conditions are likely to be more pronounced.

### **2.3.2 Significance of Learner's Errors**

Pit Corder, was probably the first to point out and discuss the importance of errors learners make in the course of their learning a second language. Soon the study and analysis of learners' errors took a prominent place in applied linguistics. Brown (1994:205) suggests that the process of second language learning is not very much different from learning a first language, and the feedback an L<sub>2</sub> learner gets upon making errors benefits him in developing the L<sub>2</sub> knowledge. Errors arise from lack of competence in the target language.

Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language (TL) and that target language itself. Pit Corder is often referred to as "The father of error analysis. It was his article entitled "The significance of Learners Errors (1967) that marked a new turn for error analysis. Errors used to be flaws that need to be eradicated. Corder (1974) presented a completely different point of view. He emphasized that those errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. Gass and Selinker (1994) defined

errors as “Red flags” that provide evidence of the learners knowledge of the second language. Many researchers like Richard (1974), Taylor (1975), Dulay and Burt (1974) shared interest in errors because they believed errors contain valuable information on the strategies that people use to acquire language.

Richard and Simpson (1974:15) explain that “at the level of programmatic classroom experience, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determines priorities for future effort.

According to Corder (1974; 27) error analysis has two objects, one theoretical object and the other applied. The theoretical object serves to “elucidate what and how a learner learns when he/she studies a second language and the applied object serves to enable the learner to learn more efficiently by exploiting our knowledge of his/her dialect for pedagogic purposes”.

However Corder, (1987; 74) explains the significance of learners’ errors in three different ways. The first to the teacher in that they tell him, if he had undertaken a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed, and consequently what remains for him to learn. Second, they provide to the researcher, evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly, errors are indispensable to the learner himself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn”. Brown (1994) gives the definition of errors as follows: “The fact that learners do make errors and these errors can be observed, analyzed and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learners’ errors called “error analysis”. As with the definitions the aim of this process is to suggest, suitable and

effective teaching-learning strategies and remedial measures necessary in the target language.

Another important area of error analysis as pointed out by Corder (1973; 259) is that to the teachers, errors provide feedback. They tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials and his teaching techniques and show him what parts of the syllabus he has been following have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention. As it is seen in the explanation given above, error analysis can be a very useful device of a foreign language teaching program: Undertaken at the beginning level, error analysis reveals to the teacher “knotty” areas of the language confronting the students. The frequency counts of errors supported by the solutions of CA can be helpful in setting up teaching priorities.

One of the goals of error analysis is to help account for the second language learner’s linguistic competence. “A learner error provides evidence for the system of language that he is using (i.e. has learned at a particular point in the course).

Corder (1967; 61) in Richards, (1974), emphasized that errors in language learning are no longer regarded as negative. Rather, as positive source of information regarding the state of the learner’s target language. Corder (1974:257) believes that “from the study of the learner’s errors we are able to ponder the nature of his knowledge at that point in his learning career and to discover what he still has to learn.

Lastly, the study of error analysis is important for the research of this nature, as it helps to discover where the subjects of the study which are the remedial students of Kebbi State University of science and Technology, Aliero make tense errors and therefore sought to analyze these errors in their written works.

### **2.3.3 Second Language Learning Theory**

The participants in this study are the remedial students of 2011/2012 academic session of the Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero, Kebbi State. In this respect, remedial English has become an important aspect of this study. Richards and Schmidt (2002:472) refer to the term second language (L<sub>2</sub>) as any language learned after one has learnt one's native language. According to Krashen (1981:1), adults develop language competence in two different ways; language acquisition and language learning. Language learning and language acquisition differ in various respects.

Krashen describes language acquisition as follows: Language acquisition is a subconscious process not unlike the way a child learns language. Language acquirers are not consciously aware of the grammatical rules of the language, but rather develop a feel for correctness. In non-technical language, acquisition is picking-up a language (Krashen, 1981:2).

Most L<sub>2</sub> learners start learning the language at school level while they have already become fluent in their L<sub>1</sub> at home. To find out learning strategies which learners use in L<sub>2</sub> learning and identify difficulties they encounter, error analysis has to be carried out Richards and Schmidt, (2002:184).

Language learning according to Krashen (1981:2) is the conscious learning of a language knowing the rules, to be aware of them and being able to talk about them. In the same vein, Brown (2002:278) defines language learning as a conscious process in which "learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process". Krashen's theory of language learning consists of five main hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the effective filter hypothesis and the input hypothesis.



The researcher however, considers one of the theories for the study- The Monitor hypothesis, which proposes that there is a ‘monitor’ which functions to help a learner to filter language. The learner uses the monitor to apply rules to the already learned knowledge, such as which verb tense to use or which form of speech to use. Krashen (1981) as cited in Brown and Spada, (1995:27) explains that in order to use a monitor well, three factors must be met:

- (1) **Time:** The learner must have sufficient time to think about and use conscious rules effectively. Taking time to think about rules may disrupt communication.
- (2) **Focus on form:** The learner has to focus on forms, the correctness of forms. He may be more concerned with what he is saying but not how he is saying it.
- (3) **The knowledge of rules:** The learner has to know the rules. For example in the present study, the subjects need time to use the monitor hypothesis to comprehend the task and identify the time of the event so that he or she can decide appropriate tense, type of vocabulary and register to use in order to respond appropriately to the tasks given. Through this process the knowledge of the rules is demonstrated.

Krashen also asserted that the use of the monitor varies among different people. There are those who use it all of the time and are classified as “over users”. There are those learners who have either not learned how to use the monitor or choose not to use it and they are identified as “under-users”. Between the two groups are the “optimal users”. This group uses monitor when it is appropriate. In ordinary conversation, an optimal user will not be excessively concerned with applying conscious rules to performance. As such in writing and in planned speech, he or she will make any correction which improves the accuracy of his output.

#### **2.3.4 Second Language Acquisition and Error Analysis**

The expansion of knowledge and theory in issues concerning the nature of language and language learning has generated a different perception of many aspects of Language Teaching. In the mid 1960s, Mackey in his influential book *Language Teaching Analysis* (1965) argued that the process of language teaching cannot be understood or evaluated until it has been described. His book outlined a framework for describing and analyzing the major component of teaching.

In 1970s a similar perspective emerged with respect to language learning. It was recognized that many issues in language teaching could not be resolved without a clear understanding of the nature of second-and foreign language learning, beginning with an interest in learners' errors as evidence of learning processes. It subsequently developed into what is now referred to as the field of second language acquisition (SLA).

The collection, classification and analysis of errors in the written and spoken performance of second or foreign language learners has had a role in Applied Linguistics and language teaching since at least the 1950s.

In the late 1960s however, the study of learners errors assumed a new significance. The field of error analysis (EA) and interlanguage studies came into prominence. Their focus was the psycholinguistic processes of second language acquisition and the status of learner language systems.

The Applied Linguistic concept of error analysis was initially an application of concepts derived from linguistic theory of the 1960s and first language acquisition research. One of the important goals of error analysis was to help construct an account of the second language learner's linguistic competence. "A learner's errors then provide evidence of the system of the language that he is using (i.e has learned) at a particular

point in the course” (Corder 1967). “An ‘inter-language’ may be linguistically described using data as observable output resulting from a speaker’s attempt to produce a foreign norm, i.e both his errors and non-errors. It is assumed such behavior is highly structured” (Selinker, 1969:71).

On one hand, the concept of “system” or “competence” in Linguistics was typically applied to a static, fully developed language code. Second language learning on the other hand, is characterized by a dynamic and changing set of valuable rules. In the 1970s a number of researchers begin to call attention to the fact that, although the language produced by L<sub>2</sub> learners did not conform to target language, the ‘errors’ that learners made were not random, but reflected a systematic, if not a complete, knowledge of the L<sub>2</sub> (Corder, 1967). The term ‘inter language’ was carried by (Selinker, 1972) to characterize this developing linguistic system of the L<sub>2</sub> learner.

Several error analysis studies, in the 1970s classified L<sub>2</sub> learners’ errors and found that many errors could not be attributed to L<sub>1</sub> interference (Richards, 1974). For example, both L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> learners of English make similar over generalization errors such as “*two mouses*” and “*she goed*”. The finding that not all L<sub>2</sub> learners' errors could be traced to the L<sub>1</sub> led some researchers not only to reject traditional contrastive analysis, but to claim that L<sub>2</sub> learners did not rely on L<sub>1</sub> as a source of hypotheses about the L<sub>2</sub> (Dulay and Burt, 1976). It was also discovered that because of the association between contrastive analysis and behaviourists' explanation of language learning, the influence of the L<sub>1</sub> in L<sub>2</sub> learning was either minimized or ignored by some researchers completely. The focus instead was on the similarities among all L<sub>2</sub> learners of a particular language, regardless of their L<sub>1</sub>.

#### **2.3.4.1 Inter Language**

This refers to finite amount of language which a learner has mastered from his experience with the second language. There are also presumably bits and pieces which he has learned which are actually part of the target language. It means that all the knowledge he accepted and internalized about the target language, both valid and erroneous makes up his competence in that language at that point in time. In effect the grammar is all his own. Therefore the system of rules which he learns or own can be tested. If the speaker of this language could be tested in order to elicit production of the language, we could analyze it and determine where the learner's competence was in terms of the target language. Selinker speaks of inter-language, Corder calls it an idiosyncratic dialect; and Nemser speaks in terms of an approximative system' it seems that all the notions are fairly similar.

In acquiring a second language, the learner makes closer approximations towards total competence by means of a constantly changing system (-set of rules). These systems represent a current, but always traditional, competence in the second language. It is on this language learning theory that Rationalists and Empiricists find a meeting-ground.

Selinker identifies the following as central components of the learner's inter language (1) language transfer, (2) transfer of training (3) strategies of learning (4) strategies of communication and (5) overgeneralization.

Schachter and Celce-murcia (1977:42) state that the inter language or interference errors are those caused by influence of the learners mother-tongue on his production of the target language, in presumably these areas that the languages clearly differ. Inter - language causes of errors are due to language transfer from the mother-tongue L<sub>1</sub> in to the

target language which could be L<sub>2</sub>. MC Gregor (2009:353) also defines language transfer or interference as “carrying over the grammatical patterns from a person’s L<sub>1</sub> to L<sub>2</sub>.”

However there are many studies which centred on why errors are more frequent or when the L<sub>2</sub> learners of English commit errors. Most researchers believe that language developmental errors were mostly traceable to native language interference. As Duly and Burt (1974; 95-100) concluded, many learners actually commit errors due to general characteristics of learning of rules such as over generalization or faulty application of rules and conditions. There are many errors in the target language itself. The fact that many English verbs are irregular causes unaware learner to over generalize inflexions.

In her findings, Olsson (1974; 72) revealed that intralingual errors in child-learner include the use of the progressive instead of participle, regular inflection of irregular verbs, and the use of infinitival form of the main verb instead of the past participle. Learner characteristics errors, she observed, were represented by uncertainty in tense use and misunderstanding subjects or actors, i.e using a finite main verb and no copula. Other research findings tend to support Dulay and Burt’s hypothesis, but much remains inconclusive. Duskova (1969:11) finds heavy native language interference in syntax and construction, but non in modal or morphology errors. The latter showed primarily interference from English. In the same manner, Scott and Tucker’s (1973:205) study seems to offer no compelling evidence for accepting one theory over the other for determining the major source of errors. In another study, Taylor’s errors are with the same high frequency as Olsson's child learner, while Duskova and Scott found no dominant pattern of error types in their adult learners.

Inter language is described as a vibrant microcosm in linguistics. An application of inter language perspective is possible to learner’s underlying knowledge of the target

language sound system, (phonology), grammar (morphology and syntax), vocabulary (lexicon) and language-use norms found among learners' inter language (pragmatics).

#### **2.3.4.2 Variability**

Language varies just like people. A learner, may produce a target variants e.g “*I don't*” in one context and a non target like variant e.g “*me no*” in another, Chomsky perspective to SLA typically regard variability as nothing more than performance errors, and not worthy of systematic inquiry. The influence of mother tongue or the learners' language may also vary according to the sociolinguistic situation. Mackey (1962) notes that in describing interference one must account for variation according to the medium, style, or register in which the speaker is operating. For example, the medium may be spoken or written, the register may be formal or informal, and the speaker may play any one number of varied social roles, Sampson (1971) suggests that varying situations evoke different kinds of errors in varying quantities when children are trying to use the target language. Psychologists have related the type of language learning achieve to the role of the language in relation to the learner's need and perceptions. The instrumental type of motivation is described as that motivating a learner to study a language for largely utilitarian purposes, and not as a means for integration with members of another cultural linguistic group.

Variability in language performance according to setting and context has been observed in several SLA studies. Sampson (1971) suggests that the situation in which L<sub>2</sub> data are collected (e.g, informal, naturalistic conversation versus classroom language use), will lead to different kinds of errors and to different frequencies for particular error types.

## 2.4 Tense in English

The word *tempus* was used in grammar of Latin to describe the six “tenses” of Latin. Four are absolute tenses, of which two are combined tense-aspect categories, marking aspect in the past, while two are relative tenses in showing time reference to another point of time:

- \* *Praesens* (present)
- \* *Praeteritum imperfectum* (= imperfective past) i.e a combined tense-aspect
- \* *Praeteritum perfectum* (= perfective past, i.e a combined tense-aspect.
- \* *Futures* (= future)
- \* *Plus quam perfectum* (= relative past, ie. A past that refers to the past of a reference in the past.
- \* *Anterior futures* (= relative future, i.e a past that refers to the past of a future point).

The tenses of Ancient Greek are similar, though having a three way aspect contrast in the past, the aorist, the perfect and the imperfect. The aorist was the simple past which contrasted with the imperfective (uncompleted action in the past) and the perfect, the past form that had relevance to the present.

The study of modern languages has been greatly influenced by the grammar of these languages, seeing that the early grammarians often monks, had no other reference point to describe their language. Latin terminology is often used to describe modern languages, at times erroneously, as in the application of the term “pluperfect” to the English “past perfect”, the application of “perfect” to what in English more often than not is not “perfective”, or where the German simple and perfect pasts’ are called respectively

“imperfektum” and “perfektum”, despite the fact that neither has any real relationship to the aspects implied by the use of the Latin terms.

### **Tense and aspect in English**

<b>Tense</b>	<b>Simple</b>	<b>Perfect</b>	<b>Continuous/Progressive</b>
Nonpast	-Ø/s	has/have-en,-ed,ablaut, etc	am/is/are-ing
Past	-ed, -t, ablaut, etc	had-en,-ed, ablaut, etc	was/were-ing
Nonpast	<i>go, goes</i>	<i>have/has gone</i>	<i>am/is/are going</i>
Past	<i>went</i>	<i>had gone</i>	<i>was/were going</i>

The future can also be referenced using forms with an auxiliary verb, particularly shall or will, and these are often called the “future tenses”.

The English language allows a wide variety of expressions of combinations of tenses, aspect and mood, with a variety of grammatical constructions. These constructions involve pure morphological changes (suffixes and internal sound changes of the verb), conjugated compound verbs, and invariants auxiliaries, for English TAM from the perspective of modality, i.e "now" the present, and “after now”, i.e the future. Linguists are quick to remind us that there are different varieties of grammar that is different ways of describing and analyzing the structure and functions of language. One basic distinction worth noting is that between descriptive grammar and prescriptive grammar. Both are concerned with rules-but in different ways. Specialists in descriptive grammar examine the rules or patterns that underlie our use of words phrases, clauses, and sentences. In contrast, prescriptive grammarians (such as editors and teachers) try to enforce rules about what they believe to be the correct usage of language.



Descriptive grammar refers to the structure of a language as it is actually used by speakers and writers while prescriptive grammar refers to the structure of a language as how certain people think it should be used.

Descriptive grammarians generally advise not to be overly concerned with matters of correctness: language, they say isn't good or bad; it simply is; while prescriptive grammarians prefer giving practical advice about using language, straight forward rules to help us avoid making errors. The rules may be over-simplified at times, but they are meant to keep us out of trouble-the kind of trouble that may distract or even confuse our readers. The discussion on the basic parts of speech is primarily descriptive, while studies on correcting errors in subject-verb agreement is obviously prescriptive. Thus the research study of this nature is prescriptive, as it tends to look at errors in tenses.

#### **2.4.1 The Concept of Tense in English Grammar**

The second language learners face unique kind of problems while dealing with the tense category of English Grammar. To grasp the concept, this can be done step by step. First, it is important to define the term 'tense' itself. To do so, you need to properly define verb category in English grammar.

The verb shows actions, states, processes and events. For instance;

They assess the report (process verb)

John eats an apple (Action verb)

This is a book (state verb)

Ali built a house (event verb)

Now, in order to understand the concept of time, is to refer to time as mathematical entity. It is also universal because its start and end cannot be determined.

Therefore time is like a straight line on which we can show past present and future time. That much about the concept of time. What is tense then? Tense = verb (which state, process, action, event) + time. Thus in the sentence below the verb notion remains intact but only the time will change by changing the form of the verb.

- 1) They assess (process + present time) the report. They assessed (process to past time) the report.
- 2) John eat (action + present time) an apple. John ate (action + past time) an apple.
- 3) This is (state + present time) a book. This was (state + past time) not a book.
- 4) Ali builds (even + present time) a house. Ali built a house

It is clear that the grammars have created various forms of verb to capture time. However, there are only two tenses in English grammar; past and present. There is no future tense for we have no future form of verb.

Present	Past	Future
Eat/eats	ate	-

### 2.4.2 Classification of Tenses

The term tense is at times used in language to represent any combination of tense proper, aspect and mood, as many languages include more than one such reference - TAM tense aspect-mood affixes or verbs.

One of the way is which linguists investigate tense is to study sequence of tenses, which is known as agreement of tenses, succession of tenses and tense harmony which is a set of grammatical rules of a particular language governing the agreement between the tenses of verbs in related clauses or sentences. Example in which rules of sequence of tenses apply is the indirect speech. If at some past time someone spoke a sentence in a particular tense (say the present tense), and that act of speaking is now reported, the tense

used in the clause that corresponds to the words spoken may or may not be the same as the tense that was used by the original speaker. In some languages the tense tends to be “shifted back”, so that what was originally spoken in the present tense is reported using the past tense (since what was in the present at that time of the original sentence is in the past relative to the time of reporting). “English is one of the languages in which this often occurs. As various studies have revealed, students learning English as a second language hardly back shift the sequence of tenses when reporting, using the past tense. *I need a drink* becomes *she needed a drink*, in reporting this indirectly the tense of the verb need shift from present tense to past tense.

‘*She said she needed a drink*’. The shifting back” of tense is called back shifting or an attracted sequence of tenses. In languages and contexts where such shift does not occur, there may be said by contrast to be a natural sequence. In English if an attracted sequence of tenses (back shifting) is often used in indirect speech and similar contexts, the attracted sequence can be summarized as follows: if the main verb of a sentence is in the past tense, then other verbs must also express a past view point, except when a general truth is being expressed.

### **2.4.3 The Use of Tenses**

#### **1. The use of simple present tense**

To express a habitual action eg.

1. Bukola gets up early in the morning.
2. She loves taking tea every morning.
3. John returns from school at six.

2. To express general truths

Examples: The earth moves round the sun.

Honesty is the best policy

The sun rises in the east.

3. In exclamatory sentences beginning with here and there

Examples: Here comes the teacher!

There the bus stops!

Look! How Fatima sings.

4. To express planned activities

Examples: The president visits America next Sunday.

My uncle arrives tomorrow

5. To introduce quotations

Examples: Shakespeare says "love is not a time's fool".

Murtala says "Nigeria shall be great".

2 The use of present continuous tense

1. For an action going on at the time of speaking.

Examples: Bukola is cooking now.

Binta is writing a letter at present

We are sitting in the garden.

2. For a temporary action

Examples: I am reading Achebes's "Things Fall Apart".

The teacher is writing a letter

The girl is acting in the film.

3. For a future planned action

Examples: We are visiting our village this week

Zainab is getting married this April.

He is singing at the concert this Sunday.

3. The use of present perfect tense

1. For just completed actions.

Examples: My brother has just gone out

John has recently been married.

I have already given her the book.

2. To express past action whose time is not specific

Examples: Have you ever been married?

I have never seen her before.

I have always waited for Abu.

3. For past events whose result is still felt.

Examples: she has watered the garden (her clothes are now wet)

We have walked a long distance (We are now very tired)

They have built a new house. (So they don't need to stay in a rented house).

4. For an action started in the past and continued up to now.

Examples: I have not seen Bukola for a long time (Still not seen her)

She has worked in the college for ten years (She is still working in the college).

4. The use of the present perfect continuous tense

1. For an action which began at sometime in the past and is still going on.

Examples: I have been working in the garden for five hours (still working)  
She has been learning how to drive since last year (she is still learning).  
They have been playing chess since 4pm (they are still playing).

5. The use of simple past tense

1. For a past action with past time adverbs.

Examples: My friend wrote me a letter yesterday.  
I saw John long ago.  
He went to Abuja in 1990  
She graduated last year.

2. For a past discontinued habit.

Examples: He visited us frequently. (He is not in the habit of visiting now).  
She usually danced during parties (She is not dancing now).  
Bukola always talked about her beauty.  
(She has stopped talking about it now).

6. The use of past continuous tense

1. For an action going on at sometime in the past.

Examples: We were watching television yesterday evening.  
I was sleeping in the afternoon.  
The teacher came in when I was reading a book.

2. For a persistent habit in the past

Examples: He was always talking about his talents.  
She was always sharing up her beauty.

Amina was always thinking about her brilliant performance in the exam.

7. The use of past perfect

1. To express one of the two past actions which had been completed earlier.

Examples: When we reached the house, the door was closed.

When I went to the airport, the plane had taken off.

When they entered the class, the teacher had started the lesson.

8. The use of past perfect continuous

1. For an action which began and had been in progress before another action start.

Examples: When I went to the university, my sister had been studying there for three years.

When I returned home, my sister had been working in the house for five hour.

When their father came, they had been sleeping for a long time.

9. The use of simple future

1. For future actions

Examples: I shall meet you tomorrow

We shall begin the work from Monday

She will stay with us for another week.

10. The use of future continuous tense

1. For an action going on in future

Examples: When I get home she will be waiting for me

When she eats, she will be happy

When Fatima gets home, her parent will be angry with her.

2. For future planned actions

Examples: she will be travelling to Abuja next week

They will be getting married this year

He will be starting his degree programme next year

11. The use of future perfect tense

1. For a future completed action

Examples: I shall have written the book by tomorrow

They will have reached home by now

We will have finished our exams by this week.

12. The use of Future perfect continuous

1. For an action going on in future and it will continue to a certain time in the future.

Examples: By next July she will have been 40 years old

They will have been working in the company for five years next year.

When he completes his degree, he will have been doing his research in the university for two years.

#### **2.4.4 Tense Errors in the English Usage**

Detecting tense errors has made impact on learners of English as a second language, more so, as the research study is aimed at detecting error of tenses committed by the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero 2011/2012 academic session. Making the wrong choice of tense is a fertile source of error. Perfect tenses gives particular difficulty. The passive also present problems, chiefly by not being used when it ought to be used especially in the kind of abstract and technical



English to which students in higher institutions and those in professional occupations are exposed.

Intra-lingual and developmental errors reflect the learner's competence at a particular stage and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition. Their origins are found within the structure of English language itself, and through reference to the strategy by which a second language is acquired and taught, examples –

*Did he comed –*

*What you are doing*

*He coming from Israel –*

*Make him to do it.*

Errors of this nature are frequent, regardless of the learner's background. They may be called intralingua and developmental errors. They also reflect the learners' competence.

Jacobovits, (1969:55) describes generalization or transfer as “the use of previously available strategies in new situation---- in second language learning, some of these strategies will prove helpful in organizing the facts about the second language, but others perhaps due to superficial similarities, will be misleading and inapplicable. Over generalization covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language, for examples-

*he can sings;*

*we are hope;*

*it is occurs;*

*he come from.*

These can create a deviant structure on the basis of learner's experience of the structure in the target language. It may be the result of the learner reducing his linguistic burden, with the omission of the third person-s, over generalization removes the necessity for concord, but relieving the learner of considerable effort. Duskova's (1967:11), findings relate to the problem of omission when using 's' present tense for the third person 's' since in English, all grammatical persons take the zero verbal ending except the third person singular in the present tense. Omissions of the 's' in the third person singular may be accounted for by the heavy pressure of all other ending less forms, while the form of 'was/were' is generalized for all persons and numbers in the past tense.

Errors in the opposite direction like these does not exist any rules may be explained either due to hypercorrections, where learners apply rules to suite their thinking....or as being due to generalization of the third person singular ending for the third person plural e.g *he comes/they comes*.

Over-generalization is associated with redundancy reduction. The 'ed' marker, in narrative or in other past contexts often appears to carry no meaning. Since past-form is usually indicated lexically in stories, and the essential notion of sequence in narrative can be expressed equally well in the present – *Yesterday I go to the university and/meet my new professor*.

Ervin-Tripp (1970:313) suggests that 'possibly the morphological and syntactic simplifications of second language learners correspond to some simplification common among children (i.e mother tongue speakers) learning the second language.

False concepts hypothesis, in this case the form 'was' for example may be interpreted as a marker of the past tense, giving '*one day it was happened*' while 'is' may be understood to be the corresponding marker of the present tense; '*he is speaks French*'

while we find continuous form instead of the simple past in between ‘*come*’ and ‘*go*’. Richards, (1972; 243) presents another example of how the present continuous came to be understood as a narrative tense. The simple present tense in English is the normal tense used for actions seen as a whole, for events which develop according to a plan or for sequences of events taking place at the moment in the present tense, The Continuous tense being used only when a single event is extracted from a sequence, the sequence itself being indicated by the present forms. The presentation of the continuous form led a number of students to assume that the continuous form in English is a tense for telling stories and for describing succession of events in either the present or the past.

George (1972) notes that a frequent way of introducing the simple and continuous forms is to establish the contrast; *is* = present state, *is* + *ing* = present action when the past is introduced, it is often introduced by a past tense. ‘*He was sick*’. This lays the ground work for the learner to complete the picture of present and past in English by analogy:

*is* = present state, *is* + *ing* = present action, *was* – past state; *was* + *ing* = past action.

Thus ‘*was*’ or ‘*was* + *ing*’ may be used as past marker. Used together with the ‘*verb* + *ed*’ this produces such sentences as ‘*he was climbed the tree*’.

In a significant study, Dulay and Burt (1974:95) used a subset of the morphemes observed in first language development, presented evidence, suggesting a high degree of agreement between the order in which L<sub>2</sub> learners acquired grammatical morphemes as observed in both, L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> learners, although the two orders were not identical as the following lists shows:

First language learners	Second language learners
1. <i>Plural (-s)</i>	1. <i>Plural (-s)</i>
2. <i>Progressive (ing)</i>	2. <i>Progressive (ing)</i>
3. <i>Past irregular</i>	3. <i>Contractible copula</i>
4. <i>Articles (a the)</i>	4. <i>Contractible auxiliary</i>
5. <i>Contractible copula</i>	5. <i>Articles (a, the)</i>
6. <i>Possessive</i>	6. <i>Past irregular</i>
7. <i>Third person singular (-s)</i>	7. <i>Third-person singular (-s)</i>
8. <i>Contractible auxiliary</i>	8. <i>Possessive (-s)</i>

(Dulay and Burt 1974:9)

Evidence has shown that transfer from the first language to the second language learners has passed through certain stages in the acquisition of grammatical features, that these stages were similar to those observed in children acquiring English as a first language, and that the stages were similar for learner of different language backgrounds.

A basic distinction was made between inter-lingual errors and intra-lingual errors. The first had to do with language transfer. Intra-lingual errors were categorized as overgeneralization errors caused by extensions of target language rules to inappropriate contexts, simplifications (errors resulting from redundancy reduction) George (1972), Richards (1975:204): developmental errors (those reflecting built-in stages of linguistics development) Corder (1976:161); communication based errors (errors resulting from strategies of communication) Selinker (1972:209), Tarone (1977); induced errors (those derived from the sequencing and presentation of target language items), Stenson (1974); errors of avoidance (failure to use certain types of target language features because of perceived difficulty. Schachter (1974) refers to some features produced correctly but used too frequently. These and similar classifications have been used to account for errors at

the levels of Morphology, Phonology, Syntax, Lexis and Speech Acts etc. These could also be used to detect errors that may fall under the above classifications as it relates to errors on tenses committed by the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero.

#### **2.4.5 Other Related Empirical Studies**

The problem of grammatical construction on the part of our students has received much attention from various concerned scholars, teachers and researchers.

Consequently, various studies have been done on the acquisition of grammatical tenses marking the time of action by both native speakers and L<sub>2</sub> learners of English.

In the past years there has been a larger and growing amount of literature on error analysis. A recent study carried out by Sarfraz (2011) examined the errors made by 50 Pakistani undergraduate students in written essays, and found out the overwhelming majority of errors the students made are as a result of learner's inter language process and same errors resulting from mother tongue interference.

Another study was conducted by Darus and Subramaniam (2009; 495), using Corder's (1967) model on error analysis, examined errors in a corpus of 72 essays written by 72 Malay students. They found that student's errors were of six types, i.e singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order. In a related study, Abi Samra (2003), in his article titled: "An analysis of errors in Arabic teacher's English" conducted Study on Arabic speakers' English Writing; he collected samples of written works from 10 students in grade 9. He classified the errors into five categories, namely, grammatical (prepositions, articles, adjectives, etc. The resultant effects revealed that one third of the students' errors were due to transfer from

native language, while the rest of the errors were due to over application of the target language.

In another study on error analysis of written English Essays among Arab learners in a preparatory year program in Saudi Arabia, Murad Hassan M. Sawalmeh (2007), investigated the errors in a corpus of 32 essays written by Arabic-speaking Saudi learners of English. The result showed that the Arabic speakers in his study committed ten common errors. These are: (1) verb tense (2) word order (3) singular/plural form, (4) subject-verb agreement (5) double negations, (6) spellings, (7) capitalization (8) articles (9) sentence fragments and (10) prepositions. The researcher discovered the Saudi learners of English commit errors due to L<sub>1</sub> transfer, as a result of interference of the students' mother tongue.

In addition, Ridha (2012) examined English writing samples of 80 EFL college students, while the errors were categorized according to the following taxonomy: grammatical, lexical/semantic, mechanics, and word order types of errors. The results showed that most of the students' errors can be due to L<sub>1</sub> transfer, as she discovered that most learners depend on their mother tongue in expressing their ideas.

There were however, research studies carried out on learners' errors as it relates to grammatical errors in most of Nigeria schools used as case studies revealed. In a study of Nigerian secondary school students grammatical errors, Tonga (1999) collected his data from end of term essay scripts of students. Finding shows a high frequency of learners' errors in the following areas; error of concord, incorrect use of preposition, pluralizing of uncountable nouns, misuse of tenses. The study however, revealed lack of understanding of the rules of L<sub>2</sub>.

Interference studies done on Yoruba learners in secondary schools in Kwara State, as observed by Issa Aremu were due to mother tongue interference from Yoruba to English. In transforming the idea to English, the learner produced the un-English expression. By so doing, the subjects for the study are seen using a direct translation approach. The learners negatively transferred the Yoruba expressions into English and there by produced the erroneous sentence.

In another study on capitalization errors in under graduates' essays, Abolaji S. Mustapha and Lillian Ofordile, discovered in their findings on indiscriminate use of capitalization which suggests that teachers erroneously presumed that certain elementary topics might have been taken care of in learner's previous education; and errors in L<sub>2</sub> learners are not always traceable to their first language interference.

Dulay and Burt (1974:95) say that the making of errors is unavoidable and we cannot learn without goofing, that is making errors. Therefore, the remedial teaching should be applied when a common error occur despite good initial teaching.

In a related study, Akande (2008) investigated the acquisition of the eight inflectional morphemes in English from 60 Yoruba-speakers learning English selected from four secondary schools in Oke-Igbo, Ondo State, Nigeria. Two types of elicitation techniques were used; written composition and question test techniques. The result of the study revealed that the subjects have poor mastery of the English past participle, possessive inflection, past tense marker and English plural nouns. However it was interesting to discover that the performance on the test techniques was relatively encouraging as none of the subjects scored below 10 out of the 25 questions (Akande, 2003). Hence the problems of linguistics can be grouped into phonological, orthographic, morphological and syntactic.

Despite the facts that all the research studies have had different resultant effect on the part of the learners, as to why the aforementioned errors persist, yet the studies seem to reveal the problem areas but yet the findings could not however be fully applied to the university students of the present study as none of the studies was specifically focused on tenses which serves as the focus of this study. Even if done, the results from the studies may differ significantly from the present study except that of Nihal Saudi preparatory class of Ha'il university which was aimed at preparing students for a university degree, similar to what is obtained in a remedial class of the Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero.

On a final note, the present study intends to examine the tense problem of remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero to see whether the findings are similar or different as it applies to other learners of English as L<sub>2</sub> from the literature reviewed.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The method adopted for the gathering of data for this study is the quantitative method of research use in order to examine the type and frequency of errors made by the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero. The data were based on the texts of the students in the 2011/2012 academic session. The quantitative method is a research technique that is used to gather quantitative data and information dealing with statistics and measurable data (Nunan, 2001; 187). It is a systematic process which relates to numerical data that are controlled and measured to address the accumulation of facts and then utilized to obtain information. This study found the quantitative research design appropriate for the study because it is statistically reliable and allows results to be analyzed and compared with similar studies. Its aim is only to identify errors, their type and their frequency.

#### **3.1 The Study Area**

The data for this research were gathered from the remedial class students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero 2011/2012 academic session. The information was derived from formal source. The institution being co-educational and science oriented has a population consisting of variety of students who are mainly of Kebbi State origin and students from some other states. Many of the students, the study discovered had poor English skills, hence the need to offer remedial teaching that will help them to qualify for admission into the degree programme in the same year. The Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero was established

in 2007 by the then Kebbi State Government and it began to offer matriculation programme.

The entry requirements include a minimum of five (5) credits, two (2) of which must be science subjects. The subjects offered by the remedial students are Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics and English language. The remedial class has only one (1) English lecturer, while there are eight (8) periods per week.

### **3.2 The Population of the Study**

Burns and Grove (1993:779) state that a population is defined as all elements (individuals, objects and events) that meet the sample criteria for inclusion in a study. The study population for this research consisted of 42 study subjects. The admission enrolment for the 2011/2012 academic session was used as sample for the study. This consisted of 241 students who were admitted but only 178 students registered for the programme. However, 130 marked scripts were collected for the study, comprising 109 males and 21 females. However out of these, the sample population used for the study is 42 which served as representative sample of the study.

Monton (1996, p. 132) defines a sample as elements selected with the intention of finding out something about the total population from which they are taken.

The subjects of the present study were selected through a stratified sampling method, to have a proportional representation because it is regarded as one of the most reliable methods to obtain a representative sample. In demographic terms, the study subjects selected for the study are aged between 18 to 20 years.

### 3.3 Sampling Technique

The two groups of study subjects made up of both male and female students were selected from the remedial class of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero who took English as a qualifying course in the University.

Stratified sampling technique was adopted to select the subjects for the study. The following table is presented to illustrate the given population based on gender and the number of study subjects selected.

Male-Total population	109
Female-Total population	21
Study subjects selected	
Male	- 21
Female	- 21
<b>Total:</b>	<b>- 42</b>

The table shows that 21 males were selected from the population while 21 females were selected to represent the remedial class that the university runs.

From the foregoing table, it would be observed that the number of subjects selected was uniform in order to have equal representation among the population. The selection made was as a result of stratified sampling technique that gave a fair representation of students in the remedial class, such that it provides an objective basis for the analysis of the use of tenses among the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero.

### 3.4 Instruments for Data Collection

The instruments used for data collection on error analysis were the English written essays produced by the subjects of the study, during the end of the year examination for

the 2011/2012 academic session. One (1) written text and three (3) letter types were administered to the students. However, question four (4) written by all the participants were studied as samples for the analysis on tenses. It therefore serves as one of the tasks in section B. Section A was made up of 20 multiple choice questions, while questions 1-5 were not considered as part of the study. Questions 6-20 were used as part of the study, where the participants were asked to choose the correct tense of the verb in section A. Using the examination written scripts was an appropriate method for this study because it is during examinations that learners with different backgrounds write about the same topics and under the same controlled environment.

The error analysis used in this study focused especially on tense errors regardless of the learners' writing skills such as idea, expression, organization and cohesion.

All the writings of the students were compiled and encoded with numbers instead of the students' names to maintain confidentiality of the participants. The participants' written texts were based on the following tasks:

Section A: Incomplete sentences were given and the students were required to choose from the alternatives listed A to D, the tense of the verb which best completes each of the sentences given in questions 6 – 20. See Appendix I for details.

Section B, had four written texts while students were expected to answer three (3) questions only, namely:

- (1) Write an article suitable for publication in your school magazine on 'The day I will never forget'.
- (2) Write a letter to the commissioner for agriculture in your state describing the low level of food production in the state and suggest measures which the government should take to ensure that there is sufficient food for all.

- (3) Write an application letter for any job, you think you are qualified to do.
- (4) Write a letter to the Registrar of your University telling him the reasons why you were absent during the examination period.

### **3.5 Validity**

The validity of an instrument is the degree to which the instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Polit and Hungler, p. 448). In order to ensure standard and content of the study instrument, whereby a method of trustees' validity was employed made up of two academic instructors and some lecturers to evaluate the already given topics. Since the task administered was based on the end of the year examinations questions, it was considered appropriate to students' standard and was suitable for their ages.

### **3.6 Reliability of the Instrument**

Reliability is concerned with stability, dependability and predictability of a measuring instrument. It refers to the accuracy or precision of a measuring instrument. Here the researcher was concerned with the consistency in the results given by the same instrument.

Polit and Hungler (1993;445) refer to reliability as the degree of consistency with which an instrument measures the attribute it is designed to measure. Here the researcher used a test-retest device to measure the reliability of the instrument. The research study was conducted using 42 students from the target population using stratified sampling technique. Thus their end of semester examinations, both essays and multiple choice questions were used. The result shows that the students performed better in essay types than the multiple choice questions. However, the results showed inconsistency in the answers on essay types.

### **3.7 Method of Data Analysis**

A quantitative approach to the study investigates the types and frequency of errors made by remedial students of the study.

The method of data analysis to be use will be dictated by the stated hypotheses that there is no significant mean difference in the students' frequency of errors and their sex. After the collection of data was made, the raw scores were analyzed by converting the frequencies of the responses in to percentages and mean in order to determine the skills exhibited and those not exhibited.

The findings of this study are from the quantification and analysis of the responses of the test items. Each of the items of the test questionnaire was scored according to devised rating. The quantification and analysis of the test scores was through transforming the scores of the students in to simple ranks of two options of correct and incorrect. The idea for the transformation is that good achiever would be one who holds lower (incorrect) responses in relation to other students' while the poor achiever is one who holds a higher number of in correct responses,.

Through this form of analysis, the researcher highlights some these areas that are not effectively exhibited. For this study the in correct responses are used only for this analysis.

### **3.8 Hypotheses**

In order to guide and direct the researcher, hypotheses were formulated from the research questions that focus attention on crucial variables of the study.

The null hypotheses proposed are:

- 1) There is no significant difference between the students frequency of errors among the two groups of the study.

- 2) There is no relationship between errors committed and gender.

### 3.9 Hypotheses Testing

The decisions or conclusion on the stated hypotheses are made through the application of appropriate test of hypotheses. The probability level at which the decisions are taken in this study is the 0.05 significance level.

Therefore, the statistical tests used include:

1. Percentage score (%) used to bring out the relative differences of the frequencies of responses. The formula applied is:-

$$\% = \frac{\text{Frequency of (incorrect) responses observed}}{\text{Total no of study subjects}} \times 10$$

2. The t-test; used to determine whether two means ( $\bar{x}$ ) differ at a selected probability level. The samples are independent of one another, thus, the formula below is used:

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n}}}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{but } \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n}} &= \sqrt{\frac{\sum_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{\sum_2^2}{n_2}} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{3.17}{21}\right) \sum_2^2 + \left(\frac{4.17}{21}\right) \sum_1^2} \\ &= 0.1986 + 0.1510 \\ &= \sqrt{0.3496} = 0.59 \end{aligned}$$

$$\text{and } \sum^2 = \sqrt{\sum \left(\frac{x_i - \bar{x}}{n}\right)^2},$$

$$\text{but } \bar{x}_i = 12.38$$

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_1^2 &= \frac{210.7487}{21} \\ &= \sqrt{10.0356} = 3.1679 \end{aligned}$$

$$\int_1^2 \approx 3.17$$

$$\therefore t = \frac{12.38-9.67}{0.59}$$

$$t = \frac{2.71}{0.59} = \underline{\underline{4.59}}$$

$$t_{\text{cal}} = 4.59$$

$$t_{0.05 (n_1 + n_2)} = 1.684$$

since  $t_{\text{cal.}} = 4.59 > t_{\text{table}}$



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

It is very important to teach the students tense at all the higher level of learning. At the University, the English language is taught in our schools for students to learn the technical use of the English, a course which is either referred to as Technical English, or Use of English, and some times simply as English language. It is necessary to equip the students with the basic skills in the Use of English.

The data used to analyze the responses collated from the essays and objective test, serves as part of the examination scripts for the 2011/2012 academic session of the remedial class of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero. The responses that were analyzed form part of the objective tests answered by the 42 respondents of the remedial class. Added to the above mentioned data, analysis of deviant structures related to tenses which were identified in the end of the year examination essays of the participants were also presented.

#### **4.1 Tense Analysis of Multiple Choice Questions**

In this section, there are twenty objective multiple choice questions out of which the study considered questions 6-20 which were meant to serve as part of the study of tense errors. However, for the purpose of this study, question 6-20 were numbered 1-15 respectively.

The functionalist approach to syntactic analysis has been adopted as most of the researches carried out in this area were structuralists' biased. Similarly, the functionalists shared some aspects which are common to structuralists as both are aimed at the same approach.

1. The chairman's speech (B) "was broadcast" on radio a few hours ago. Among the 42 participants that responded to the question, only 12 male and female selected the correct option that completed the blank space. The correct option which is required to complete the blank sentence is a *past participle tense*.
2. Next march when he returns from France Abdul (C) "will have spent" four years abroad. In responding to the correct option, it was discovered that only 7 participants were able to choose the correct option to complete the given sentence. This is a *perfect future tense* "will" used in the future together with the present perfect have spent. From what was observed, the students lack knowledge of the perfectives as their responses show.
3. Jummai (C) was eating her breakfast when I knocked at the door. This verb form seems to have been identified as a result of the respondents' ability in choosing the correct form of the verb. Out of the 42 participants, 21 selected the correct option that completed the blank space provided. The verb tense chosen to match the sentence is a *past continuous tense (progressive)* tense. This did not prove difficult for most of the participants of the study.
4. Your application for employment (B) is being considered at this moment. The responses obtained for this question show that about 17 subjects out of the total number of 42 for both genders, scored correctly. The verb form chosen to fill in the blank space is a *present continuous (progressive) tense* which shows the past relating to the present moment.
5. The patient (D) has been sleeping quietly since yesterday. This is a *present perfect continuous (progressive)* tense which the participants should have considered as the correct option to the above sentence. However, 13 respondents were able to choose

the correct tense form. The present perfect continuous (progressive) refers to something happening from the past time up to present.

6. (D) Exercising regularly will ensure good health. This is a gerund i.e continuous tense base form + 'ing' form used as verbal noun in the option given. The result shows that 18 respondents choose the correct option.
7. That style of hair plaiting makes Mary (A) look very attractive. This is a present simple tense used to complete the blank space provided. However, out of the 42 respondents only 12 were able to choose the correct option, as simple present tense is a verb used for action or regular event hence Mary 'looks' was being described.
8. I can't imagine myself (A) doing such a thing. The correct option chosen in this sentence is a present continuous tense form of the verb. Out the 42 respondents, 19 were able to answer by choosing the correct form.
9. The police men, (C) having surrounded the house, waited for the thief to come out. The underlined verb chosen which serves as answer to question 9, is a past *participle progressive* only 7 study subjects answered with the correct tense out of the 42 participants.
10. Mallam Musa (D) knowing his daughter was right defended her actions. The option chosen to complete the sentence here seems to create problem for almost all the participants as each failed to recognize the correct tense. The result shows that only 1 student out of the 42 subjects chose the correct tense. It is the present participle progressive tense.
11. I didn't see Amina at the party; she must have come after I left. The correct tense chosen as the correct option to fill in the blank space is a past form expressing

obligation in the past. However 15 study respondents were able to go for the correct option. This tense is used to describe a state of uncertainty.

12. Perhaps what Aliyu told us B may not be true after all. The tense is a present/future form explaining possibility in the present or future. The auxiliary verb may stand to negate the verb finite form. Twenty one participants however chose the correct option while completing the blank space provided.

13. I (C) used to go there quite often, but I have no time these days. The verb tense is a simple past tense chosen to complete the blank space provided in the sentence. It shows an activity that happened in the past but has stopped or habitual action. However, 25 study subjects got the answer right while filling the blank space provided in the sentence.

14. John is late for dinner; he C should have been here by now. This is a *present perfect tense* which provides the right options to complete the above sentence. However the *present perfect* proves to be identified by almost all the study subjects which stands at 31 compared to the number of participants selected for the study which is 42 subjects.

15. Funmilayo (D) needn't have to wash all the clothes herself. This serves as verb with auxiliary form used as the present future tense. However, the correct responses by the study subjects stand at 5. It therefore, seems to prove a difficult tense for most of the participants of the study.

#### **4.2 Tense Errors Identified in Students Responses to the Objective Test**

This focuses on the responses obtained in the objective test administered to the subjects under the study which is presented on frequency table for further analysis and interpretation. See Appendices II and III for details.

The mode, mean and median scores have also been calculated. The study discovers problem that the students have in the area of English tenses, particularly the tense that have an 'ing' variety, as the subjects' performance in the objectives shows that all the subject have failed to recognize most of the tenses. A typical example featured in question 10 in which 1 respondent out of the 2 groups scored correctly, which becomes a major problem for almost all the study subjects.

The responses to questions 2 and 15, however show poor result on *the future perfectives* as well as the *present future tense*. Again, the study subjects have difficulty in the use of the present perfect tense for completed action in the present, as the correct responses stood at 7 and 5 out of the total of 42 respondents.

#### **4.3 Result Profiles on Students' Essay**

The hypothesis was that "there is no significant difference between the male subjects represented by A and female subjects represented by B from the frequency of their errors.

In testing the hypothesis, it shows there is relationship between A and B *groups'* written works in English tenses. This can also be determined using percentages and T-test values.

While the findings will determine exactly if sex can be a determinant factor for better performance in the students' written English. In their written essays, however the analysis shows that A group who were male participants has the largest number of words

written in its essay which stands at 3809 words with 192 deviant errors, while the B group representing female participants had a total of 3414 words and the deviations recorded in their essays appears to be 149.

The study therefore concurs kwok's (1998:15) research findings which shows that more errors can be detected in larger essays than from shorter ones.

**Table 4.1: Frequency of error types made by each group and the number of times each error type occurred in the students' written essays**

S/No	Example of Error Identified	Definition of Error	Number of errors identified		
			A	B	Total
1.	I should have <u>informed</u> the school. (informed)	WVF correct verb form used while the tense is wrong, <u>ed</u> maker not used to mark the past tense.	91	94	185
2.	He asked me what <u>happen</u> (had happened)	Tense: PR-P The correct verb form not used while the present tense was used instead of past tense.	140	109	249
3.	I <u>wished</u> you the best (wish)	Tense: P-PR- Past tense is used instead of the present tense.	5	3	8
4.	I am <u>write</u> the letter (writing)	TENSE:PR-PC- present tense used instead of present continuous tense	8	3	11
5.	We <u>are</u> waiting for the day. (were)	TENSE:P.C-P.C present continuous used instead of past continuous tense.	1	1	2

6.	I was <u>released</u> to go home (asked)	TENSE: WS The wrong substitution is made here <u>released</u> for <u>asked</u>	1	1	2
7.	When I <u>recover</u> (would have recovered)	TENSE,OMMISION This is a case of omission of the verb form used to explain the activity that happened in the past and not completed; The present tense used instead.	2	8	10
8.	..... <u>were calling</u> me to <u>come</u> (was called)	TENSE:ADDITION The past continuous tense used instead of simple past tense, while another verb <u>come</u> was added to the items.	3	4	7
9.	they are telling me, (was told).	TENSE: Mis-ordering: a case of placing verb in wrong order	3	2	5
10.	I was to <u>tall</u> you tell (tell) When it <u>Open</u> (happened)	TENSE: WSV this is a wrong spelling of a tenses	7	8	15
		<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>499</b>

In this study it shows the male subjects having longer essays, which resulted to more errors than the female subjects, whose essays were short yet with fewer errors. It is not that these subjects were very good at using correct tenses, but only wrote their essays with few paragraphs.

### 4.3.1 Types of Error Recorded from Each Group

An analysis of each student's writing showed several tense errors. It was discovered that the greater occurrence of errors manifested in the areas of wrong verb form, tenses, (Present tense, past tense, perfect tense, future tense, progressive tense). Wrong substitution of tenses, unnecessary insertion, omission, mis-ordering, addition, and wrong spelling of verb tense.

See table 4.2 below for classification of error types. See appendices 2-5 for detailed record.

**Table 4.2: This table shows the types of error recorded by male subjects and the overall number of errors recorded from each in their essays**

Subjects	WVF	Pr-P	P-Pr	Pc-Pc	WS	SPV	OMIS	M/O	AD	TOTALS
1	3	4	2	2			1			12
2	3	7	1	1		1				13
3	4	5	1	2	1					13
4	4	6	1	2						13
5	3	1							1	5
6	8	5							2	15
7	5	10								15
8	8	6								14
9	7	13								20
10	5	9				2				16
11	3	2								5
12	5	9				1				15
13	1	3								4
14	4	2				1				7
15	4	4			1		1			10
16	2	2								4
17	3	3		1					2	9
18	7	17				2				26
19	5	11								16
20	4	2								6
21	3	19								22
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>260</b>



**Table 4.3: This table shows the types of error recorded for each individual female subjects and their over all frequency in their essays**

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>WVF</b>	<b>Pr-P</b>	<b>P-Pr</b>	<b>Pc/Pc</b>	<b>WS</b>	<b>WSPV</b>	<b>OMIS</b>	<b>M/O</b>	<b>AD</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
1	4	9			1	2	3		1	20
2	5	3					1		1	10
3	3	4				1				8
4	10	9								19
5	6	5	1		1		1			14
6	2	2	2							6
7	5	4							1	10
8	4	3								7
9	6	2					1			9
10	3	16			2					21
11	2	5							2	9
12	2	2					1			5
13	10	8					4			22
14	8	5								13
15	6	5								11
16	3	2							1	6
17	4	5							1	10
18	4	4			1		1		1	11
19	3	7					1		2	13
20	1	3					1			5
21	3	6								9
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>238</b>

#### **4.3.2 Examples and Comparison of Errors**

Here the section deals with examples of errors recorded in the study. Each of the error type was discussed while comparison of errors made by each group is done. Subsequently, a summary of each error type results were also done.

#### **4.3.3 Examples of Tense Errors**

There are several examples of tense errors discovered to have featured in the writings of the two groups, namely, wrong verb form (WVF) where the correct tense was used but the verb form was wrong and using present tense instead of past tense, using past tense instead of present tense etc

(i) **Wrong verb form (WVF)**

Examples of wrong (WVF) verb forms which appears in the essays of the study subjects.

**Table 4.4: Wrong Verb Form (WVF)**

	<b>Wrong</b>	<b>Correct</b>
WVF	1) I <u>start</u> business.	(started)
WVF	2) He <u>ask</u> me what I <u>need</u> .	(asked, needed)
WVF	3) Which is <u>took</u> over.	(was taken)
WVF	4) ..... the exam <u>commence</u> .	(had commenced)
WVF	5) I <u>have</u> an English exam.	(was to have)
WVF	6) .....that is all what <u>happen</u> .	(was/had happened)
WVF	7) .....the exams <u>has been</u> already <u>commence</u> .	(had already/commenced)
WVF	8) ....My room mate <u>wake</u> me up.	(woke me up)
WVF	9) My eyes <u>are</u> <u>paining</u> .	(were paining)
WVF	10) I am the one who <u>take</u> her to the hospital.	(was/took)

The above are some cases of errors identified so far from some of the writings of the students collected. It is pertinent to note that in English Language some verbs have certain identical forms for the categories of past tense and past participle, for example *start-started* – Started. These verbs are called regular verbs. It is so because the normal pattern with regard to the addition of ed maker applies to most of the verbs. Therefore, students extend this rule to irregular verbs, for example, *take-took-taken*. Here the past tense is different from the past participle form.

In all the wrong sentences constructed above, the students have failed to inflect the verb as they use them as present tense without marking the past by ed.

However, research studies by Carson (2001; 200) and Kutz, Garden and Zamel (1993;879-903) explains different ways in which errors occur. These research studies suggest that learners tend to over generalize the rules for stylistic features when acquiring new items. The table for example shows this type of error when students confuse regular

with irregular verbs. However, the finding on this study revealed that the subjects of the study have poor knowledge on the use of the regular verbs, substituting past participle with the past tense; took-taken.

**(ii) The use of present tense instead of past tense.**

**Table 4.5: Shows examples of the use of present tense where the past tense is required.**

**Table 4.5: Examples of Present Tense Used Instead of Past Tense**

	<b>Present Tense Used Instead of Past Tense Pr-P</b>	
	<b>Error</b>	<b>Correction</b>
Pr-P	1. They <u>have</u> to do the operation.	(were)
Pr-P	2. Why <u>I am</u> absent during the exams	(was)
Pr-P	3. That <u>is</u> the reason	(was)
Pr-P	4. The exam <u>have been</u> ended	(Had ended)
Pr-P	5. They <u>rush</u> me back	(was rushed back)
Pr-P	6. We <u>are</u> waiting for them	(were)
Pr-P	7. They <u>are</u> calling me to come	(was called)
Pr-P	8. I <u>be having</u> an examinations	(would be having)

From the above examples, collected from the writings of the two groups of subjects, students were not consistent with the use of past tense, as such the second verb or other verbs in the same sentence were expressed in present continuous tense, for example 7 and 8. This is considered as another form of grammatical error in the use of tenses because it caused confusion to the reader.

This is a case of what Ellis (1996:710) explains as “false concepts hypothesis” as a result of which error were recorded. False concept hypothesis occurs when learners do not completely understand a distinction in the target language. From the errors recorded under *example 4* that reads “The exam have been ended”, the use of present perfect tense “*have been ended*” is erroneous, if the event described here, was a thing of the past, since the student was supposed to use the past perfect tense “had ended”.

#### **4.4 Comparison of Tense Errors**

Error deviation in tenses is the highest error category in this study for the 2 groups. Male subjects recorded the highest number of tense errors with 140 while Female subjects recorded 109 tense errors. Male subjects have the highest number of frequency of error that is 17, while female subjects had 27.

##### **4.4.1 Wrong Verb Form (WVF)**

The data shows that female subjects committed the most errors with 94, while the male subjects have 91 errors recorded from their work.

The highest total number of 140 Pr-P errors was recorded from male subjects and 109 Pr-P errors respectively. The students who made this type of error do not understand the implication of the misuse of verbs in a sentence and how carefully a verb tense should be chosen to convey the precise meaning.

##### **4.4.2 Present Tense Instead of Past Tense (Pr-P)**

This type of error occurred in most of the students’ work in this study. This error types were found among the 2 groups. The frequency of Pr-P displayed in the table above shows that the male subjects revealed 17 cases while the female subjects recorded 27 cases.

#### 4.4.3 Summary of Tense Errors

Here is a summary profile on tense errors recorded from the scripts of all 42 students presented in the table below:

**Table 4.6: Total number of tense errors and frequency of tense error types recorded from each groups.**

	<b>Total number of tense errors recorded</b>	<b>Frequency of tense error types recorded</b>
Male	140	17
Female	109	27

#### 4.5 CONCLUSION

Although the male subjects have the highest number of tense errors recorded (140), yet the frequency stands at 17, compared to female subjects whose total number of errors recorded stand at 109, yet the frequency of error raised to higher level of 27.

From the examples given, the number of tense errors the students commit could be attributed to have been caused primarily by ignorance of rules and confusion over similarities of verb forms, inability to differentiate between a regular and irregular verbs, which could be have been caused by over generalization and faulty application of rules.

However, the result of the findings shows that both groups have deep rooted problems in almost all the tense categories examined.

The subjects of the study are the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero, as the two groups had little to shows, on the benefit derived from the remedial teaching programme which was meant to serve as a remedy for their errors. Hence, it could be said that the programme made little impact on their

learning of the English language which they were made to undergo for a period of one year, as the more they write, the more errors they commit as was revealed by this study.

From the foregoing it could be deduced that the remedial students of the study performed poorly because they have not been exposed well to the English Language.

However, the fact that the male subjects of the study committed more errors in their written essays does not in any way mean that the female subjects have appreciated what they were taught in the remedial programme better than their male counterparts. The high occurrence of errors could be attributed to the fact that since the male subjects write more lengthy essays there is likelihood that more errors should be noticed in their work compared to that of the female subjects who write relatively shorter essays.

On the all, the remedial programme which is aimed at improving the performance of students in English and indeed other subject has made little or no impact, hence the need to overhaul the whole system so that the target for which the remedial programme is set up could be better achieved.

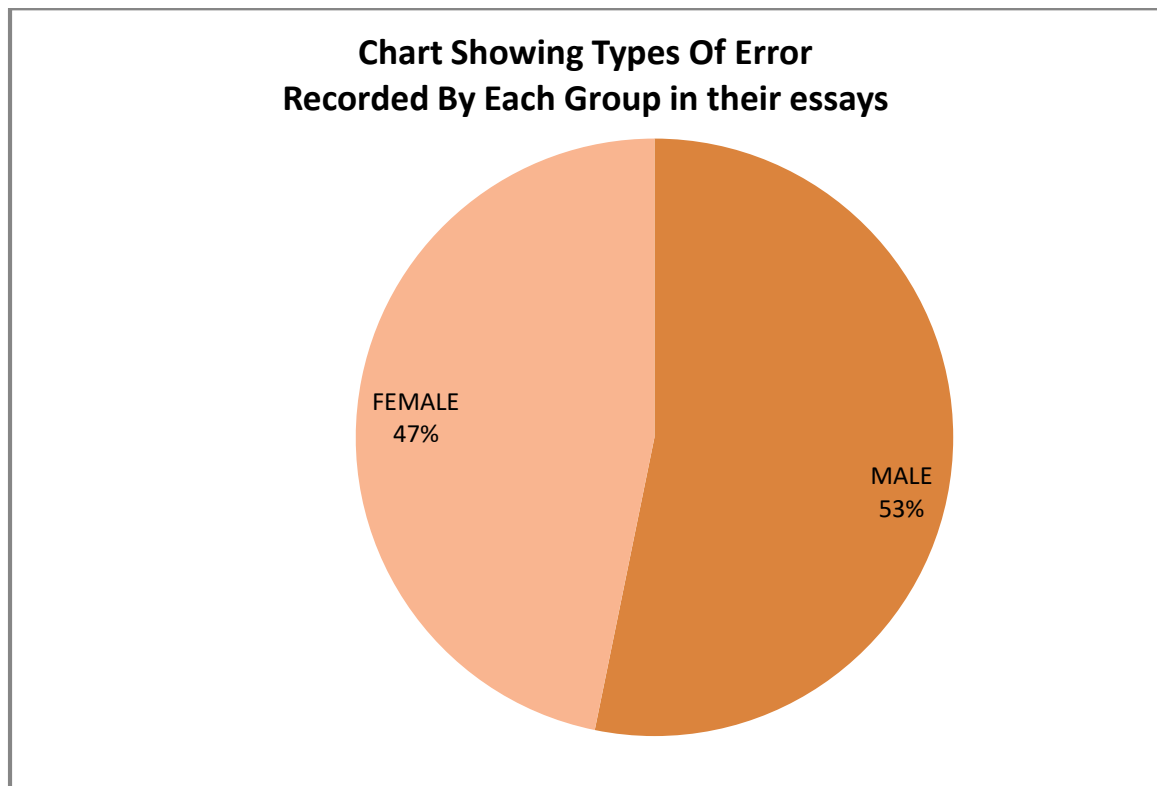
## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

### TYPES OF ERROR RECORDED BY EACH GROUP AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE DIFFERENCE

**Table 4.7: Group Statistics: Male and Female subject**

	sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
count	male	21	12.38	6.012	1.312
	female	21	11.33	5.209	1.137

From table 4.7, the mean scores indicates that the error recorded is averagely higher in male than female. And also, the standard deviation shows that the disparities of errors recorded are higher among male than female students.



**Figure 4.1:** Pie chart showing the percentage of students in their essays

## HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Ho: There is no significant difference on the types of error recorded for both male and female on essay writing.

H1: There is significant difference on the types of error recorded for both male and female on essay writing.

**Table 4.8: Independent Samples Test for the two groups**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Count	.384	.539	.603	40	.550

## INTERPRETATION

Since sig. value (0.550) is highly greater than level of significance (0.05), therefore we cannot reject null hypothesis (accept Ho) and conclude that there is no significant difference on the types of error recorded for both male and female on essay writing.

## OBJECTIVE TEST

**Table 4.9: Group Statistics for Objective test**

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
count	Male	21	10.38	4.364	.952
	female	21	11.05	3.667	.800

From table 4.9, the mean score of the objective test indicates that the female students performed averagely better than male students. Also the result of the standard deviation shows that most of the male students performed below the average.



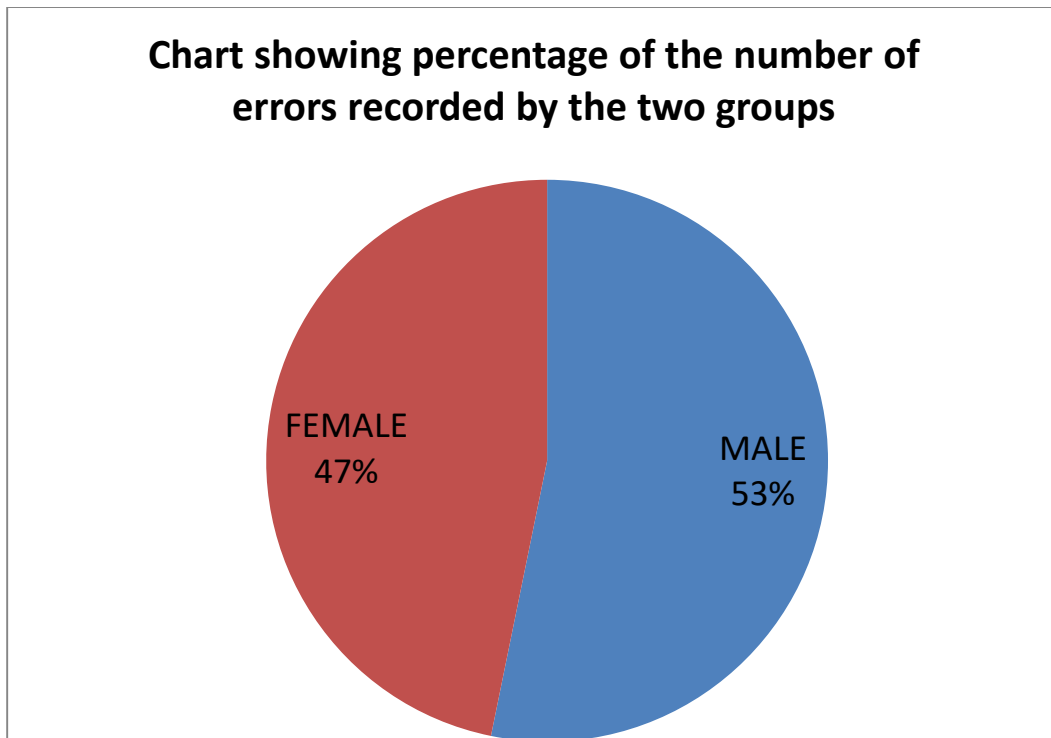


Figure 4.2: Pie chart showing the percentage of the number of errors recorded by the two groups

Ho: There is no significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on objective test.

H1: There is significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on objective test.

**4.10: Independent Samples Test for their performance in the Objective test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
count	.404	.529	-.536	40	.595

**INTERPRETATION**

Since sig. value (0.595) is highly greater than level of significance (0.05), therefore we cannot reject null hypothesis (accept Ho) and conclude that there is no significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on objective test.

**4.11: Group Statistics for Essay writing**

	sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
count	male	21	7.90	3.081	.672
	female	21	6.95	3.570	.779

From table 4.11, the main score indicates that the male students performed averagely better than female students. Also the standard deviation of the scores indicates that the disparity is higher among the female than male which implies that the majority of the female students performed below average.

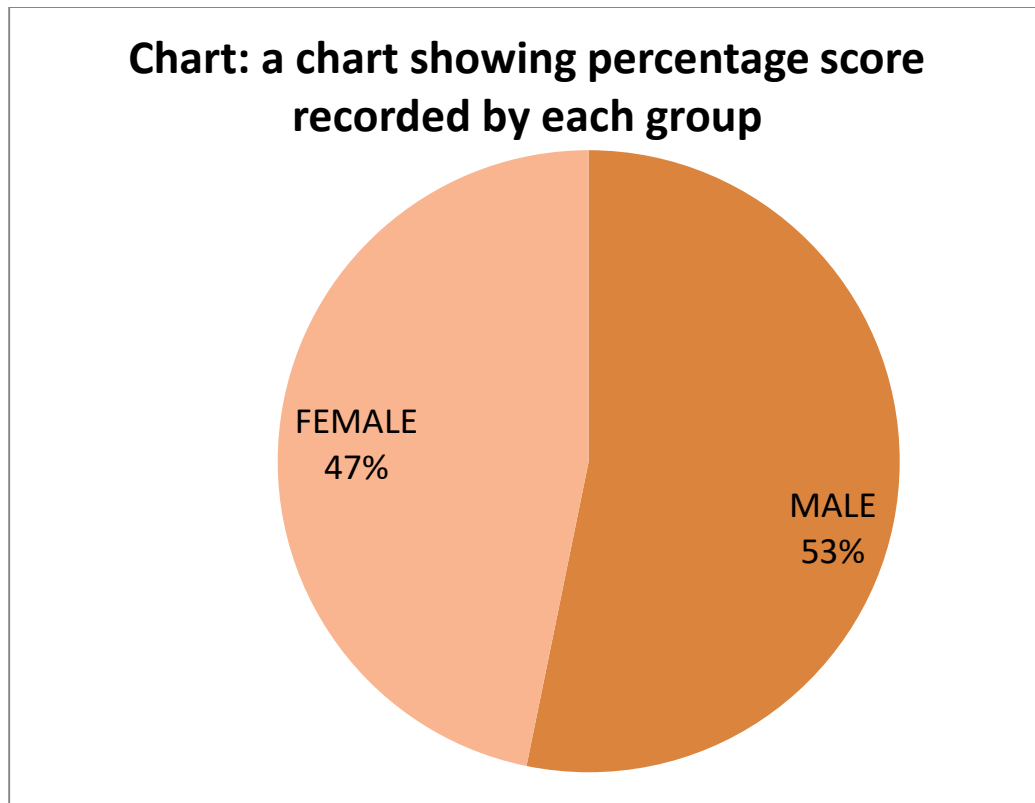


Figure 4.3: Pie chart showing the percentage scored by each group in their essay writing

### **HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

Ho: There is no significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on essay writing.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on their essay writing

**Table 4.12: Independent Samples Test for their performance in Essay writing**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
count	.008	.927	.925	40	.360

## INTERPRETATION

Since sig. value (0.360) is highly greater than level of significance (0.05), therefore we cannot reject null hypothesis (accept  $H_0$ ) and conclude that there is no significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on essay writing.

### OBJECTIVE AND ESSAY

**4.13: Group Statistics: Male and Female students Scores in the two instruments shown**

	sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
count	male	21	18.29	5.866	1.280
	female	21	18.00	5.282	1.153

From table 4.13, the overall mean scores for both the male and female students shows that the male students performed averagely better than female students. But the disparity is higher among male students than female students.

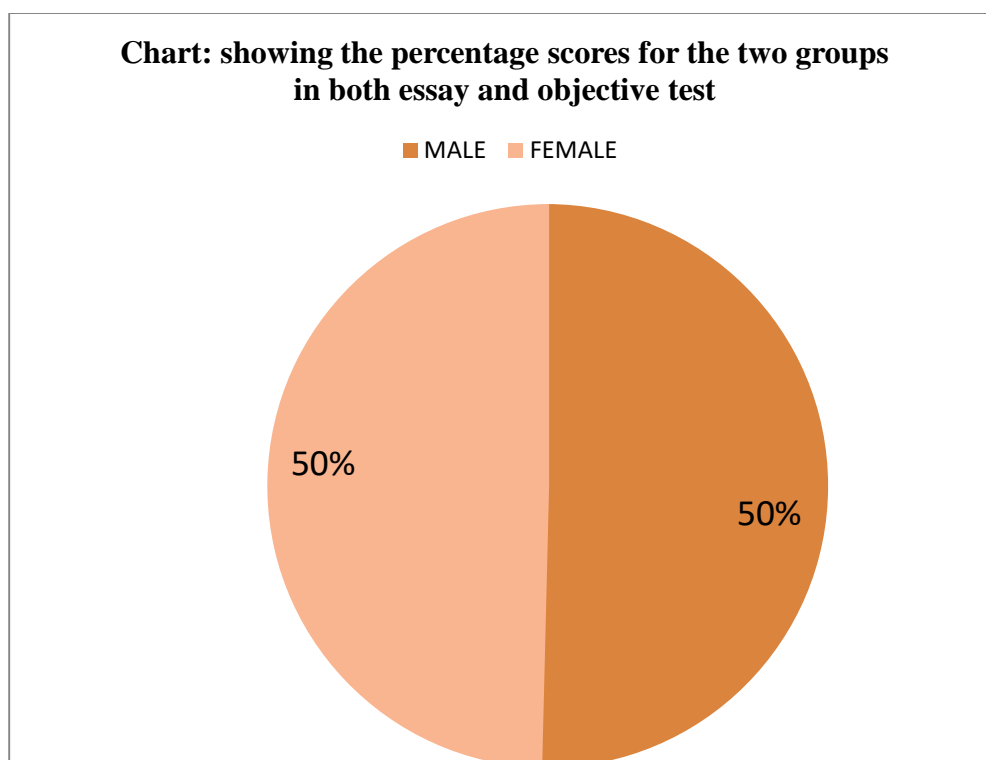


Figure 4.4: Percentage scores for the two groups in both essay and objective test

Ho: There is no significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on Objective test and essay writing.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on Objective test and essay writing

#### 4.14: Independent Samples Test for Objective test and Essay writing

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Count	.752	.391	.166	40	.869

#### INTERPRETATION

Since sig. value (0.869) is highly greater than level of significance (0.05), therefore we cannot reject null hypothesis (accept Ho) and conclude that there is no

significant difference on the average performance of male and female students on Objective test and Essay writing.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

In order to achieve the aims set out in chapter one of the study which is to classify and analyze grammatical errors in students written work as well as to identify their causes, the researcher began by giving an overview of the poor state of students written and spoken English in the Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero and also identified the tense categories under study.

In chapter two a review of related literature was done, it included a discussion of various approaches to the study of error analysis. However different views and approaches on remedying errors in written English were also discussed.

In chapter three the researcher discussed the technique used for data collection and the type of study subjects. Two group of study subjects drawn from the 2011/2012 session of remedial school of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero were involved in the study.

In chapter four presentation and method of data analysis were carried out, the 2011/2012 remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology were used as data for the study involving 42 study subjects both male and female, their essays and multiple choice questions served as instruments for the study.

#### **5.1 Findings**

The study however made the following findings;

1. The findings reveal that the hypothesis male and female students of the remedial class have an error profile in their written work that differ from each other and in

their frequency of occurrence, has prove wrong. The two groups made similar errors in many respects. However, these errors differ at rates of frequency.

2. There is inconsistency in the use of tenses in single sentence among the two groups of remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero; Learners handling of tenses was very poor as it was noticed that the past and present tenses were sometimes mixed together in a single piece of writing demanding only one tense form.
3. The study has shown that errors in wrong verb form, present tense instead of past tense, past tense instead of present tense, wrong progressive tense, perfectives, misspelled verbs and use of the wrong forms constitute the major area of weakness of the students. However, errors in the use of past tense instead of present tense are relatively less serious and could not be considered as the students' major area of weakness.
4. The study also show that the performance of female subjects is better in all respects (yet the difference is not significant), this is understandable as female are known to excel better academically than their male counterparts. However, looking critically at the performance of both groups of study subjects generally, it reveals that, there is no significant difference in the written performance between male and female subjects. This could be attributed to admission policy of the college due to the fact that the remedial students' of the study are meant to serve as a make up for them, hence, their poor performance could be attributed to failure to achieve a desired goal on why the remedial studies were introduced in the universities, this shows the impact was not felt on the students' learning of the English language.



5. The study reveals that student with longer essays have more errors in their writings than those with shorter essays, the male subjects having longer essays while their in-correct responses were more than those of the female group who wrote relatively shorter essays. It is not that these subjects were very good at using correct tenses, but only wrote their essays with few paragraphs.
6. The findings revealed that many remedial students had difficulty in reading and understanding which made them to commit errors in their written work.

## **5.2 Recommendations on the Findings**

The researcher seeks to make the following recommendations:

1. There is the need for an improved performance on the part of the students and more effort put in place by the teachers in the university remedial programme to help overcome the major problems that persists right through the students' period of study. As it is important to note that language teaching requires special skills, while it places greater demands from English teachers.
2. As some of the causes of these errors have been highlighted earlier on where it was stated among others that students' lukewarm attitude towards the study of use of English 'Technical English "Communication in English" course that play a major role. The students should be encouraged to put interest in the use of English Language learning in all respect. In addition, there is the need to drill the students on how to handle the essay types, as regard to narrative, descriptive, argumentative and expository, and to consider the tense for each.
3. On the part of the teachers, they should find the best means to encourage their students so as to improve on their performance, by giving them some exercises after each lecture this determines if what was taught has been thoroughly learnt,

since the finding reveals that for most students in the remedial level, the use of tenses proved to be their major area of weakness.

4. Students must be drilled on how to answer questions and learn to interpret them, as most of the students, the study revealed, failed woefully during exams because they were unable to interpret questions with understanding.
5. Some teachers in secondary school tend to shy away from difficult topics in the curriculum especially the speech work which require constant practice by the students so as to overcome the spoken form of expression. Therefore the authority or educational developers should request for a regular report by teachers and to find out the priority areas that require attention.
6. The school time table be reviewed, the normal 40 minutes period allotted per subject in secondary schools be extended to an hour, to provide room to drill on major areas that need remedial teachings from the onset.
7. Teachers need to be motivated on the part of the government when incentives are put in place, so as to double their effort and reciprocate the gestures to be more committed in the discharge of their duties.
8. Incessant strikes by teachers' nation wide and prolonged holidays hinder their learning and act as a setback, since what was learnt would be forgotten by the students.
9. As a science and Technology institution, the remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, and the state government should seriously look into problem areas faced by both the staff and the students, as future scientist, engineers, doctors, the success in other subjects depends on success in the English language which serve as the medium of instructions in Nigeria.

10. Another major problem is the non availability of teaching facilities which were not adequately put in place such as shortage of classroom furniture, in adequate classroom as over crowding seems to be a major problem, when a conducive atmosphere for learning is lacking.
11. Finally, I also wish to recommend that this study be extended to investigating the certain error types found among the remedial students' written work by future researchers.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study identified errors in remedial students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aleiro, (2011/2012 academic session) written work. Thus specify reason why they commit tense errors, they commit so many tense errors in their writings due to over generalization and faulty application of rules when learning the target language patterns of verb forms and tenses. As most of the errors recorded on tense in this study, revealed a negative transfer of learning, over generalization, cross association and applying of wrong – rules in learning the target language.

Ravern (1974:154) points out that the more we know about language learning the more likely, we are able to be successful in our teaching of a second language.

On the final note, the study call to encourage more research on grammatical problems in our institutions of higher learning, especially in this part of the country, where attitude to English language learning is discouraging.

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