

**Causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays in  
a school, Maboke Circuit, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa**

By

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## DECLARATION

I, Rethabile Mphahlele Komane hereby declare that the research study submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the Master of Education degree, has not been previously submitted by me at the university or any other institution, this is a design of my work and all the sources used in the study were rightfully acknowledged.

Signed:



Date: 05 July 2024

## DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to the ever-faithful God, the God of Mount Zion who carried me through these two years of my academic journey until the very last day of completion. It is also dedicated to my Sunshine, my parents Mr K.A Komane and Mrs L.R Komane who believed in me and kept checking up on my progress at any given time. It is also dedicated to my siblings who gave me courage to conquer this study.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays at a rural South African high school. The population for the study consisted of 9 secondary schools in the Maboke Circuit, in the Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. 20 Grade 10 English First Additional Language learners and three English educators were purposefully sampled to participate in the study. A qualitative research approach was adopted to carry out the study from an interpretivist point of view. Semi-structured interviews and documents were used to collect qualitative data from the sampled teachers and learners respectively. The results of the study revealed evidence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays identifiable as errors in punctuation, word order, tenses, spelling and pronoun use. These errors were found to be caused by lack of resources, learners' lack of interest in the English language, insufficient English instructional time, home language interference, and limited English vocabulary range. The study recommends increased time allocation for grammar teaching, frequent writing practice, the use of more effective teaching methods, and the use of stimulating teaching and learning materials as possible strategies to ameliorate the learners' writing challenges.

**Key Words:** English first additional language, Language influence, Grammatical errors, Sepedi home language, Teaching strategies, Writing skills.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background and Motivation**

Language is seen as a tool used for communication purposes. It can only be through language that social relations and cultural diversity are properly constructed and expressed (Department of Basic Education (DoE), 2011). It is very important that learners master their content or subject matter so that they can apply it in a proper manner. When learners use language effectively, they are able to acquire knowledge, think critically and express themselves fully, either through speaking or writing so that they can manage their world (DoE, 2011). English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners are assumed to have insufficient knowledge and background of the target language when they first arrive at school (DoE, 2011). This is mainly because English is not their home language. As a compensatory strategy, these learners try to apply their home language knowledge in order to facilitate communication in the English target language.

The Curriculum Assessment Statement Policy (CAPS) document states that, Grade 10 learners enter the grade with expectations that they become proficient in English, yet the reality is that quite a number of these learners still cannot communicate well in their additional language (DoE, 2011). The whole purpose of learning an additional language is to be able to communicate across language barriers and help promote intercultural communication and multilingualism.

In as much as language is important to master, so are the skills used to communicate. Writing skill is one of the crucial skills in language learning because it is mostly used to communicate one's thoughts in formal school settings. When putting together a written communication message, a mastery of grammatical aspects, such as punctuation, spelling, tenses, and concord, is a prerequisite in order to express oneself effectively.

Mostert and Van Wyk (2016) argue that reading and writing are identified as disadvantaged literacy skills. This was demonstrated through results of their Namibian study which revealed that learners struggle mostly in writing when in primary school and the problem overlaps into secondary school. This is an indication that the writing skill is a complex skill to acquire, especially for EFAL learners. Writing in English is also regarded

as a complex activity to accomplish as it makes learners to become vulnerable to committing errors in their writing activities (Emvula, 2020).

The researcher's interest in embarking on this study was motivated by a display of poor writing skills by Grade 10 learners who demonstrated lack of sufficient knowledge of English grammatical structures. The learners could not apply grammatical rules properly when writing essays. This made their writing difficult to comprehend because their essays were very difficult to follow since they were full of grammatical errors that obscured meaning and interfered with clarity of expression and precision of thought. Writing is a crucial skill that learners must use when communicating ideas, hence, learners need effective writing skills that meet their academic needs and requirements. Durga and Rao (2018) believe that teachers should motivate their learners to do better in writing activities by guiding them through the writing process and creating ample opportunity for them to rehearse their writing skills. To achieve this, teachers can use different teaching approaches to help learners improve their English language proficiency (Suelto, 2018).

This study aimed at investigating causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays. The investigation involved exploring the nature of the grammatical errors committed and establishing the original sources these errors can be traced back to. The ultimate aim was to come up with possible solutions to deal with the identified problem by deriving strategies that can be implemented to keep the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' writing at minimum levels.

## **1.2. Research Problem**

The problem at the core of the study was the lack of effective remedial and intervention strategies to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in Grade 10 learners' written English creative essays. These include errors such as incorrect usage of pronouns and verb tenses, punctuation errors, poor sentence construction, concord and spelling errors. The learners demonstrated poor English writing skills and inadequate familiarity with applicable English grammatical rules they should apply when writing essays. This affected their general academic performance since almost all their school subjects are studied through the English language medium. As Kumala, Aimah and Ifadah (2018) affirm, factors that cause learners to commit grammatical include carelessness, first language interference, translation, teachers' and students' lack of grammatical knowledge. This problem was worth investigating because it affected not only the

learners' communicative competence in the EFAL classroom, but also impacted negatively on their overall academic performance in other school subjects studied through the medium of English. Ipinge (2018) confirms that learners' weakest point in writing is the grammatical errors they commit. According to Miko (2018), students fail to apply grammatical rules in their writing due to lack of knowledge pertaining to grammar and direct translations between the native and the target languages.

### **1.3. Literature Review**

Writing is a cognitive activity regarded as a complex skill to acquire or to engage in, whereby the writer is required to demonstrate a steady control of variables simultaneously. As Durga and Rao (2018) explain, learners need to acquire efficient writing skills so that their chances of success are elevated. Learners need to be able to apply their writing skills to communicate their thoughts and feelings. In addition, learners can also express themselves creatively in writing without feeling the pressure associated with delivering a speech or communicating verbally to convey their message.

Mastering the English writing skill is seen as a complex activity for learners who study English as an additional language. It becomes a challenge for them to internalize correct English language rules and apply them appropriately to produce written essays that are relatively grammatically error-free. Learners are likely to make errors when writing in a second language regardless of the amount of time spent to teach them the English second language. However, as Phuket and Othman (2015) state, committing errors is seen as a form of language development in language learning. This means that language errors are a good indicator of how far a learner has gone into the language learning process.

According to Sioco and Vera (2018), grammar refers to the patterns and systems used by people to choose words and incorporate them. Grammar has to do with how words are put together to form sentences. This arrangement of words should be done in a specific, appropriate and language-compliant manner in order to form sentences that are meaningful and free of errors. Grammar patterns must be properly used, and in order for learners to construct meaningful sentences, they need to master and apply basic grammar rules associated with the target language and acceptable amongst competent users of that particular language (Emvula, 2020). According to Larsen-Freeman (2015), grammar is not merely a set of static rules, but it is a body of rules and regulations of

language that improves accuracy in the language learning process. Furthermore, grammar is the study and the practice of the rules by which words change their form and are combined into sentences (Larsen-Freeman, 2015).

Therefore, although the knowledge of grammar rules is essential, it is the correct application of these rules in actual writing activities that makes the difference. Learners need to ensure that language rules are applied correctly when writing. As such, grammatical competence assists learners in knowing the nature of language and how to apply appropriate language rules when writing (Emvula, 2020). Learners should be able to apply grammatical rules when they write and should be competent in communicating relatively error-free messages. Tarvin (2015) defines communicative competence as a way of being able to communicate and make use of language in order to complete tasks or to make meaning. Therefore, learners who master communicative competency will be able to apply grammar rules either through speaking or writing. Discourse competency, according to Januin and Stephen (2015), involves being able to comprehend and construct verbal and non-verbal features, which helps with discourse cohesion. In other words, cohesion within a text must be created by using cohesive devices and markers such as pronouns, parallel structures, and synonyms. When learners are able to construct meaningful sentences through correct usage of grammar, not only their proficiency in the English language, but also their level of language development and advancement is showcased. As Ellis (2014) correctly states, whenever learners violate grammar rules, the means of communication will be compromised. For communication to be effective, there must be a sound application of grammar rules (Emvula, 2020).

According to Phuket and Othman (2015), errors are seen as a sign of learning progress. In an EFAL classroom environment, teachers need to understand the errors committed by their learners to implement appropriate corrective measures. Learners who commit errors show an attempt to learn the target language and should receive correction from their teachers or language mentors at their earliest convenience to facilitate and boost their language learning process. For these EFAL learners, language errors are viewed as the non-native outcomes of the learners' inadequate linguistic knowledge (Phuket and Othman, 2015).

In most cases, learners who are not English native speakers tend to experience difficulties when they write, since their writing contains grammatical errors (Ipinge, 2018). The

learners' inability to master writing is believed to be due the interference or influence of their home language and the lack of knowledge when it comes to English grammatical rules (Singh, Signh, Razak, and Ravinthar, 2017). These learners end up using direct transfer of language structures from their home language into English. When this happens, both the semantic and grammatical sense of their sentences are usually compromised because of inherent structural and semantic incompatibilities between the two languages. Therefore, home language influence is seen as one of the possible contributory factors to learners' writing grammatical errors. Learners need to learn English grammatical rules and know how to apply them when writing so that their essays can become meaningful and grammatically sound.

#### **1.4. Role of theory in the study**

This research was guided by Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural theory of cognitive development. This theory is based on exploring the impact that the world has on the development of an individual. It postulates that learning is a social process whereby development occurs when individuals interact with each other, and development occurs more especially when one individual is more knowledgeable than the other (Cherry, 2022). According to the theory, learning is a social process whereby there is interaction between people, which results in the development of knowledge and skills. The study focused specifically on Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding as a theoretical pedestal for the investigation. According to Spadafora and Downes (2020), scaffolding is defined as a process whereby people with competencies support learners' thinking at an upper level than those who can manage on their own by giving a temporary framework. The role of scaffolding in the proposed study was evaluated by focussing on the role played by EFAL teachers in guiding learners and providing them with the necessary support regarding essay writing so that they can be able to master the writing skill. One of the principles of scaffolding that guided the researcher in this study is espoused by Wood, Brunner, and Ross (1976) and involves reducing the number of steps required to solve a problem by simplifying the task, so that the learner can manage components of the process and recognise when a fit with task requirements is achieved. This principle gives clarity on how teachers should try to simplify tasks for learners when teaching the writing process, and this is applicable when they are taught how to apply grammatical rules when writing. Teachers should simplify the writing process and make it easy for learners to understand

and master. The study determined whether this scaffolding-based relationship between the learners and the teachers can be a viable answer in resolving the learners' writing problem.

## **1.5. Purpose of the study and Research questions**

### 1.5.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate causes of grammatical errors in Grade 10 learners' English creative essays.

### 1.5.2. Research questions and objectives

Main research question:

What sources of influence can the learners' grammatical errors be attributed to?

Research sub-questions:

What are the educators' views on the causes of the learners' grammatical errors?

What intervention strategies can be implemented to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays?

Research objectives:

To identify the types and nature of grammatical in the learners' English creative essays.

To establish the sources of influence behind the learners' grammatical errors.

To devise intervention strategies that can be implemented to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays.

## **1.6. Research Methodology**

According to Patel and Patel (2019), research methodology is scientifically studying how research is done and, it is a way to resolve research problems systematically by taking various steps in a logical manner. The main scope of research methodology covers the research methods and instruments that are used to generate research data.

### 1.6.1. Research approach

The current study adopted a qualitative research approach. According to Tenny, Brannan and Brannan (2022), qualitative research accumulates the experiences, behaviours and perceptions of participants. Qualitative research approach was suitable for this research project because it helped the researcher collect data from the sampled learners and educators through interviews and documents (essay scripts). These qualitative data collection methods helped answer the 'how', 'when', 'why', and 'who' questions which helped the researcher get to the bottom of the problem identified, and also propose possible solutions to the learners' writing problem.

### 1.6.2. Research design

The research design for this research project was a case study. A case study is an approach which is effective when exploring issues that are difficult in a real-world setting (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). Case study helps the researcher to focus on a specific case, and there are benefits in terms of the process and the outcomes of the study as you get granted the opportunity to gather data using multiple instruments, which grants the researcher a chance to have an in-depth look into the interactions of groups or individuals (Schoch, 2020). The research design was suitable for this study because, it focused on a specific case of sampled Grade 10 learners in a natural and authentic school and classroom environment.

### 1.6.3. Research Paradigm

The researcher used interpretivism as the research paradigm for the study. Interpretivism permits the researcher to view the world through perceptions and experiences of the participants (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). Researchers following interpretivism use experiences from the participants to construct and interpret the data in their own understanding (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). The fundamental belief of interpretivists is that reality is socially constructed (Willis, 2007). This research was conducted in a school context and participants gave the researcher a view of their own experiences and perceptions based on the problem identified. This paradigm was relevant because it also helped the researcher analyse the nature of the grammatical errors in the learners' writing and be able to interpret the data, and eventually arrive at the possible sources of the grammatical errors and be able to come up with possible solutions to the problem.

## **1.7. Population and Sampling**

### 1.7.1. Population

In research, population refers to the qualities of a particular group, and it also means the parent group from which a sample is formed (Pandey and Pandey, 2015). The population for this study consisted of 9 secondary schools in the Maboke Circuit, in the Bohlabela District in the Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. All the 9 high schools in the Maboke Circuit offer English as a First Additional Language. The average enrolment per school is approximately 400 students, with an average of 40 learners per class. All the schools offer Grades 8 to 12. The schools in the circuit have different quintiles, meaning other schools are declared non-fee paying schools (quintiles 1-3) and some are declared fee-paying schools (quintiles 4-5) (Dass and Rinquest, 2017).

### 1.7.2. Sampling

According to Pandey and Pandey (2015), sampling means selecting a given number of subjects from a defined population as representative of that population. It also refers to individuals going through a selection from the population in such a way that there are equal chances for every individual to be part of the sample (Pandey and Pandey, 2015). One sampled school was engaged for data collection purposes. The researcher used convenience sampling to select the school from the population of 9 high schools. Convenience sampling allowed the researcher to sample participants that were near or situated where the researcher was conducting the research and where the researcher was collecting data (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). The reason why the researcher used this sampling procedure is that the sampled school is the researcher's place of employment, and therefore, the researcher had easy access to the participants and other resources which made data collection conveniently easier.

The sampled school consists of 478 learners, from Grade 8 to 12, and there are two classes per grade. The teachers in the school are 23 in total. The sampled school is categorized as a quintile 3 institution, which means that learners do not pay tuition fees. 20 learners from Grade 10 and three EFAL educators were sampled for this study. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the participants (both educators and learners). Purposive sampling is a technique used by researchers to deliberately select

participants based on the qualities they have (Etikan et al., 2016). This presumes selection and identification of participants that are well-informed and proficient when it comes to the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano, 2011). The qualities considered when sampling the learners for the study at hand were a display of poor English writing skills evident in the learners' error-ridden written essays. This sampling strategy was suitable for this study because it made it easier for the researcher to get data from relevant participants, who in this instance were Grade 10 learners because they were the ones experiencing the investigated writing problem. Moreover, three educators out of the total of 23 were also purposively selected for the study since they were the EFAL teachers in the school, and therefore, were able to provide relevant research data.

### **1.8. Data Collection**

Data collection is defined as a long-term practical strategy selected for reaching the aims of the researcher (Ganesha and Aithal, 2022). There should be interaction with the research participants in a social context to be able to get their subjective meanings as it is regarded as important for the researcher to understand them. The findings of a research study should be enlightened by the research data rather than the assumptions of the researcher (Bloomberg et al., 2015). According to Taherdoost (2021), data collection is the gathering of research data using methods which differ regarding certain variables of the study with the objective of employing them in the analysis of data to be able to achieve the study's results and get answers to the research questions. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and documents to collect research data.

#### **1.8.1. Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews are formal meetings between the interviewer and the interviewee with an aim of getting relevant answers for the questions posed to the interviewee. Interviews are regarded as primary data collection tools because they give deep descriptions (Bloomberg et al., 2015). The three sampled educators were interviewed using the semi-structured interview schedule in Appendix D. Semi-structured interviews include a mixture of closed- and open-ended questions, and allow for follow-up questions as well (Adams, 2018). This type of interview gives the researcher more information because there are no strict questions to follow when conducting the interviews. A voice recorder was used to capture the interview proceedings, and the voice recordings were subsequently

transcribed for analysis purposes. The main focus of the interviews with the educators was to find out from their perspective what could be the cause of the learners' writing problem and which strategies can be applied to solve the problem.

#### 1.8.2. Documents

Learners were given four topics to choose from and write a descriptive essay of 500 words on their chosen topic under controlled classroom conditions. The essay scripts were collected and served as primary documents for subsequent analysis. A primary document is considered as the one that has arisen as a product of the actual research process, as opposed to a secondary document, which constitutes interpretations of events by others (Grix, 2010).

The main purpose of the essay-writing task was to document the grammatical errors committed by the learner participants.

### **1.9. Data analysis**

Data analysis is defined as a process of renovating, modernizing, checking, examining and displaying the data to explore important data so that a decision can be made regarding the problem (Sabah, Hassan, and Qadri, 2022). According to INTRAC (2017), the aim of data analysis is to help turn raw data into knowledge, which can then be used for decision-making and other purposes, and data analysis can take place at any stage of a project. The researcher chose a qualitative data analysis because the research followed a qualitative research approach. A qualitative data analysis is used to analyze reports, cases, quotes, transcripts or even photos (INTRAC, 2017).

#### 1.9.1. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data collected through semi-interviews. Thematic analysis involves reporting of patterns and identification in a data set that are interpreted for their deep-rooted meaning (Liebenberg, Jamal and Ikeda, 2020; Xu and Zammit, 2020). This method allows the researcher to see and comprehend the shared meanings and experiences. It also allows the researcher to identify what is common from the findings concerning a research topic. The interview data was analysed by gathering all the interview transcripts and going through them and looking for commonalities in

terms of how the participants had responded to each of the interview questions, and generating unifying themes accordingly.

#### 1.9.2. Document Analysis

The learners' essay transcripts were analysed by identifying grammatical errors committed. The identified errors were classified according to their nature and type, and possible sources of their origin was determined based on the classification.

### **1.10. Quality Criteria**

#### 1.10.1. Credibility

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), credibility has to do with believing that there is truth in the results of a research study. The researcher used different methods of data collection to get results that are credible. In-depth information was acquired from both data collection methods, which were semi-structured interviews with the educators and the written essays (documents) from the learner participants. According to Chauke (2022), credibility can also be referred to as a degree of reliability of the study, based on the correctness of the analysis of data and the participants' original views. To ensure credibility, the conducted interviews were voice recorded to maintain authenticity. The original essay manuscripts were preserved for easy verification.

#### 1.10.2. Dependability

Dependability refers to the ability of a study to be replicated in a similar site and yield same results (Bloomberg et al., 2019). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that dependability implies that the findings of a research in a comparative setting can be duplicated with comparative participants. To ensure dependability in the study, the research processes were reported in detail to create a prototype model that can be used by other researchers to reproduce the study elsewhere. Should there be any change of context, it is important that the researcher mentions it as it may temper with research results.

#### 1.10.3. Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which research findings are not biased, or do not reflect any undue bias by the researcher (Bloomberg et al., 2019). Confirmability has to do with other people being able to confirm the research results (Mamba, 2019). There should be participants' validation whereby one's interpretation can be confirmed based on the findings of the participants (Mamba, 2019). The researcher ensured that data was collected in an organised and recoverable manner so that the participants and readers can access the data. The researcher collected data through voice-recorded interviews and essay scripts which were recoverable and preservable. Also, member checking was applied to ensure confirmability in the proposed study by allowing the participants to verify their responses as captured by the researcher during the data collection process.

#### 1.10.4. Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which research results are transferable to other locations or circumstances (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Transferability was ensured in the study by ensuring that the selected sample was a good representation of the population from which it was extracted. This was to ensure that the obtained results of the study were transferrable to the other high schools within the designated population. In qualitative research, transferability is considered to be a huge challenge because the most important instrument are the participants, and it is considered a risk to permit deductions in research information. However, the improvement of transferability in qualitative research can be done by specifying the research strategies, settings of the research and the primary assumptions of the study (Mamba, 2019). The researcher gave a full description of the participants involved in the study, and the full details of how the research process took place so that the next person can gauge whether the researcher's findings can be transferable to other similar settings.

### **1.11. Ethical Considerations**

Ethics are an important component of a research study. Researchers should ensure the safety of participants, and that they are not under undue stress, and they are protected from harm at all costs. According to Bos (2020), ethics refers to an inquiry into the wrong and the right, and what researchers are supposed to do. The researcher should follow all the research principles to ensure that the participants are safe, and the research conducted does not compromise them in any way.

#### 1.11.1. Consent and Assent

Consent forms were issued out to parents for them to grant permission for their minor children to participate in the study. This was because the learners sampled as participants were under the age of 18, and their parents/guardians had to give permission on their behalf. Teachers were also given assent forms to sign to show that they agree to be participants in the study. The forms clearly stated that their data would be kept anonymous and shall not in any way lead back to them. The researcher also explained thoroughly to the participants the process and aims of the research study.

#### 1.11.2. Permission

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the university's Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC). After receiving ethical clearance, the researcher then wrote letters to ask for permission to conduct the study to both the principal of the sampled school and the Mpumalanga Department of Education as represented by the circuit manager. The letters to seek permission clearly stated all the details of the research study.

#### 1.11.3. Protection from harm

The researcher committed not to cause any harm on the participants' psychological or physical being. The researcher avoided making any reference to offensive stereotypes and assumptions as well as making cruel statements about the study participants. The researcher also made the participants aware of their right to withdraw from the study should they feel uncomfortable with the research procedures.

#### 1.11.4. Confidentiality and Anonymity

The researcher informed the participants that none of the collected data would lead back to them as it would be presented anonymously for confidentiality purposes. The data was kept in confidence, and the participants were protected at all costs as their data was kept anonymous. Pseudonyms were assigned to the sampled school and the participants to conceal their real identities. A numerical system was used to identify the study participants in order to conceal their identity, and no personal information about them was shared.

#### 1.11.5. Voluntary participation

The participants were made aware that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any point. The researcher also made it clear to the participants that they would not suffer any consequences if they decided to withdraw their participation as it was within right to do so.

### **1.12. Structure of the thesis**

The structure of the thesis is compartmented into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter which consists of the background and motivation of the study and the whole recap of the study is provided.

Chapter 2 mainly focuses on the literature review, the research topic is broken into subtopics, and literature is reviewed pertaining those subtopics. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks are established in the chapter to help analyse the problem identified.

Chapter 3 provides a thorough description of the methodology which is applied when conducting the research study. The research approach, research design and research paradigm used in the study are also discussed to show how the qualitative approach, the case study design and the interpretivism paradigm were suitable for the study. The population and sampling are also explained thoroughly, giving details of population used and the selection of study's sample. The instruments used to collect data are also outlined and their suitability is thoroughly discussed. Ways of analysing the data are also discussed looking at each data collection instrument. The quality criteria and ethical considerations that were followed in the study are also outlined.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the study's results and findings. The participants' profiles are outlined, and the data collected through semi-structured interviews and documents is presented and analysed.

Chapter 5 gives a summary of results, the findings of the study and the recommendations of the study. The results and findings of the study are summarised and juxtaposed against the preset research questions. Furthermore, the significance of the study, the limitations of the study, areas for further research are also discussed.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides a conceptual framework about the grammatical errors made by Grade 10 EFAL learners in writing creative essays. It discusses the writing skill and its significance in the schooling system. Error analysis, as a methodological strategy to analyse the significance of grammatical errors, is also discussed. The chapter also reviews relevant literature generated around the topic through research studies by different scholars to unpack different research findings on the main causes of grammatical errors in learners' writing.

### **2.1. English writing skill**

Writing is a cognitive activity regarded as a complex skill to acquire or to engage in, whereby the writer is required to demonstrate a steady control of variables simultaneously. As Durga and Rao (2018) explain, learners need to acquire efficient writing skills so that their chances of success are elevated. Learners need to be able to apply their writing skills to communicate their thoughts and feelings. In addition, learners can also express themselves creatively in writing without feeling the pressure associated with delivering a speech or communicating verbally to convey their message.

Mastering the English writing skill is seen as a complex activity for learners who study English as an additional language. It becomes a challenge for them to internalise correct English language rules and apply them appropriately to produce written essays that are relatively grammatically error-free. Learners are likely to make errors when writing in a second language regardless of the amount of time spent to teach them the second language which they have to acquire. However, as Phuket and Othman (2015) state, committing errors is seen as a form of language development in language learning. This means that language errors are a good indicator of how far a learner has gone into the language learning process.

According to Nkgadima (2022), writing remains a challenge for students who are not native speakers of the English language. Their writing is permeated by structural and grammatical errors which EFAL teachers can use to identify struggling learners and plan appropriate intervention strategies. The struggling learners can be diagnosed through written essay tasks administered in an EFAL classroom context to allow the teacher an opportunity to map out strategies to improve the learners' writing skills. Since mastering

the writing skill is a common challenge for learners who learn English as an additional language, there must be dedicated instruction on higher order writing skills, planning, grammatical rules, and word choices and organizing of ideas (Safitri, 2019). Learners usually encounter problems when a topic is too confusing, resulting in misinterpretation and an interrupted flow of ideas. Moreover, learners might also struggle to brainstorm ideas and put words together in a way that will be coherent and easily readable. As observed by Apsari (2018), there has to be an understanding by the learners that writing entails bringing ideas together and putting them down in a coherent way. Learners must apply appropriate rhetorical conventions to arrange their writing in a cohesive manner and proofread their written work to ensure clarity of meaning and appropriate application of grammar rules.

Writing is there to test the learners' ability to use the English language when they express their ideas (Nkgadima, 2022). The complexity of writing can be in the representation of ideas in an organized and readable piece of writing (Safitri, 2019). The difficulty mostly starts when the learners translate their words and ideas from their home language into the English target language. This makes the writing skill difficult for learners to acquire because of structural and semantic discrepancies that exist between their home language and the target language. As a result, meaning is lost in the translation process since learners do not sufficiently master the vocabulary and grammar of the English target language. This is mainly because their exposure towards the English language is limited and they hardly communicate using the language in their everyday life (Alghazo and Alshraideh, 2020). Learners are mainly exposed to the English language at school and particularly in the classroom. At home, learners mostly use their home language, and as a result, they do not get full exposure to the target language in order to learn it without any hindrance. Moreover, resources may also be limited for the learners to be fully exposed to the language at school even if they are willing to learn the language. This becomes an additional setback in the learners' English learning experience, and their prospects of acquiring English literacy skills become further minimized and more challenging.

For example, Thai students still find it difficult to deal with the writing skill or even master it (Phuket and Othman, 2015). This becomes a problem or a challenge for learners when they graduate and move into the workplace where English is used as the main medium of communication and employers expect employees to be able to communicate their

ideas in English (Suraprajit, 2021). According to Iamsiu (2014), people with poor writing skills are generally regarded as poor performers, and that leaves them with less chances of getting any managerial positions. Any kind of errors that are portrayed in any written task in the workplace can serve as evidence that one experiences difficulties when using English as a way of communicating (Suraprajit, 2021). Therefore, when learners do not master the writing skill at an early age, it becomes a disadvantage because in the workplace they would probably stand little chance to thrive reasonably because they find it difficult to efficiently communicate ideas in writing.

For the learners to become experts in writing, they need to get corrections and constructive feedback for their written work (Sahara, 2017). This will help them to notice the errors they make in their writing and find better ways to learn from their mistakes to avoid repeating them in future. As such, feedback is one of the most important aspects to administer after giving an assessment task. It can be in the form of one-on-one interactions with learners to rectify their mistakes or annotating their essay scripts with corrective comments. When learners are corrected consistently, their acquisition of grammar rules improves, resulting in a better application of the rules when writing essays. As Phuket and Othman (2015) state, committing language errors is seen as a form of language development in language learning. This means that language errors are a good indicator of how far a learner has gone into the language learning process.

## **2.2 Grammatical competence**

According to Sioco and Vera (2018), grammar refers to the patterns and systems utilized by people to choose words and incorporate them. Grammar has to do with how words are put together to form sentences. This arrangement of words should be done in a specific language-compliant manner to form sentences that are meaningful and acceptable to fellow language users. As Emvula (2020) notes, grammar patterns must be properly used, and in order for learners to construct meaningful sentences, they need to master and apply basic grammar rules associated with the target language and acceptable amongst competent users of that particular language. According to Larsen-Freeman (2015), grammar is not merely a set of static rules, but it is a body of rules and regulations of language that improves accuracy in the language learning process. The scholar further mentions that grammar is the study and the practice of the rules by which words change their form and are combined into sentences. Therefore, although the

knowledge of grammar rules is essential, it is the correct application of these rules in actual writing activities that makes the difference. Learners need to ensure that language rules are applied correctly when writing. As such, grammatical competence assists learners in knowing the nature of language and how to apply the appropriate language rules when writing (Emvula, 2020). Learners should be able to apply grammatical rules when they write and should be competent in communicating relatively error-free messages.

Tarvin (2015) defines communicative competence as a way of being able to communicate and make use of language to complete tasks or make meaning. Therefore, learners who master communicative competency will likely be able to apply grammar rules when speaking or writing. Discourse competency, according to Januin and Stephen (2015), involves being able to comprehend and construct verbal and non-verbal features, which helps with cohesion in verbal and non-verbal features. In other words, cohesion within a text must be created by using cohesive devices and markers such as pronouns, parallel structures, and synonyms. When learners are able to construct meaningful sentences through correct usage of grammar, not only their proficiency in the English language, but also their level of language development and advancement is showcased. As Ellis (2014) correctly states, whenever learners violate grammar rules, the means of communication will be compromised. For communication to be effective, there must be a sound application of grammar rules (Emvula, 2020).

Grammar can be defined as a set of shared assumptions about how language works (Miko, 2018). Proficiency in grammar can be assessed based on one's ability to be able to share their ideas, emotions and feelings using acceptable language structures and forms. In the context of English language teaching, it is suggested that grammar should be consolidated in the development of the four language skills. Language makes sense when grammar rules are properly followed, making it very enjoyable to read and write (Deyass, 2018). Therefore, learners should learn relevant language forms and functions applicable in the target language. This will enhance their knowledge and skills in constructing sentences that are acceptable in both spoken and written and English. They will be able to express meaning and project information comprehensively to other people by including grammatical choices that are more appropriate and sounder.

## **2.3 Grammar instruction**

Grammar instruction refers to the methods that are used to teach grammar to develop the learners' grammatical competence. It pays dedicated attention to features of grammar and description and analysis of particular forms and structures of a language (Lungolobi-Nalunga, 2017). For second language learners, grammar is regarded as an important aspect of their target language (Singh, et al., 2017). In South Africa, most learners learn English as an additional language, and it is mostly used as the language of the economy and the medium of instruction in most schools. As Steyn (2017) states, in South Africa from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, learning is only offered through the medium of Afrikaans or English. Therefore, it is quite important for learners to learn English grammar effectively in order to fare confidently and efficiently in the predominantly English environment.

According to Singh et al. (2017), the most beneficial approach of facilitating learners' command of grammar in writing is to employ their writing as the starting point for discussing grammatical concepts. Writing is the most important point to start at for learners who are acquiring a second language, and their written texts will serve as an indication of their language learning progress. Chin (2000) argues that if there is a separation between writing instruction and grammar teaching, then there will be no improvement in the learners' writing. The two processes should coincide to provide learners with a wholesome language learning experience.

In a study conducted by Alkhazraji (2018) in Dubai, to explore teacher talk impact in English grammar acquisition, it was revealed that teachers should know how to teach grammar since it is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition, and there are interaction processes employed by teachers when teaching a second language to learners. The findings of the study showed that teacher talk improves the learning of English grammar, because when teachers get involved in small talks with the learners, it becomes easy for the learners to acquire the grammar rules.

### **2.3.1. Deductive grammar approach**

According to Crystal (1987) cited by Nan (2015), deductive grammar instruction refers to a top-down, direct, and explicit way of making students aware of grammatical structures. It involves a direct teaching of grammar rules and structures. The deductive or rule driven approach involves the teaching of grammar from rules, where the rule is firstly introduced,

followed by an example of how to apply it (Benitez-Correa, Gonzalez-Torres, Ochoa-Cueva, Vargas, and Alba, 2019). Teachers use the deductive grammar approach to explicitly instruct learners on grammar rules from a generalised to a more specific application of the rules, providing full exposure to the grammar rules and how they should be applied. In this manner, grammar rules are learnt consciously. Although the grammar rules are mostly learnt out of context, teachers should create ample opportunity to allow for the application of the acquired rules. In summary, the deductive instruction approach is rule-oriented, and does not focus on the contextual meaning of the communicative setup. (Nan, 2015).

### 2.3.2. Inductive grammar instruction approach

Inductive grammar instruction approach differs from the deductive grammar instruction approach because it is 'bottom-up' as it deduces the grammatical structures implicitly. The teaching of the grammatical structures and rules is done indirectly, and learners acquire grammar patterns from relevant communication contexts (Nan, 2015). In principle, learners make generalizations of the rules as they figure them out from communicative contexts and language discourse. The inductive or rule-discovery approach involves teaching of grammar by using examples from which grammar rules are inferred (Benitez-Correa et al., 2019).

A study was conducted in Ecuador by Benitez-Correa et al. (2019) was based on a comparison between deductive and inductive approaches for teaching EFL grammar to high school students. The purpose of the study was to test the two methods for grammar teaching in English as a foreign language. However, after careful analysis of the data collected through grammar pre-tests, the findings of the research showed that the inductive approach is more effective for teaching grammar in the EFL classroom in terms of instruction and rapport. According to Benitez-Correa, et.al, (2019), one learning approach would favour induction, with the added benefit that students learn how to figure out the rules on their own, and on the other hand, learners might have to memorize the rules for in case they have to apply them in their writing.

## 2.4. Learners' grammatical errors

According to Tiensawangchai (2014), learning a second language is negatively affected by the students' home language influence, where they transfer language structures and

patterns from their home language to the target language when they write. The evidence of this transfer in the students' writing comes in the form of incorrect formation of plural noun forms, incorrect subject-verb agreement, fragmented sentences, and incorrect verb tenses. Singaravelu (2010) also discovered that learners face challenges when it comes to incorporating prepositions and conjunctions into their writing, and also encounter problems with sentence patterns.

According to Prasetyo, Saehu and Sundari (2022), inter-lingual transfer errors refer to errors made by students due to their native language's effect on the second language learning, such as language translations. This is also backed up by Sari (2019) who cites first language use, carelessness, and translation as some of the factors that cause grammatical errors. First language interference is projected as the main source of learners' language problems. Learners usually apply their knowledge of their first language when communicating in the target language (Promsupa, Varasarin and Brudhiprabha, 2017). This involves using the mother tongue when communicating in the target language, which can result in the misuse of articles, incorrect use of prepositions, and incorrect verb tenses and concord. Therefore, first language interference is the negative transfer of the first language structures into the target language.

Promsupa et al. (2017) conducted a study on Thai students whose first language was Thai and were learning English as a second language. The study aimed to investigate grammatical error types and analyse the sources of the errors in English writing. The study found that the students experienced difficulties in writing in English because Thai and English language systems were not structurally compatible. Moreover, the Thai students regarded English grammar as difficult, which also affected their English language learning experience negatively.

Furthermore, Anh, Yen, Tho, & Nhut (2022) identify lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge as contributory factors towards learners' grammatical errors. This problem is exacerbated by the teachers who use Grammar Translation Method to teach the learners a second language, as it was discovered by George, Iqbal, Bin, and Halimb's (2023) Malaysian study, where the teaching method was used to facilitate second language acquisition. When the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is used to teach a second language, there is little usage of the target language. Teachers translate words and phrases into the learners' first language to facilitate language learning. According to

Elmayantie (2015), GTM requires students to translate whole texts word for word and memorize numerous grammatical rules and exceptions as well as enormous vocabulary lists. The advantage of this method, according to Khan and Mansoor (2016), is that learners can be aware of the grammatical rules, comprehend the message through reading texts, and can produce grammatically correct sentences. Elmayantie (2015) adds that the underlying purpose of teaching the target language through Grammar Translation Method is to be enable learners to read literature written in the target language. One disadvantage of GTM is that learners will find it difficult to communicate directly in the target language, since translating from one language to the other without error is impossible (Khan and Mansoor, 2016). This is likely to compound the learners' problems associated with learning English as an additional language.

According to Phuket and Othman (2015), language errors are seen as an indication of learning progress. In an EFAL classroom environment, teachers need to understand the errors committed by their learners to implement appropriate corrective measures. Learners who commit errors show an attempt to learn the target language and should receive correction from their teachers or language mentors at their earliest convenience in order to facilitate and boost their language learning process. The writing skill is considered to be the most crucial skill which learners should master. In most cases, learners who are not English native speakers tend to experience difficulties when they write, since their writing contains grammatical errors (Ipinge, 2018). For these EFAL learners, language errors are viewed as the non-native outcomes of the learners' inadequate linguistic knowledge (Phuket and Othman, 2015). The learners' inability to master writing is believed to be due the interference or influence of the home language and the lack of knowledge when it comes to English grammatical rules (Singh et al., 2017). These learners end up using direct transfer of language structures from their home language into English. When this happens, both the semantic and grammatical sense of their sentences are usually compromised because of inherent structural and semantic incompatibilities between the two languages. Therefore, home language influence is seen as one of the possible contributory factors to the identified problem. Learners need to learn English grammatical rules and know how to apply them when writing, so that their essays can become meaningful and grammatically sound. According to Setiyadi (2020), the main differences between the target language and the mother tongue lie in the phonology, vocabulary, grammar, graphics, and stylistics. These differences can cause

problems when learners use their mother tongue as a resource of convenience when learning the English target language.

## **2.5 Error Analysis**

The concept of error analysis was proposed by Crystal (1987) as a technique used for classifying, identifying and interpreting any form of unacceptable forms made by anyone learning a foreign language. The concept is defined by Sahara (2017) as an activity to reveal errors found in writing and speaking. According to Al-Khresheh (2016), the theory plays a significant role in investigating, identifying and describing causes of errors of second language learners. The main purpose of error analysis is to uncover techniques applied by learners when learning a language, and to discover where the errors made by learners emanate, and to also gather information on the common challenges encountered when learning a second language (Sahara, 2017). This is an important concept to consider as it helps in identifying and describing the type of errors that students make and how these errors originate, and how best students can learn from them. This can also allow teachers to devise intervention strategies and implement corrective measures to deal with the language errors.

Al-Khresheh (2016) also indicates that error analysis makes it possible for second language teachers to also find the uncommon sources of the errors in second language, so that thoughtful pedagogical practices may be implemented against them. According to Corder (1967), errors are valuable information for three beneficiaries: for teachers, it clues them on the progress of their students; for researchers, it provides evidence as to how language is acquired or learned; and for learners themselves, it offers them learning resources.

As Cristia (2021) correctly states, error analysis provides a picture of the learners' linguistic development and may give indications as to the learning process. The basic reason why EFAL learners commit grammatical errors in their writing is that they are dealing with a second language that is not compatible with their home language structurally and otherwise. This is a challenge that teachers should seek to address by using error analysis as a point of departure and a diagnostic tool towards ameliorating the problem. Error analysis should culminate into intervention initiatives and customised teaching strategies that teachers can use to help learners minimise incidences of

grammatical errors in their essay writing. According to Ekpe (2022), teachers should not regard learners who commit grammatical errors as failures. Instead, these errors should be regarded as an integral part of the learning process and a stepping stone for further learning and development. In order for learners to learn from the language errors they make, they should get immediate intensive feedback from their teachers on any written task they engage in.

In the field of language learning, error analysis plays a very crucial role as it contributes towards the process of language acquisition. When there is a systematic exploration of learners' writing errors, it becomes easier to identify learners' skills and knowledge deficits and understand how and why the errors occurred (Suraprajit, 2021). Error analysis can provide teachers with information on how second language acquisition works and what learners go through during the language learning process. Moreover, as Mitchell, Myles and Marsde (2019) note, error analysis assists in the adjustment of the learning process, and helps teachers establish effective strategies to improve the learners' writing skill (Waelateh, Boonsuk, Ambele & Jaharsae, 2019).

## **2.6 Causes of learners' writing problems**

Widagdo (2017) conducted an Indonesian study to explore writing problems of 160 teacher education students. The study was intended to share some recommendations on how students can overcome those problems. Data was collected using questionnaires and documents from the students, and two lecturers were also interviewed to solicit their opinions on the students' writing problems. The researcher used the students' written documents to collect tangible evidence of their writing problem. The findings of the study revealed grammatical errors as one of the main problems when it comes to writing. The study demonstrated that learners had limited vocabulary and could not express their ideas properly in writing as their writing lacked structure and appropriate information to generate coherent ideas. Results from the questionnaires were represented in percentages to reflect the gravity of each writing problem. Faulty sentence structure, lack of writing vocabulary, and lack of writing practice were identified as the main causes of the students' writing in descending order. Based on the interview results, lack of motivation and vocabulary are a contributory factor towards their English writing problems due to the students' poor participation in classroom activities. Furthermore, the students demonstrated an inadequate knowledge of the writing process as reflected in the

analysed written documents. Moreover, their lack of writing practice outside the classroom did not make the situation any better.

Tanasy and Nashruddin (2020) conducted a study at Universitas Muslim Maros to investigate students' formal writing problems. The study's main objective was to identify common problems that appeared in the students' writing and determine their causes. The researchers conducted the study using 8 students from the university. The data collection instruments used were observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings of the research revealed that learners encountered writing problems due to word choice problems, grammatical problems, and mechanical problems. The learners encountered difficulties in choosing words and appropriate verbs in their writing, which was characterised by spelling, capitalization and punctuation errors. Furthermore, the study results identified lack of practice as one of the causes of the students' writing problem. The findings showed that the students seldom practise writing, they only get to write when they are given a task to work on. Limited writing practice negatively affected their acquisition of the required writing skills. Moreover, the students became less motivated to write as it was during the pandemic time, and most of the learning was done online. As such, they only engaged in obligatory writing activities since they considered writing as a boring, difficult and tedious activity. Time allocation was also identified as one of the issues that affected their writing, as it was found that the time allocated for classroom writing was insufficient. The students always requested for additional time to complete their writing tasks.

Bhatti, Hussain, Azim and Gulfam (2023) conducted a study in Lahore based on the perceptions of English Second Language learners and teachers on writing difficulties in English language learning. The study's objectives were to identify the most frequent writing difficulties faced by higher secondary learners, by soliciting opinions and perceptions of English language teachers about the difficulties of teaching the writing skill at higher secondary level. The study sample consisted of 240 participants taken from 6 private colleges in Lahore. The findings of the research study showed that the writing difficulties faced by the learners were vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and tense use. Moreover, male learners proved to encounter more writing difficulties than their female counterparts.

In a related study, Budjalemba and Listiyani (2020) conducted a study in Indonesia on factors contributing to students' difficulties in academic writing. The participants were 22 students from a University in Central Java in Indonesia, who were taking Academic writing classes for repeaters in the first semester of the academic year 2018/2019. The study used interviews and open-ended questionnaires to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire and interview questions were formulated in the students' native language to avoid misunderstanding. The findings of the study showed that the students encountered mechanical grammatical problems and lack of vocabulary issues in their academic writing. However, out of the 22 students, only 14 students encountered grammatical problems in their writing. The findings also revealed that there were internal and external factors which contributed to the difficulties in the participants' writing. These included deficiencies in language knowledge, self-motivation, and self-confidence, and feeling under pressure. In addition, the study found that external factors, such as classroom atmosphere, teaching style, writing resources and materials, also had a bearing on the participants' writing. Teaching styles were found to be confusing for some students. Teachers used different teaching styles, and not all of them accommodated all students. As argued by Awla (2014), there has to be a balance between the teachers' teaching styles and the learners' learning style. The study also revealed that learners become demotivated if the teacher does not thoroughly explain the materials needed for writing activities, and the kind of atmosphere they learn in contributes a lot to their motivation to write, because a comfortable atmosphere boosts students' energy levels. This is supported by a study by Listyani (2018) which demonstrated that a successful implementation of strategies when writing largely depends on the atmosphere in the classroom.

Similarly, Peter and Singaravelu (2020) conducted a study in India to investigate English writing problems among high school learners. The study involved 1200 Standard 8 participants who were randomly selected from Cuddalore Education Block. To collect data, the researchers administered a diagnostic test based on Cronbach's reliability test. Results of the study revealed that 69% of the students' essays lacked cohesion and coherence. About 74% of the students could not come up with their own content due to lack of reading habits, and almost 30% of the students deviated from the main content. There were also lexical problems whereby the students could not select proper vocabulary based on context and incorrectly used grammatical aspects such as subject-

verb agreement, tenses, active and passive voice, articles, pronouns, and prepositions. Mother tongue interference was also evident. The structural incompatibilities between the participants' mother tongue (Tamil) and English posed sentence construction challenges and affected the students' performance in terms of English writing. These problems also manifested as spelling, syntax and punctuation errors, and redundancy of ideas.

A study conducted by Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022) explored academic writing difficulties encountered by ESL learners at University of Benghazi in Libya. The study aimed at investigating factors that hindered students' academic writing skills. A quantitative method approach was adopted for this study, to help in discovering the causes of difficulties in writing and what hinders development in the Libyan undergraduates' academic writing skill. The data was collected using a questionnaire comprising 25 questions, which helped the researchers to obtain answers for their research questions. The study involved 36 learners from the University of Benghazi, 26 of them were undergraduates who majored in English in the Faculty of Education, and 10 were graduates who took the same course and applied for Master Program in Education. 1 of the participants was a male and the 35 participants were females. After the analysis of the data collected, the findings showed the different problems which were encountered in writing, such as concord, verb form, capitalization, punctuation and spelling problems. The participants also encountered problems generating thoughtful ideas, organizing ideas, and paraphrasing ideas taken from other sources. The findings of the study were the same from both groups of participants.

Mohammed and Darwish (2019) conducted a study at University of Jordan, in Amman, Jordan. The study was based on writing problems of non-English speaking students. The purpose of the study was to identify areas of difficulty in writing skills and to help the students overcome their writing weaknesses. 30 students who spoke Arabic as their native language participated in the study. The researchers collected data through written samples from the participants to analyse for the students' writing weaknesses and strengths. The findings of the study demonstrated that the Arabic students could not use articles in their writings, and they also faced challenges with spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and verb tenses.

Ho (2024) conducted a study at Mekong Delta University in Vietnam. The study focused on problems regarding academic writing encountered by EFL postgraduate students. The

aim of the study was to investigate problems that frequently hinder the academic writing of EFL postgraduate students. The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, and data was collected using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. 37 students aged between 22 and 40 participated in the study. The findings from the questionnaire showed that students encountered lexical, grammatical, cohesion and coherence, citation and referencing, paraphrasing and plagiarism problems. The findings from the semi-structured interviews showed four factors which contributed towards writing problems of the students. The first factor was the difference between the English language and the EFL postgraduates' mother tongue. At least 5/12 students agreed that the structural difference between the two languages was one of the causes of their writing problems because there are words that exist in English but are not found in the Vietnamese language. As such, the students even find it difficult to write in the English language without translating words from Vietnamese. The second factor was the lack of academic writing experience and knowledge. All the 12 students who were interviewed expressed that they had writing problems because of lack of knowledge and experience regarding the English language. The third factor was lack of knowledge of the topic. Most students mentioned lack of knowledge about the topic as another source of their writing problems. Lastly, the use of reference materials was cited as another cause of their writing problem. The participants expressed difficulty in understanding the academic vocabulary used in reference materials.

Toba, Noor and Sanu (2019) conducted a study in Indonesia aimed at investigating Indonesian EFL students' writing skills problem. The study involved 52 English students of IAIN Samarinda in 2018/2019 academic year. These were 9 males and 43 females aged between 19 and 23. Three data collection instruments were used in the study namely, interviews, open-ended questionnaires and a written essay task. All participants answered the open-ended questionnaire and wrote the essay, but only 10 of the 52 students participated in the interviews. The findings of the study were presented according to the instruments used to collect data, and the essay findings showed that, 16 students (30.77%) performed excellently, 24 students (46.15%) were good at the task, 6 (11.54%) performed fairly, the performance of 5 (9.62%) was poor, and 1 (1.92%) dismally failed the task. The students' observed writing problems were categorised into content issues (24.30%), organisation (20.60%), vocabulary (13.45%), grammar (25.60%), and language mechanics (33.40%).

Another study was conducted by Mohammad, Al-Mofti and Hussein (2020), aimed at exploring difficulties in English writing encountered by Iraqi EFL Learners at university level. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to obtain data from the participants. The students' responses were analysed quantitatively using SPSS software program to discover the type of difficulties most frequently encountered by students. These difficulties were analysed qualitatively to investigate students' attitude towards their difficulties. The participants for the study were 80 English majors from the University of Anbar's College of Education for Humanities, in the Department of English. The questionnaires handed out to the students were based on the following 10 difficulties: lack of ideas, grammar difficulties, vocabulary restriction, topic inappropriateness, lack of materials for consulting, lack of teacher's help, incorrect use of mechanics of writing (spelling, punctuation, quotation, and capitalization), unsuitable methods of teaching writing, time restriction, and lack of clear assessment instruments and marking schemes. An SPSS System Program was used to analyse the results. The results were presented in percentages as follows, indicating the difficulty ratings as encountered by the students: (1) Lack of ideas (59.8%), (2) Grammar difficulties (53.0%), (3) Vocabulary restriction (54.9%), (4) Topic inappropriateness (22.6%), (5) Lack of materials for consulting (39.0%), (6) Lack of teacher's help (46.3%), (7) Incorrect use of mechanics of writing (68.5%), (8) Unsuitable methods of teaching writing (40.2%), (9) Time restriction (30.5%), and (10) Lack of clear assessment instruments and marking schemes (61.1%). These results show that the most difficulties students have in writing emanate from the incorrect use of language mechanics.

A study based on an analysis of causes of students' problems in writing a recount text was conducted by Nurkholijah and Al Hafizh (2020) in Indonesia. The main objective of the study was to investigate students' challenges in writing recount texts. A qualitative research method was adopted for this study, and interviews were conducted to collect data for the research. The study involved 22 students who were interviewed individually. The research findings revealed that there were four indicators which made students have difficulty in grammar. These were the students' use of simple past tense, action verbs, linking verbs and sentence patterns. Furthermore, students found it difficult to elaborate on ideas in writing recount texts and could differentiate main ideas and topic sentences in recount texts. The results showed that there were difficulties in writing due to inadequate practice as the teacher seldom gave students practice in writing recount texts.

Hartono and Maharani (2020) also conducted a study on English writing anxiety and the writing problems of Indonesian EFL learners. The aim of the research was to investigate the level of English writing anxiety experienced by Indonesian EFL students. 38 undergraduate students participated in the study. Two closed questionnaires were used to collect data, one was for collecting data on English writing anxiety and the other was for collecting data on writing problems faced by students which may trigger the anxiety. The findings of the research showed that grammar is the biggest source of writing anxiety, and vocabulary difficulties together with insufficient writing practice stand as the second biggest sources, followed by topic mastery. Insufficient peers' feedback is the least considered factor that may cause writing anxiety. The study revealed the following factors as causes of writing anxiety, in descending order: grammatical difficulties, poor writing technique mastery, insufficient writing practice, vocabulary difficulties, poor topic mastery, insufficient teachers' feedback, and insufficient peer feedback.

## **2.7. Types of grammatical errors**

The problem that most English second language learners face in their essay writing is grammatical errors. Manik and Suwastini (2020) conducted a study in SMP Pelangi Dharma Nusantara, in Indonesia, wherein students produced recount texts that were analysed and observed through the theory of surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). The researchers found that there were four types of errors that learners committed in their recount texts, which were omission, addition, misformation and misordering errors. The error that was mostly committed by the learners was omission at 37%, followed by misformation at 36%, and addition at 15%, and the least committed error was misordering at 10%. Students learning English as a foreign language in a vocational school in Bali also committed errors related to omission and misformation (Suwastini and Yukti, 2017). These two categories of errors were also detected by Budiarta, Suputra and Widiasmara (2018) in narrative texts written by junior high school learners at SMP Negeri 1 Sukawati, in Indonesia.

The term 'omission' is defined as the leaving out of items which are required for a sentence to be regarded as grammatically correct or required for utterance to be grammatically correct (Ellis, 1997). It is an error in obliteration or deleting of items in a sentence (Gayo and Widodo, 2018). Omission errors occur when obligatory sentence elements, such as articles, prepositions, conjunctions and other markers, are left out.

Misformation errors occur when applying language structures and using morphemes that are not grammatically acceptable (Manik and Suwastini, 2020). They refer to items that are incorrectly used or included, which can take three forms, namely: regularisation, double marking and simple addition (Manik and Suwastini, 2020). Simple addition is the type of error that occurs when items that are not essential in sentences are added (Hikamah, 2020). Regularisation errors involve placement of regular marker for pluralisation in the context of an irregular noun (Manik and Suwastini, 2020). Another type of grammatical error is misordering, defined by Ellis (1997) as a wrong order of words in a sentence. Nkgadima (2022) defines it as the inaccurate word order in a sentence. According to Hikamah (2020), misordering errors happen in the construction of sentences when the writer puts words in places where they are not needed.

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework**

This study was based on Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory of Cognitive Development to help analyse the causes of grammatical errors in learners' essay writing. Sociocultural theory asserts that learning is a social process whereby development occurs when individuals interact with each other, and development occurs more when one individual is more knowledgeable than the other (Cherry, 2022). The study focused specifically on Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding as a theoretical pedestal for the study. According to Raymond (2000), scaffolding implies the role of teachers and others in supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level of development. The role of scaffolding in the study was evaluated by focussing on the role played by EFAL teachers in guiding learners and providing them with the necessary support regarding essay writing so that they can be able to master the writing skill. The study determined whether this scaffolding-based relationship between the learners and the teachers could be a viable answer in resolving the learners' writing problem.

Shooshtari and Mir's (2014) assertion that Sociocultural theory has to do with the development and learning of humans through interaction, has had a huge impact on teaching and learning. According to Bruner (1990) cited by Shooshtari and Mir (2014), in the second language acquisition, the concept of scaffolding refers to the linguistic support given by an expert to the learner. Shooshtari and Mir (2014) believe that scaffolding can take different forms, for example, it can be a joint venture whereby learners work in a group and construct meaning together, aided by the teacher's mentorship. Another form

of scaffolding is peer-response feedback whereby learners work in groups using prompts given to them by their teacher to help each other by giving each other responses based on their writing. Lastly, direct teacher feedback can be used to scaffold learners' essay writing. According to Wood et al. (1976), scaffolding is tutorial behaviour that is contingent, collaborative, and interactive. Scaffolding is originally the work of Jerome Bruner (1983) who defined it as a process of 'setting-up' the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it. The theory advocates giving support to the learners when they need it, and in this study, the theory was applicable as it motivated teachers to provide support to the learners in order to improve their essay-writing skills.

According to the Sociocultural theory, child development cannot only be comprehended through an exclusive study of an individual, but rather through examination of one's external societal world (Shooshtari and Mir, 2014). This theory guided the researcher to explore the learners' societal world in the process of determining the sources of the grammatical errors in their written essays. The society which the learners live in has an impact on their learning, and the social interactions which they have with other people have an impact on their language learning. As learners are supposed to acquire English as an additional language and their social interactions are mostly in their home language, their social environment becomes a key role player and determinant in their learning of English as a second language. When their essay writing skills show signs of a negative influence, their linguistic surrounding becomes the immediate culprit to investigate. As Vygotsky (1986) argues, cognition is a process that is attributed to activities such as interventions and artefacts of culture that are not entirely psychological in their nature.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) had a theoretical bearing of the current study. According to Vygotsky (1986), ZPD can be determined in three ways, firstly, by determining what learners can do without mediation, secondly, what the learners can do with mediation, and lastly, what the learner cannot do even under guidance. This was relevant to the study because it gave the researcher insights of the interrelationship between ZPD and scaffolding and how the two can be jointly applied to determine and explain the learners' essay-writing problem.

The Sociocultural theory argues that the functioning of a human's mind is a mediated process which is categorized by cultural activities, artefacts and concepts. According to

Rahmatirad (2020), the theory suggests that there is a big difference in the development of the child when he/she is in the company of more knowledgeable others, this difference indicates that children learn actively and promptly in the company of a mentor or a teacher. The strategy or intervention that could assist when guided by the theory is that learners need to be mediated by knowledgeable experts, they need to be scaffolded so that they can properly acquire the required writing skills. The learners can also be scaffolded by their peers who are regarded as knowledgeable. Another possible intervention strategy by the teachers is to give constructive feedback to the learners in order to improve their writing skills. The ZPD can also be integrated into language teaching to determine what learners can do with or without the teacher's guidance, and what they cannot do even with their guidance. This will guide teachers to offer the necessary support and guidance to their learners to minimise the prevalence of grammatical errors in their English writing.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher has gone through literature based on the causes of grammatical errors in learners' English writing. The researcher gave an account of literature and previous research related to the study at hand in order to place the current study in context. In the main, the different studies conducted around the issue of learners' writing problems have an equivocal stance in terms of the nature and causes of learners' encountered writing challenges. The bottom line is that teachers and students should be held accountable for factors that result in poor English writing skills that are not entirely beyond their control. These include factors such as lack of practice in writing and lack of self-motivation, which were commonly identified as contributory factors towards learners' English writing problems. Moreover, both teachers and learners need support from relevant stakeholders in order to make teaching and learning of grammar effective and curb the writing problem.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study. Rajasekar, Philominathan, and Chinnathambi (2013) note that research methodology is a sense of studying how research is to be carried out. According to Patel and Patel (2019), research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem and it can also be understood as a science of studying how research is done. Research methodology has to do with how a researcher conducts a study and comes up with ways to solve the identified problem. This implies that research methodology is concerned with research methods that are used to generate data. The research methodology for the current study is discussed under the following subheadings: research approach, research design, research paradigm, population and sampling, data collection and data analysis.

### **3.2. Research approach**

Creswell (2014) defines research approach as plans and procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the research problem and the purpose of a research are tied to the choice of a research approach. Research approach can be considered as a way in which a researcher will collect data and be able to analyse it and make interpretations of the identified social phenomena. Grover (2015) states that research approach has to do with the procedures and the plans for the research that enclose the main steps based on the assumptions and the methods that will be used to collect data, analyse it and interpret it. To be able to reach such a decision, the researcher has to be guided by the philosophical assumptions that research approach brings to the research study.

There are three different types of research approaches, namely: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), qualitative research approach implies an emphasis on exploration, discovery and description. It is used to address the “what?” questions in research, and it also incorporates an understanding of circumstances, environment, context, and milieu. Qualitative research approach aims at solving scientific and practical issues within the society by utilizing both naturalistic and interpretative strategies across various topics (Taherdoost, 2021).

Qualitative research is more focused on experiences which people went through, hence it can be accessed through case studies. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a qualitative approach consists of characteristics that are of paramount importance. Firstly, comprehending people's experiences is one of the main objectives of qualitative study. Secondly, data collection and the data analysis instruments are essential to the researcher, and then the data collected for the study is analysed on an inquiry basis. Finally, a description is produced from different sources of data such as interviews, notes and documents. Qualitative research works with the study of the behaviour of humans, and as such, the researcher can derive findings from the feelings, opinions, attitudes and the body language observed from human participants (Patel and Patel, 2019). As Kothari (1990) mentions, qualitative research is especially important in the behavioural sciences where the aim is to discover the underlying motives of human behaviour.

According to Bloomberg et al (2019), qualitative research is grounded in a philosophical position that is essentially constructivist in the sense that it is concerned with how the complexities of the social and cultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time. One of the key features of qualitative research approach is that the researcher's main objective is to be able to narrate the meaning of the research findings from the participant's point of view, and for that to work out, the researcher has to gather the data from the participants directly. As Creswell (2014) asserts, research approaches consist of strategies and methods for research that extend the decisions from general assumptions to thorough methods of data gathering and reasoning. A research approach consists of joint theoretical assumptions, strategies, and exact methods. The fundamental assumption of qualitative research approach is that an interaction between the researcher and the participant is the only way data can be captured in a real context (Rossman and Rallis, 2017). According to Queiros, Faria and Almeida (2017), the objective of qualitative methodology is to produce in-depth and illustrative information in order to understand the various dimensions of the problem under analysis.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of using the qualitative research approach. Firstly, the qualitative research method produces a more detailed representation of how the participants taking part in the research actually feel. The interpretation of the participants' opinions, experiences and feelings can be described more in detail as well as the meaning of their actions, and there can be construction of

meaning based on their lived experiences and that will be genuinely based on their reality and truth (Xiong, 2022). Secondly, qualitative research approach comprehends human experiences in certain settings fully (Queiros et al., 2017). Thirdly, for researchers to fully encounter the participants' inner experiences, they need to get access to specific methods of collecting data, and show how meaning can be created through culture, which cannot just be obtained numerically, like in quantitative research where numbers are the main focus (Xiong, 2022). Fourthly, qualitative research methods such as unstructured interviews, describing records, participant-observation, direct observation, are mostly utilised for data collection (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). Lastly, generous amount of information can be evoked pertaining personal perspectives because qualitative research data methods tend to be versatile (Xiong, 2022).

However, there also disadvantages to qualitative research. Silverman (2010) states that qualitative research approaches focus more on experiences and meanings and occasionally leave contextual sensitivity out. This is demonstrated by Rahman and Rashid (2017), who focus on the experiences of participants rather than other critical issues in the context. Xiong (2022) mentions that the researcher's own experiences and own knowledge can affect the interpretations of the data, however, to try put the issue to rest, more attention should be paid to the influence on the context. Secondly, qualitative research approach results are given low credibility by policy makers (Rahman and Rashid, 2017). This is supported by Xiong (2022) who states that qualitative research is regarded as a time-consuming method as it requires interpretations and analysis of data, and it can be difficult to some extent. The amount of work that qualitative researchers invest in collecting, interpreting and analysing data can become too much to bear and can make researchers to collect inadequate data which can result in unreliable findings. Furthermore, the whole research population is generalised due to the usage of smaller sample sizes when conducting research (Harry and Lipsky, 2014). Lastly, a researcher may generalize research results of the whole population due to the amount of time it actually takes to analyse the cases that can be done in a short period of time (Flick, 2011). Xiong (2022) adds that generalising is considered as a weakness when it comes qualitative research compared to quantitative research, as researchers are generally condemning when it comes to generalising.

Quantitative research approach is defined by Taherdoost (2021) as a method that involves using numerical data obtained from observations to provide explanations and

insights on the phenomena that the observations can indicate regarding them. It is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables that can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numerical data can be analysed using statistical procedure (Cresswell, 2014). According to Patel and Patel (2019), the main concerns of quantitative research are measurements of the phenomena with regards to quantity by focusing more on statistical analysis. This definition is strengthened by Rasinger's (2013) addition that this research approach attempts to gather responses to the questions of 'how much' and 'how many', and lays heavy stress on measuring variables that exist in the social world (Rahman and Rashid, 2017). This research method deals with numbers and analysing data through statistics as the data is collected in a quantifying manner. This research approach gives the researcher the platform to ask questions and also get answers through variables that are measurable (Mohajan, 2020). Quantitative research uses techniques such as simulation, mathematical modelling, surveys, laboratory experiments, statistical analysis, and structured equations modelling and econometrics to collect data (Goundar, 2012). Therefore, quantitative research gives attention to objectivity in the collection of quantifiable variables and conclusions from samples of a population (Queiros et al., 2017). As Mohajan (2020) explains, in a quantitative research, researchers decide what to study, ask specific and narrow questions, collect quantifiable data from participants, analyse these numbers using statistics, and conduct the inquiry in an unbiased and objective manner. In sum, quantitative research can be defined as a form of research that relies on the methods of natural sciences, which produces numerical data and hard facts (Ahmad, Wasim, Irfan, Gogoi, Srivastava, and Farheen, 2019).

The advantage of using quantitative research approach is that it is more objective, and the researcher can conduct the study in public (Xiong, 2022). Furthermore, chances of the researcher being biased when collecting data are slimy as the researcher will not be in direct contact with the participants of the study (Daniel, 2016). In such cases, researchers are more disposed to collect data which can be interpreted using computers, and data collection can be through online platforms, experiments or even through pencil-paper questionnaires (Xiong, 2022). Furthermore, generalizations can be made from the findings towards a huge population and that can apply in separate settings. This attests to the fact that quantitative research results are mostly accurate and reach conclusions that are standardised even when a large sample size is involved in the research.

Moreover, when quantitative research approach is used, consumption of time is less and there is effectiveness in the data collection and analysis process.

The disadvantage of using quantitative research approach is that there is lack of development in terms of comprehending the participants' point of view (Xiong, 2022). This can be due to the statistical analysis done because the numbers may not explain the whole truth of the data collected to the researcher, and that may lead to the researcher making generalizations instead of getting the truth from the participants based on their point of view. Furthermore, it fails to take account of people's unique ability to interpret their experiences and construct their own meanings (Goundar, 2012). Moreover, this approach is not totally objective because the researcher is subjectively involved in the very choice of a problem as worthy of investigation and in the interpretation of the results, and due to the complexity of human experience, it is difficult to rule out or control all the variables (Goundar, 2012).

Mixed-methods research is a research approach that incorporates multiple methods to address research questions in an appropriate and principled manner, which involves collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2015). The approach employs a combination of both qualitative research and quantitative research in a single study (Halcomb, Massey, and Gunowa, 2023). The main objective of this research approach is to reduce the limitations on both quantitative and qualitative approaches and build on their strength. According to Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri (2021), the mixed-methods approach comprises philosophical assumptions that give direction on the collection and analysis of data from different sources in a single study. It permits the researcher to be able to get help regarding the generalization of findings and implications of the issues researched, and to be able to answer research questions with the adequate depth and breadth (Enosh, Tzafrir, and Stolovy, 2014). As Sharma, Bidari, Bidari, Neupane and Sapkota (2023) further explain, the usage of both qualitative and quantitative methods can offer a better understanding of the phenomenon. The mixed-methods research approach gives the researcher an allowance to incorporate and gather numerous sources of data in order to study difficult problems (Poth and Munce, 2020).

The advantage of using a mixed-methods approach is that two methods are better than one method, and therefore, it may give better insights with regards to the phenomena being researched, which might not be well comprehended if only qualitative method or

quantitative method is used (Dawadi et al., 2021). When the qualitative data or quantitative data alone is insufficient to give answers to the research questions, then mixed-methods research becomes an advantage and a suitable choice for the study process (Sharma, et al., 2023). Furthermore, Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016) mention that the mixed-methods approach helps to obtain more rigorous conclusions, by employing two methods in such a way that the strengths of the qualitative methods offset the weaknesses of the quantitative methods and vice versa. It might be advantageous for the researcher to be able to use two approaches to try solve the research problem, and obtaining a variety of data from participants might lead to better results. The downside of the mixed-methods approach is that it can be time-consuming because both qualitative and quantitative methods need time for analysis and interpretation of results, which might be a bit challenging for the researcher.

In this research study, qualitative approach was used to collect relevant information from the study participants. According to Tenny, Brannan and Brannan (2022), qualitative research accumulates the experiences, behaviours and perceptions of participants. Qualitative research approach was suitable for this research project because it helped the researcher collect data from the learners through documents (essay scripts) and from educators through semi-structured interviews. These qualitative data collection methods helped answer the 'how', 'when', 'why', and 'who' questions, which helped the researcher get to the bottom of the problem identified and also propose possible solutions to the learners' writing problem.

According to Cropley (2023), the core property of qualitative research is that it examines the way people make sense out of their own concrete, real-life experiences in their own minds and in their own words. In this study, the researcher used the qualitative method in order to allow for an understanding of the participants' real life experiences with regard to the problem under investigation. The qualitative research approach was able to get the participants express themselves fully, allowing the researcher to examine how the participants made sense of their own real-life experiences in the whole process of producing English written texts. Qualitative research approach was appropriate because the aim of this research was to uncover the main source of the learners' poor writing skills through a generation of qualitative data. The researcher was concerned about the learners' experience when it came to writing, and wanted to know about the experiences they had regarding academic English writing. Moreover, qualitative approach was the

most suitable method for this research study because the researcher was able to understand the social aspects of the participants and how their social life had an impact on their writing skills. The researcher had a chance to go into detail regarding the problem identified and was able to get qualitative content from the participants.

### **3.3. Research design**

According to Pandey and Pandey (2015), research design is a master plan specifying the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the needed information. It is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance (Peniel, 2015). Khanday and Khanam (2019) define research design as a plan that the researcher acquires in order to give answers to questions in a valid way. Creswell (2014) explains research design as the type of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches that provides specific direction for procedures in research design. According to Khanday and Khanam (2019), a research design is a logical and systemic plan prepared for directing a research study, it specifies the objectives of the study, the methodology and techniques to be adopted for achieving the objectives. Research design is considered as the glue that holds the elements of the research together, and it is regarded as the structure of research as it holds the study together (Akhtar et al., 2016).

Cresswell (2014) identifies different research designs under each research approach, namely: experimental designs and surveys for quantitative research; narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study for qualitative research; and convergent studies, explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, transformative, embedded, or multiphase designs for mixed-methods approach. A survey involves studying a sample of a certain population to get the opinions, attitudes, or numeric description of bends from the sampled population (Creswell, 2014). It comprises structured interviews, longitudinal studies which utilize questionnaires and cross-sectional instruments for the collection of data with the aim of generalizing from a population sample (Fowler, 2009). Experimental research aims to determine whether an outcome can be influenced by a specific outcome (Creswell, 2014). This can be done by giving a particular group a specific treatment and gatekeeping it from the other group, and determine how each group performed under the varied circumstances.

Narrative research is defined as a qualitative methodology which is based on the nature of being people-orientated as it is centered on people's life stories (Ntinda, 2020). The researcher then retells the information into a narrative chronology. According to Creswell (2014), phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experience of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experience of several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Grounded theory, according to Mohajan and Mohajan (2022), is an inductive methodological approach which is grounded in reality as it is imbedded in social sciences and other related subjects, and it is concerned about social processes which are generated by the theory. Without the consideration of the method being obtained from reality which is verifiable, this method aims at comprehending peoples' perspectives with regards to their experiences (Taherdoost, 2021).

According to Creswell (2014), ethnography is a design inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behavior, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period. This research design elaborates that the ethnographers are engaged in the local setting as they conduct empirical research, and they use qualitative methods such as open interviews and observations (Sluka, 2016). This implies that ethnographers are more involved in the lives of the participants as they are frequently in the same context with their participants when conducting the study. Case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation in which the research develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014).

Creswell (2014) defines convergent parallel mixed methods as a form of mixed methods design in which a researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. The researcher, in this design, collects data from both forms of data simultaneously and then interprets the results. Explanatory sequential mixed methods are a design whereby the researcher conducts quantitative research and comes to analysis of the results and then the results are explained in detail using qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The first quantitative research data is then explained further in relation to the qualitative data.

The research design adopted for this research was a case study. A case study is an approach which is effective when exploring issues that are difficult in a real-world setting (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). The research design was suitable for this study because, it focused on a specific case of sampled Grade 10 learners in a natural and authentic school and classroom environment. This study was aimed at exploring the learners' struggle in English essay writing by analyzing the grammatical errors that learners commit when they write essays. A case study helps researchers to focus on a specific case, and there are benefits in terms of the process and the outcomes of the study as you get granted the opportunity to gather data using multiple instruments, which gives the researcher a chance to have an in-depth look into interactions of groups or individuals (Schoch, 2020). The case study design allowed the researcher to study the participants' English writing output in a naturalized school setup, in order to generate authentic data regarding the problem under investigation. The research design allowed the researcher more insight into the learners' grammatical errors and draw informed conclusions about their nature and possible origins.

### **3.4. Research paradigm**

Paradigms represent the researcher's values and beliefs about the world and the way in which they define the world. In relation to research, the researcher's thoughts and beliefs about any issues explored would subsequently guide their actions. In essence, the paradigm adopted directs the researcher's investigation, which includes data collection and analysis procedures (Kamal, 2019). A paradigm, therefore, has important implications for every decision made in the research process (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

This study was conducted from an interpretivist perspective. Interpretivism is a paradigm which shows more concern with factors related to context and variables. It also takes into consideration that human beings and physical phenomena are different because it is believed that human beings and physical phenomena cannot be explored in the same way (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), interpretivists believe in socially constructed multiple ideas, which is what the researcher considered in this study in opting for interpretivism as the study's paradigm. The interpretivist outlook gave the researcher access and exposure to the different ideas that the participants had regarding the causes of grammatical errors in the learners' English essays. The participants expressed their

own beliefs and values with regards to the problem identified. According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), the main objective of an interpretivist research is not to discover universal, context and value-free knowledge and truth, but to try and understand the interpretations of individuals about the social phenomena they interact with. The researcher was able to get the participants' interpretation of the causes of the grammatical errors in their English essays as it was the social phenomena identified by the researcher. The researcher then made interpretations of the information given by the participants in order to gain insights into the issue under investigation. The participants were able to understand the social phenomena identified and they were able to respond accordingly.

Interpretivism also argues that knowledge and truth are subjective, historically and culturally situated, and based on the people's experiences and understanding (Ryan, 2018). This helped the researcher to get relevant information from the participants because they gave out their own subjective reflections about the causes of the grammatical errors in the learner participants' writing. The researcher was able to subjectively interpret the information given by the learner participants about their experiences with writing EFAL essays. The participating teachers also shared their own subjective experiences in assessing and teaching English to non-native speakers of the language, and also revealing what they know about the possible causes of the grammatical errors in their learners' written essays.

The interpretivist paradigm was, therefore, suitable for this study as it helped the researcher access the participants' experiences and interpretations regarding the problem under investigation. The paradigm permitted the researcher to view the world through perceptions and experiences of the participants (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). This paradigm was relevant because it also helped the researcher understand the nature of the grammatical errors in the learners' writing and be able to interpret the data, and eventually arrive at informed conclusions about possible sources of the grammatical errors and derive possible solutions to the problem.

### **3.5. Population and Sampling**

#### **3.5.1. Population**

In research methodology, population refers to the qualities of a particular group, and it also means the parent group which a sample has to be formed from (Pandey and Pandey,

2015). Population can also be defined as a set of all the units that hold variable characteristics under study and for which findings of research can be generalised (Shukla, 2020). Every research study depends on a specific population from which data will be collected. The population for this study consisted of 9 secondary schools in the Maboke Circuit, in the Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. All the 9 high schools in the Maboke Circuit offer English as a first additional language. The average enrolment per school is approximately 400 learners, with an average of 40 learners per class. All the schools offer Grades 8 to 12.

### 3.5.2. Sampling

According to Pandey and Pandey (2015), sampling means selecting a given number of subjects from a defined population as representative of that population. It also refers to individuals going through a selection from the population in such a way that there are equal chances for every individual to be part of the sample (Pandey and Pandey, 2015).

There are two types of sampling, namely: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. According to Bhardwaj (2019), probability sampling as sampling strategy that is used to select study participants in such a way that every element chosen has a known probability of being included. It is a known probability of each member of the population of being selected in the sample. In other words, every individual has a high chance of being sampled from the population, more especially if the population consists of elements with the same features. Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, is used when the population members do not know their chances of being selected (Bhardwaj, 2019). In this case, the researcher can search for the desired sample from the population with specific features.

For the current study, the researcher chose non-probability sampling, using the convenience sampling subtype to select one school from the total population of 9 schools. Convenience sampling is defined as selecting members of a sample based on their convenient accessibility (Bhardwaj, 2019). Only accessible members to the researcher were selected since they were easier to recruit to participate in the research study. Convenience sampling allowed the researcher to sample participants that were situated in the vicinity of the researcher's place of employment for easy and convenient access.

Furthermore, 20 Grade 10 learners and three EFAL educators were sampled to take part in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The researcher chose 20 learners who exhibited grammatical errors in the preliminary essay-writing task that was administered for the selection of learner participants to take part in the study. As Etikan et al. (2016) state, purposive sampling, is used by researchers to deliberately choose participants due to their possession of desired qualities. The qualities that were considered when sampling learners were poor English writing skills, demonstrated by the presence of grammatical errors in their written pre-selection essays. Three educators out of a total of 23 were also selected to participate in the study using purposive sampling. The teacher participants were purposively picked because they taught EFAL at the sampled school, and as such, they would be able to provide relevant research data.

### **3.6. Data collection**

Data collection is defined as a long-term practical strategy selected for reaching the aims of the researcher (Ganesha and Aithal, 2022). Findings of a research study should be based on research data rather than on the assumptions of the researcher (Bloomberg et al., 2015). According to Taherdoost (2021), data collection is the gathering of research data using methods which differ regarding certain variables of the study with the objective of employing them in the analysis of data to be able to achieve the study's results and obtain answers to the research questions.

Research data falls under two broad categories, namely: primary and secondary data. Primary data is defined as the type of data that is first-hand information, has not been published yet and no individual can change it (Taherdoost, 2021). Primary data is the kind of data which scholars collect under the guidance of the research questions and variables, and it is bound to be realistic, reliable, objective, original, authentic, valid and unpublished (Ganesha and Aithal., 2022). Primary data can be collected through data collection instruments such as surveys, case-studies, diaries, questionnaires, interviews, focus group interviews, and observations. These data collection methods are authentic and can be used by the researcher to arrive at results and conclusions that can be considered authentic and reliable. As Taherdoost (2021) correctly states, results of a study can improve and be of high quality when primary data collection sources are used. Secondary data, on the other hand, is the type of data collected from published sources and may serve different purposes in the research (Taherdoost, 2021). This is data collected using

existing literature which has already been published and was not primarily gathered by the researcher. Secondary data gives motivation to come up with relevant research questions, hence it is required in a research study (Ganesha and Aithal, 2022). The advantage of secondary data is that it is inexpensive and less time consuming to collect since it readily available and accessible. Secondary data comprises books, journals, published printed sources, letters, magazines and other readily established materials.

In qualitative research, primary data can be collected through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documents. According to Taherdoost (2021), a questionnaire is one of the common methods of collecting data from participants in a form of giving their own written answers to the researcher's questions, and that affords the researcher the needed information for a research study. Roopa and Rani (2017) explain a questionnaire as the main means of collecting quantitative primary data in a standardized way so that the data is internally consistent and coherent for analysis. Questionnaire can be easy to administer as it is designed on a page and distributed to different study participants. It affords the researcher access to a lot of information that can be provided in privacy by study participants.

Interviews are also regarded as primary data collection tools because they give deep descriptions (Bloomberg et al., 2015). They are formal meetings between the interviewer and the interviewee with an aim of getting relevant answers for the questions posed at the interviewee. The three main types of interviews are structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews involve preparing questions before the interview session and allowing the interviewees to respond to the same set of questions (Taherdoost, 2021). This type of interviews is structured in the sense that a specific set of predetermined questions is used to elicit research data from respondents. Structured interviews allow the researcher to capture the participants' responses in a categorized manner as set out by the research questions (Stuckey, 2016). Semi-structured interviews ask guided questions that allow the interviewer to expand on in order to extract information from the interviewee (Taherdoost, 2021). This can be in the form of follow up questions posed to the interviewee to prompt further elaboration on the responses given. As Stuckey (2016) explains, semi-structured interview questions are set looking at the covered topic for the research, and the answers provided by the interviewee determine the direction of the interview. Unstructured interviews do not follow any predetermined line of questioning. They are an informal method of interviewing conducted casually as a

conversation and with no guidance for the interviewer (Taherdoost, 2021). This type of interview has the likelihood of engaging with components of information that are real and pivotal and it has deals with people's in-depth perspectives and experiences (Bihu, 2020). Observation method is defined by Kumar (2022) as a method to observe and describe the behavior of a subject, and it involves the basic technique of simply watching the phenomena until some hunch or insight is gained. Observation is one of the most diverse methods and a significant method to be incorporated into social sciences research (Ciesielska, Boström and Öhlander, 2018). Observations have to do with the researcher and the participants' interaction. Observation method is considered to be a proper technique that can be used to evaluate methods of teaching in the classroom (Taherdoost, 2021). According to Kumar (2022), the advantage of the observation method is that it is direct and helps to study behavior as it unfolds in a natural setting, and also helps in analysing contextual background. Documents are another method of collecting data in the form of written texts, reports, records or files.

For the current study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and primary documents.

### 3.6.1. Semi-structured interviews

The three sampled educators were interviewed using the semi-structured interview schedule in Appendix D. Semi structured interviews are more engaged in questions which are open-ended, or it can be an incorporation of both closed and open-ended questions and they have follow-up questions as well the 'why' and 'how' questions (Adams, 2018). This type of interview gives the researcher more information because there are no strict questions to follow when conducting the interviews. The main focus of the interviews with the educators was to solicit their perspectives on the learners' poor writing skills and the strategies that could be applied to solve the problem. All the interviews were conducted in one day, and each session lasted for approximately 30 minutes. A voice recorder was used to capture the interview proceedings.

### 3.6.2. Documents

Learners were tasked to write a descriptive essay of 500 words on the topic "My dreams for the year 2023" under controlled classroom conditions. The essay scripts were

collected and served as primary documents for subsequent analysis. The main focus was to identify and analyze the nature of grammatical errors committed.

### **3.7. Data analysis**

Data analysis is defined as a process of renovating, modernizing, checking, examining and displaying the data to explore important data patterns so that a decision can be made regarding the problem (Sabah, Hassan, and Qadri, 2022). According to INTRAC (2017), the aim of data analysis is to help turn raw data into knowledge, which can then be used for decision-making and other purposes, data analysis can take place at any stage of a project. The researcher chose qualitative data analysis because the research followed the qualitative research approach. Qualitative data analysis is used to analyze reports, cases, quotes, transcripts or even photos (INTRAC, 2017). The researcher used thematic data analysis and document analysis to analyze data collected through semi-structured interviews and primary documents respectively.

#### **3.7.1. Thematic data analysis**

Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Dawadi (2020), thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets, it is a search for themes that can capture the narratives available in the account of data sets. Interview data was analyzed by gathering all the interview transcripts and going through them and looking for commonalities in terms of how the participants had responded to each of the interview questions and generating unifying themes accordingly.

#### **3.7.2. Document analysis**

Document analysis is defined as a research method which comprises analyzing different forms of documents including articles, journals, books, newspapers, it is also regarded as a valuable method as it has been utilized for numerous years (Morgan, 2022). The learners' essay transcripts were analyzed by identifying and analyzing the grammatical errors committed. The identified errors were classified according to their nature and type, and possible sources of their origin were determined based on the classification.

### **3.8. Quality Criteria**

### 3.8.1. Credibility

Credibility has to do with believing that there is truth in the results of a study (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). The researcher used different methods of data collection to get results which were credible by acquiring in-depth information through both the interviews with educator participants and the written essays from Grade 10 learners. According to Chauke (2022), credibility can also be referred to as a degree of reliability of a study, based on the correctness of the analysis of data and the participants' original views. To ensure credibility, the conducted interviews were voice recorded to maintain authenticity. The original essay manuscripts were also preserved for easy verification.

### 3.8.2. Dependability

Dependability refers to the ability of a study be replicated on a similar site and still yield same results (Bloomberg et al., 2019). Dependability is similar to reliability which has to do with the constancy of getting to the same research findings under any similar conditions (Mamba, 2019). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that dependability implies that the findings of the research in a comparative setting can be duplicated with comparative participants. To ensure dependability in the study, the research processes were reported in detail to create a prototype model that can be used by other researchers to reproduce the study elsewhere. If there is any change of context, it is important that the researcher mentions it as it may temper with the research results.

### 3.8.3. Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the research findings are not biased, or do not reflect any undue bias by the researcher (Bloomberg et al., 2019). Confirmability has to do with other people being able to confirm the research results (Mamba, 2019). There should be participants validation whereby one's interpretation can be confirmed based on the findings of the participants (Mamba, 2019). The researcher ensured that data was collected in an organised and recoverable manner so that the participants and readers could access the data. The researcher voice recorded the interview data and preserved original manuscripts of the learners' essay to strengthen data confirmability. Also, member checking was applied to ensure confirmability in the proposed study by allowing

the participants to verify their responses as captured by the researcher during the data collection process.

#### 3.8.4. Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of a study are transferable to other locations or circumstances (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Transferability was ensured in the study by ensuring that the selected sample is a good representation of the population from which it was extracted. This was to ensure that the obtained results of the study are transferrable to the other high schools within the designated population. In qualitative research, transferability is considered to be a huge challenge because the most important instruments are the participants, and it is considered a risk to permit deductions in research information. However, the improvement of transferability in qualitative research can be done by specifying the research strategies, settings of the research and the primary assumptions of the study (Mamba, 2019). The researcher gave a full description of the participants involved in the study, and a full description of how the research process took place so that the next person can gauge whether the researcher's findings can be transferable to a different setting.

#### 3.9. Ethical considerations

Ethical research aspects are an important component of a research study. The researcher should ensure the safety of participants by not subjecting them to undue stressful conditions and protect them from harm at all costs (Cacciattolo, 2015). The researcher should follow all ethical research principles to ensure that the participants are safe and the research conducted does not compromise them in any way possible.

##### 3.9.1. Permission

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the university's Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC). After the researcher was granted ethical clearance, letters were written to both the principal of the sampled school and the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education as represented by the circuit manager to seek their permission to conduct the study. The letters to seek permission clearly stated all the details of the research study, and also gave assurance that the data collected will not lead back to the participants and the name of the school will also not be mentioned in any way.

### 3.9.2. Consent and assent

Consent forms were issued out to parents for them to grant consent on behalf of their minor children to participate in the study. This was because the learners sampled as participants were under the age of 18, and their parents/guardians had to give permission on their behalf. Teachers were also given assent forms to sign in order to declare their own willingness to participate in the study. The aims and procedures of the study were thoroughly explained to the participants to facilitate their informed consent to participate in the study.

### 3.9.3. Protection from harm

The researcher committed not to cause any harm to the participants' psychological or physical being. The researcher avoided making any reference to offensive stereotypes and assumptions as well as making cruel statements about the study participants. The researcher also made sure to make the participants aware that should they feel uncomfortable about the study processes and procedures, they could withdraw from the study at any point without any consequence or retribution.

### 3.9.4. Confidentiality and anonymity

The researcher ensured the participants that none of the collected data would lead back to them as it would be presented anonymously for confidentiality purposes. The data was kept in confidence, and the participants were protected at all costs as their data was delinked from their identities. Pseudonyms were assigned to the sampled school and the participants to conceal their real identities. The participants were also assured that their real names would not appear anywhere in the research study and reports.

### 3.9.5. Voluntary participation

The participants were made aware that they could choose to withdraw from the study should they no longer feel like being participants as their participation was voluntary. The researcher also made it clear to the participants that they would not suffer any consequences if they decided to withdraw their participation as it was within their right to do so.

### **3.10. Conclusion**

The aim of the study was to investigate causes of grammatical errors in Grade 10 learners' English creative essays. The study followed a qualitative approach to collect data from the 20 Grade 10 learners and three EFAL teachers sampled to take part in the study. Semi-structured interviews and primary documents were employed as data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three English educators and the sampled learners were given a creative-writing task to generate primary documents for analysis. Inductive thematic data analysis and document analysis strategies were employed to analyse the collected data. The study was conducted from an interpretivist viewpoint and assumed a case study design which allowed the researcher to interact with participants in their authentic school and classroom setting.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Introduction

The aim of the study was to investigate causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays at a high school at Maboke Circuit, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. This chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of data which was collected from the 20 Grade 10 learners and the three EFAL educators using primary documents and semi-structured interviews respectively. The data collection process was aimed at finding answers to the following research questions that guided the study:

Main research question:

What evidence of grammatical errors is present in the learners' creative essays?

Research sub-questions:

What sources of influence can the learners' grammatical errors be attributed to?

What are the educators' views on the causes of the learners' grammatical errors?

What intervention strategies can be implemented to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays?

### 4.2. Participants' Profiles

#### 4.2.1 Learners' profiles

20 Grade 10 were purposively sampled to take part in the study. The profiles of the learners are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Learners' profiles**

Participants	Age	Number of years in Grade 10	Home language	Gender
Learner 1	17	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 2	17	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 3	17	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 4	17	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 5	16	1	Sepedi	Female
Learner 6	16	1	Sepedi	Female
Learner 7	17	1	Sepedi	Male
Learner 8	17	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 9	18	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 10	18	2	Sepedi	Male

Learner 11	17	1	Sepedi	Female
Learner 12	17	1	Sepedi	Male
Learner 13	16	1	Sepedi	Female
Learner 14	16	1	Sepedi	Female
Learner 15	16	1	Sepedi	Female
Learner 16	17	1	Sepedi	Male
Learner 17	17	1	Sepedi	Female
Learner 18	18	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 19	17	2	Sepedi	Male
Learner 20	15	1	Sepedi	Female

The table above outlines the learners' profiles in terms of age, gender, home language and the number of years in the current grade. These factors were noted since they could have direct or indirect implications for the study. The learners' ages ranged between 15 and 18 which indicates that some of the learners were actually a one or two years older than ideal age for Grade 10. As illustrated by the table, 9 of the 20 participants were repeating the grade. Learners who repeat grades usually struggle a lot academically, and they are also prone to experiencing language difficulties. As per the table, there were 8 females and 12 males who participated in the study. Since the learners were purposively selected based on their writing proficiency, this statistic shows that male learners mostly struggle with writing skills as compared to their female counterpart. Furthermore, all the sampled learners speak Sepedi as their home language. The implication is that English is the learners' additional language, which does not receive much practical attention outside the classroom. This might partly explain the learners' struggle regarding English writing skills. Moreover, Sepedi, as the learners' primary language, might be drawn upon as a convenient and readily available resource to facilitate their learning of English, increasing chances of language transfer between the two languages during the English learning process.

#### 4.2.2 Teachers' profiles

Profiles of the three sampled teachers are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Teachers' profiles**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Major subjects</b>	<b>Subjects taught</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>
<b>Teacher 1</b>	Bachelor of Education	English and Geography	EFAL (Grade 8) Geography (Grade 10) Sepedi (Grade 8)	23	2 years
<b>Teacher 2</b>	Bachelor of Education	English and Geography	EFAL (Grades 9 and 11) Geography (Grade 11)	27	2 years
<b>Teacher 3</b>	Bachelor of Education	Sepedi and Geography	English (Grade 10) Social sciences (Grade 9)	29	2 years

Table 2 above shows profiles of the teachers who took part in the study in terms of their qualifications, major subjects, subjects and grades currently taught at the school, and their teaching experience. All the teachers who took part in the study have a two-year teaching experience each. As such, they might still be trying to find their feet in the teaching career and are still in the process of accumulating experience and insights regarding challenges that learners face in the classroom. All the participants hold a bachelor's degree in education and have mostly majored in the subjects they teach at the school, except for Teacher 3 who has majored in Sepedi and Geography but teaches English and Geography as the allocated subjects at the school. This can have a bearing on the learners' English proficiency and competence since the teacher might not be well versed in the EFAL teaching methodology and strategies.

### 4.3 Presentation and analysis of findings

This section outlines the data that was collected from the study's participants, the data is analysed according to the type of research instrument used for data collection.

#### 4.3.1 Presentation and analysis of documents findings

The researcher collected data through documents, which were in the form of written essays. The 20 sampled learner participants were required to write an essay of about 500 words on the topic: "My dreams for the year 2023". The collected essays were individually analysed for grammatical errors, with specific focus on spelling, tense, word order, and punctuation errors. The analysis revealed the following grammatical errors in the learners' errors, as outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: Grammatical errors identified from the learners' essays**

Errors type	Number of cases
1. Spelling	95
2. Tenses	40
3. Word order	24
4. Punctuations	10

##### 4.3.1.1. Spelling errors

According to Table 3, the number of spelling cases identified were 95 in total from all the 20 essay scripts sampled. Examples of the spelling errors identified are contained in the following sentences:

- (i) I would like to achive my goals by the end of 2023 ("achive" instead of "achieve")
- (ii) I believe in my elders so much expesioly my mother ("expesioly" instead of "especially").
- (iii) We are tšheren we need support from our parents when it comes to dreams good for us ("tšheren" instead of "children")

Some of the spelling errors committed showed evidence of the learners' Sepedi home language influence. For example, the use of the word "tšheren" has traces of Sepedi language sound system since the "tšh" sound does not exist in the English language. The word emanates from the Sepedi vocabulary, and its use highlights the learners' tendency to draw on their knowledge of Sepedi home language structures and sound systems when writing English words and sentences. As evident from the learners' sentence samples, another cause of the spelling errors is that the learners write the words the way they pronounce them, which results in letter omissions as evident in the misspelling of "achieve" as "achive". The omission of the letter "e" reflects how the word is pronounced, and therefore, the misspelling showcases the learners' inability to differentiate between spoken and written language discourses. This observation is supported by Altamimi and Rashid (2019) who assert that overall, spelling errors can be a result of omission, or substitution or insertion, or the misplacement of a letter when writing a particular word. Furthermore, Al-Bereiki and Al-Mekhlafi (2015) indicate that lack of proper classroom instruction is one of the attributes to such spelling errors. This claim is corroborated by Johnston's (2000) American study, cited by Al-Bereiki and Al-Mekhlafi (2015), that aimed at investigating teachers' practices and beliefs with regards to spelling instruction. The interviewed teachers who participated in the study revealed that spelling was not adequately addressed in the elementary school curriculum, and that today's students spell worse than students did in the past. This is an indication that the curriculum did not adequately support spelling acquisition, leading to students not knowing how to spell words correctly. Moreover, teachers do not create ample opportunity for learners to practise spelling in the classroom, hence the prevalence of the spelling problem.

#### 4.3.1.2. Tense errors

Another grammatical error that was evident in the learners' essay manuscripts was the use of incorrect verb tenses. As reflected in Table 3, there were 40 cases of instances where learners committed tense errors in their writing, which could be an indication of the misalignment between the type of essay they were required to write, and the verb tense they should use in presenting their ideas. For instance, when writing a narrative essay, the past tense is the appropriate tense to use to narrate events that happened in the past. As such, when learners are not familiar with writing conventions for different types of essays, verb tense errors are likely to permeate their essay writing. Evidence from the

analysed essays showed that learners have a poor concept of verb tenses. The following sentence extracts from the essays are a case in point:

- (i) She given me mind.
- (ii) Some dreams they becomed true.
- (iii) If you dream some scary dream is going to happened.

Evidently, the learners' inadequate knowledge of verb tenses negatively affects their clarity of expression when writing English narrative essays. This distortion of meaning is demonstrated by examples such as: "She given me mind" which was supposed to be "She gave me an idea", "Some dreams they becomed true" instead of "Some dreams came true", and "If you dream some scary dream is going to happened" instead of "If you dream some scary dream, it is going to happen". Such tense errors can be attributed to insufficient exposure to ideal reading materials and not being familiar with basic English language rules. As Ouledkaddour and Traiki (2022) concur, learners who have poor reading habits tend to encounter poor usage of tenses. This affects their verbal and written communication as they do not use tenses suitable for the writing genre at hand. The learners in the present study could not differentiate between simple and continuous tenses. Their essays contained an inappropriate overlap in the use of different tenses since they could not stick with the appropriate verb tense for the assigned essay-writing task and topic. The learners mostly alternated between past and present verb tense forms, which distorted the meaning of their writing.

#### 4.3.1.3. Word-order errors

The number of word-order errors identified in the learners' essays were 24 in total. Word order proved to be a problem in the learners' essay writing since they could not properly put words in order so that the constructed sentences could make sense. Examples of these instances from the learners' essays are:

- (i) Which she was sleeping without any to sit down.
- (ii) Let my mother disappointed.
- (iii) They will going to destroy.

These sentences are meddled up and do not make sense to the reader. The researcher was also puzzled and could not figure out what the learners wanted to say, or which ideas were being brought forth. This demonstrated that the learners had ideas that they could

not express clearly in writing due to their lack of knowledge regarding English syntactical rules and conventions. Their lack of practice in English writing also seemed to have had a negative impact on their sentence construction skills. According to Momade (2021), a learner's first language usually differs from the target language when it comes to the way in which words in a sentence are structured and arranged. As such, this increases chances of the learners' propensity to produce poorly coordinated sentences. This means that mother tongue influence plays a role in the learners' word order problem and poor sentence construction because learners tend to think in their home language before writing down ideas in the target language. This largely accounts for the word order errors found in the learners' essays, which interferes with the meaning they intend to convey through writing. There was also evidence of direct translation of sentences from Sepedi into English. For example, one learner wrote: "in the middle of the people", which is a direct translation from Sepedi language ("gare ga batho"), the English equivalent of which is "in front of people". This mother tongue influence aggravates the grammatical errors that learners commit since meaning and sense of coherence is lost when learners perform direct translation of ideas from their Sepedi home language into English. This is mainly due the structural discrepancies that exist between the two languages. English grammatical rules differ from those that are applicable in Sepedi, hence the confusion and difficulty encountered by the learners when constructing English sentences.

#### 4.3.1.4. Punctuation errors

Another identified grammatical error was the incorrect use of punctuation marks. The number of cases identified in the learners' essays were 10 in total. The learners seemed unaware of the importance of punctuation marks and their effect on meaning construction when writing essays. Each punctuation mark serves a specific purpose in the coherence of written texts, which should be consciously considered in order to produce meaningful and structurally sound essays. The analysis of the learners' essays showed that learners did not know the effect and use of an apostrophe in written texts. This was evident in sentences such as: "I wan't to pass my exams", "Don't you eat here", "Lets go now", "I started taking my studies serious I started by writing them down in a diary I wanted to make sure I follow them without making any mistake I also pasted some notes on my wall in my room", whereby the apostrophe, was inappropriately used, and some punctuations such as commas, full stops and question marks were left out. Learners also demonstrated difficulty in using different punctuation marks in their writing and that affected the meaning

of their sentences. According to Nurwahyuni (2017), the main purpose of using punctuation marks is to split up phrases and words within a sentence. If a student cannot apply that, their sentences will be without meaning and the reader could perceive the sentence in a wrong way. The difficulties are mainly an indication of incompetency and lack of knowledge of written language rules.

#### 4.3.2. Presentation and analysis of interview findings

The three sampled teachers were asked the following 5 questions in order to solicit their views regarding the learners' grammatical errors. The participants responded as follows to each of the interview questions:

##### 4.3.2.1. Which errors do you mostly come across when marking the learner's essays?

When asked about the kind of errors which they come across when marking the learners' essay scripts, the teachers gave out their various responses to explain the kind of errors they come across when marking learners' essays. The participants' responses to the question could be clustered as follows:

##### (a) Tense errors

Teacher 1 mentioned that: *"What I have observed from my side is the issue of tenses, usage of wrong tenses, for example, instead of using present tense, a learner uses present perfect or present continuous, instead of using past tense, they use the past continuous. So, such are considered grammatical errors that learners commit, an example can be that, a learner wants to express himself and he has to use a present continuous tense that 'I am dreaming' instead the learner says 'I am dream', so the verb 'dream' has to be in present continuous tense, it should be 'dreaming', not 'dream' so such expressions make the learners to miss the point"*. Teacher 1's response indicates that the issue of tense is a problem to the learners, it shows that learners can get confused as to which tenses they should use when writing. This negatively affects clarity of expression as it interferes with meaning. Tense errors distort the message learners wish to convey in their writing as sentences are temporally displaced. The teaching of tenses should be emphasised. According to Bukit (2020), tenses are there to avoid any misunderstandings in communication and to also make communication more clear. To

avoid tenses becoming an interference in meaning, teaching tenses should be more emphasised.

(b) Spelling errors

Teacher 1 also expressed that spelling errors are also a contributory factor towards the learners' poor grammar, stating that: *"One other thing is the issue of spelling errors, learners do commit such errors when writing essays because I have realised that mostly they may do very well in other grammatical aspects, but when it comes to spelling, it becomes a problem. I think it is because they are not familiar with these words, they just hear them and be able to use them correctly but, they are not able to write them appropriately. So, spelling is a challenge."*

Teacher 2 also mentioned that: *"Another common error that I always come across when marking essays is spelling errors. Learners commit a lot of spelling errors."* The two educators reportedly come across spelling errors when they mark learners' essays. These errors interfere with the meaning of words since the teachers themselves also find it difficult to figure out the learners' intended meaning as it is misrepresented by the misspelt words. Even a slight mis-sequence of alphabets in a word can disrupt the sense of the entire sentence. As Fitria (2020) observes, not spelling words correctly may cause misunderstandings. The spelling errors are also a reflection of the learners' limited vocabulary range that mostly stems from an inadequate exposure to standard written English.

(c) Incorrect use of pronouns

Teacher 1 mentioned that learners do not have a good concept of English pronouns, which is reflected in their use of inconsistent pronoun references when writing essays. The participant stated that: *There is wrong usage of pronouns, for example, instead of using 'she', the learner would use 'he'. I do not know if the learners do not understand the meaning of the pronouns because they happen to use them where they are not appropriate to use because you'll find that in an essay the learner speaks about a boy, but the pronouns used are 'she' and 'her'.* This hints at the learners' lack of knowledge regarding the referential value of pronouns and how they should be used in sentences. It can also be an indication that the learners are not adequately familiar with the English parts of speech, which translates into their poor demonstration of how words belonging

to different parts of speech categories relate to each other in discourse. Teacher 3 also supported this line of argument by stating that: *“The errors I encounter when marking are the incorrect usage of some language conventions such as how your paragraphs must be coherent. Learners just write without planning their work and that is evident when marking.”* These language conventions form an essential part of English grammar and if learners do not master them, their grammar is likely to be very poor, hence, the teacher mentioned that their writing is not coherent. When learners fail to master the language structures and conventions, their writing becomes poor and makes no meaning because language structures and conventions are the core language basics that inform sentence construction and choice of vocabulary when writing.

#### (d) Incorrect punctuation

Incorrect use of punctuation was one of the errors that the teacher participants reported to come across when marking learners' essays. Teacher 2 indicated that learners fail to use correct punctuation when writing essays. The teacher mentioned that: *“Learners fail to use the correct punctuation, I discovered that a lot of learners that I teach they just write long sentences without punctuation marks, and this impedes the intended meaning of the text. This creates confusion and difficulty in understanding the text.”* When words are punctuated incorrectly, meaning is affected. A typical example of this fact is the use of apostrophe when writing the word 'it's'. The omission of the apostrophe in this instance would mean a shift in the meaning of the word from the contracted form of 'it is' to an indication of possession when 'its' is used. If a learner muddles the two words, the intended meaning will be lost or obscured. Furthermore, when learners fail to use appropriate punctuation to indicate whether a sentence is a statement or a question, more confusion may ensue. Ending a sentence in a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark forms an essential part of the meaning-making process when writing, and failure to punctuate sentences correctly will negatively impact the cohesion and coherence of written texts. Not using punctuation marks at all also causes meaning distortions that make reading texts less reader friendly. A different meaning may be conveyed if the punctuations are not properly used (Nurwahyuni, 2017).

4.3.2.2. By your own observation as an English educator, what do you think are the contributory factors to the committing of grammatical errors in the learners' writing?

The second interview question posed to the teacher participants was aimed to solicit their knowledge and views regarding factors that contribute to the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' writing. The teachers cited factors, such as lack of resources, lack of interest in the language, insufficient instructional time, and lack of vocabulary as contributory to the learners' grammatical challenges.

(a) Lack of resources

Teacher 1 indicated that: *“Lack of access to libraries, learners fail to do justice to grammatical rules because they are not familiar with, or they do not have English material that serves as a guideline to them and, they do not know the grammatical rules, or they do not see them to apply them, reason being that they do not have access to the material. If these learners would read novels/short stories, and all these sorts of English materials all the time, they were going to see how language and how words, and how sentences are constructed, and they wouldn't commit these little errors.”* This response identifies lack of access to relevant language materials as one of the factors that contribute to the learners' grammatical challenges. The learners' inadequate exposure to English materials aggravates their writing problems because, for learners to master the writing skill, they need to familiarise themselves with standard writing conventions through exposure to reading materials. If learners are not familiar with standard writing practices, they are likely to apply grammar rules incorrectly in their own writing since they do not have model writing to emulate. Limited exposure to reading materials does not help in cultivating a reading culture amongst learners, which also lowers their interest in writing. According to Liu and Zhang (2018), extensive reading is deemed to be an instructional method which helps to better students' language proficiency, which includes grammar awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and reading proficiency. Extensive reading that occurs outside the classroom has great benefits for the development of learners' writing competency as it expedites their acquisition of formal writing skills. Teacher 2 also supported this assertion by agreeing that: *“Lack of interesting reading material in schools contribute to grammatical errors as learners do not expose themselves to the language more often. Reading more often assists with recognition of words and of course improves how learners spell words and syntax.”* The bottom line here is that if learners are not exposed to reading materials, it sets them back as they will not be able to refine their writing skills adequately, resulting in them committing language errors when writing academically. This is backed up by Liu and Zhang (2018), who assert that, it is through

extensive reading that learners can enhance their knowledge and their attitude towards reading and they will end up acquiring better reading habits.

(b) Lack of interest in the language

Learners' lack of interest in the English language was also cited as another cause of their poor writing skills. Learners who are not fascinated by English literacy activities tend to find the acquisition of English literacy skills a difficult task. These learners are likely to divert their attention to activities that do not advance their literacy development, which results in poor development of writing skills. Teacher 3 mentioned that: *"As I observed our learners, most of them do not have the necessary language basics. They do not understand the English subject/language and that creates a challenge when they have to write."* Learners' lack of understanding of the English language contributes to the problem since they end up losing interest in the language. Since English is not their home language, they do not use it frequently enough to reach acceptable mastery levels of the language. Spending most of their time using their Sepedi home language does not enrich their English language learning experience since the two languages have different orthographies and structural incompatibilities. Hence, grammatical rules applicable in their Sepedi home language are not squarely equivalent to those that are applied in the English language. However, learners have a tendency to draw on their knowledge of their mother tongue to compensate for their English language inadequacies. The learners' general perceptions about the English language also serve as a self-imposed barrier in learning the language. They regard English as a difficult language to master and which only belongs in the classroom. As Teacher 2 explains: *"Learners' negative attitude towards English leads to ignorance of language learning. Most learners do not take language seriously."* The hostile attitude towards English could culminate into unwillingness and lack of interest in learning the language. At the back of their minds, learners have it that English is not their home language, and therefore, it is justifiably difficult to learn and master. Logically, when learners have a negative attitude towards the English language, chances of them learning and mastering it become relatively slim. Their hostile attitude towards the language limits their chances of interacting fully with the language. Since their language of teaching and learning is English, other school subjects taught through the medium of English are likely to suffer as a result.

(c) Insufficient instructional time

Teacher 1 indicated that lack of enough time is one of the contributory factors to the learners' language challenges. He mentioned that: *“English FAL has a lot of aspects which need to be taught and we only have five periods in a week and each period takes an hour, having to teach all these aspects and for understanding, in such limited time is a problem to these kids, they need more time to learn, practice and apply grammatical rules, so time is not enough to teach grammar”*. This applies to both teachers and learners because the amount of time allocated may not give the learners the full exposure they need in the subject. The EFAL subject has four (4) skills which have to be taught throughout the year and they all need to be thoroughly addressed and mastered (DBE, 2011). These skills are: Writing and Presenting, Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, and Language Structures and Conventions. The Language Structures and Conventions skill is allocated less time because it is assumed that its teaching and learning is incorporated into the other three language skills' activities. The significance of this uneven time allocation is that it is likely to result in learners not performing well as they will lack knowledge in some of the skills which did not receive enough attention in the classroom, and as such, their academic performance will be affected negatively.

(d) Lack of vocabulary

Teacher 2 mentioned that: *“Social media language, slang language and contractions affect the way learners write essays, as this language varieties are detected in their essays. Learners use contractions such as **WUD** which means **“What are you doing?”** obviously our learners are exposed to this language more than the formal or academic language, therefore, learners forget the formal spelling and syntax.”* Learners use informal language in their essays, they use abbreviations and other forms of social media language regardless of the formal nature of the academic writing context. Their limited repertoire of formal English vocabulary restricts their word choice and forces them to resort to using informal language as a compensatory language strategy. The learners' limited use of formal vocabulary manifests in their written essays as different forms of grammatical errors and poor meaning conveyance. It represents a missed opportunity for learners to experiment with language and make its learning an exciting experience. In their study, Surmanov and Azimova (2020) found that lack of vocabulary makes it difficult for the learners to learn and it also perpetuates poor reading skills. Inarguably, vocabulary development increases the learners' capacity to acquire knowledge and improve their writing skills.

#### 4.3.2.3. Which strategies can be applied to minimise the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays?

This question aimed at allowing the teacher participants the liberty to bring forth suggestive strategies that could be put in place to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays. Increased time allocation for grammar teaching, expanded opportunity to practise writing, and application of grammatical rules were suggested by the teachers as strategies to ameliorate the learners' writing problem.

##### (a) Increased time allocation for grammar teaching

The general feeling amongst the interviewees was that the notional time allocated for grammar teaching was not enough. Teacher 1 remarked that: *“More time must be allocated for grammar, as it carries more weight in language learning. Not getting enough time to teach grammar is affecting the way in which the learners apply the grammatical rules in their writing, grammar does not get enough time because there are other skills which are assessed as well in EFAL and they each need certain hours in a week”*. The current practice is that grammar is taught and assessed in conjunction with the other language skills, such as writing and presenting and reading and viewing. It does not receive any dedicated attention as a standalone component of the curriculum, and as such, insufficient focus is placed on developing and monitoring the learners' grammatical competence. This makes it difficult for teachers to track the learners' progress in terms of their writing skill development and devise appropriate intervention strategies and support programmes to effect improvements. As Cole and Feng (2015) observe, students also need some additional time to work for optimal knowledge and skill acquisition and refinement.

Teacher 2 also indicated that: *“The features of the language such as tenses, articles, punctuations, pronouns, prepositions, etc., should be taught independently, meaning that each aspect should be given enough time to deal with. The Language Structures and Conventions skill needs to be taught independently and not try to teaching it concurrently with the writing and presenting skills”*. By so doing, learners will hopefully be given ample opportunity to acquire and master different aspects of English grammar that can be applied synthetically when writing academic essays. This systematic and focused approach in teaching grammar will enhance the learners' language monitor system to

enable them to detect errors in their own writing and work towards producing relatively error-free written pieces.

(b) Increased opportunity to practise writing and apply grammar rules

The study participants identified creating opportunity for learners to practise essay writing as one strategy that could be implemented to address the learners' writing problem. Engaging learners in intensive writing practice was regarded as a helpful strategy in terms of providing learners with the opportunity to rehearse their formal writing skills and application of English grammar rules. Teacher 1 mentioned that: *"Teachers must enforce more writing. Learners sometimes spend most of their time doing other things than writing and applying the grammar that is learned from the lesson. After every grammar lesson, learners have to be given writing activities where they will be able to apply the grammatical aspects and rules"*. Teacher 3 also emphasised *"normalising writing essays more often so that learners can get used to formal writing style and how language rules are applied in writing, which is believed to make it easier for the learners to master writing and get to know all the required elements in an essay"*. Familiarizing learners with the writing process through various stages makes it easier for the goal to be reached (Cole and Feng, 2015). This sentiment was also shared by Teacher 2 who mentioned that *"writing skill should be emphasized by providing learners with weekly essays to write and then present them"*.

#### 4.3.2.4 What are the learners' attitudes and perceptions towards learning grammatical skills?

The teachers were asked about their learners' perceptions and attitudes towards learning English grammatical skills. Their responses showed a general concern about the learners' overly despondent attitude towards learning English grammar. Teacher 1 indicated that: *"Learners do not show much interest in the grammar lessons as they find them very challenging, their perception of grammar is that it is difficult and challenging to understand, and that makes them to lose hope and show little interest and not even try to participate in classroom discussions"*. This shows that the learners are passive in class when they are being taught grammatical skills and how to apply them in writing. In addition, Teacher 2 stated that: *"Learners are passive during grammar lessons, they feel that language is difficult and confusing to comprehend. Most of them during language tests, they omit answering grammar questions. Those who attempt answering the*

*questions, perform very poorly*". Teacher 3 also indicated that "*Learners' attitude towards grammar is flawed because most of them do not understand grammar, and grammar has a lot of concepts and aspects, so they do not understand how these things are connected, and in most cases they do not understand how to use grammar correctly, and this is seen in the writing because, when they write, that is when you will realise that this learner does not understand how to use conjunctions or punctuation marks, for example*". The learners' passiveness during lessons not only affects their academic performance, but also dips their confidence and interest in writing English essays. As such, their academic writing skills remain underdeveloped. This is supported by Gudu (2015) who mentions that learners' passiveness when learning a language can negatively affect how they perform in other school subjects.

#### 4.3.2.5 How do you teach grammar?

This question was asked in order to find out ways in which the teachers deliver their grammar lessons to the learners and determine the teaching philosophies that inform and regulate their EFAL classroom practice.

##### (a) Discussing previous question papers

Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 indicated that they work through previous question papers with learners as a way to develop their grammatical skills. Teacher 1 responded as follows: "*I make print outs of previous question papers and treat them with the learners in class*". Teacher 2 mentioned that: "*I make copies of previous question papers on the language structures and conventions part and treat the questions together with the learners and then give them an activity from another question paper*". The teaching philosophy that can be deduced from this grammar teaching strategy is that learners pick up aspects of grammar better when they attempt answering questions based on grammatical aspects. This implies that learners do not receive explicit instruction on aspects of grammar, they learn these aspects as they come up in the question papers discussed. According to Rahman and Rashid (2017), implicit instruction requires learners' involvement, interactive and communicative learning activities, and the focus is on language fluency instead of accuracy. One disadvantage of such an approach is that only aspects that come up in the discussed question papers will receive attention, which can result in an exclusion of crucial aspects learners might need to master for them to write grammatically sound

essays. Learning grammar implicitly can cause some incompetency as learners will only learn specific grammar content.

(b) Provision of notes and assessment tasks

Teacher 3 indicated that: *“When I teach grammar, in most cases I print out some handouts, for example, if today I am going to teach about adjectives and adverbs, I print out some notes and then as I teach, I make sure that they understand the definitions of concepts because they need to know those definitions first that, what is an adjective and give as many examples as possible because, I think the only way to ensure that these learners grasp the content is to make sure that they write, and you give them activities and those activities must be based on whatever concept that you will be teaching, so the only way to make sure that they grasp these things is to give them a lot of activities”*. The strategy used by Teacher 3 is giving notes to outline the content learners should master. Focus is also on giving assessment activities to create an opportunity for learners to apply their acquired knowledge and skills. The learners’ performance on these assessment tasks would give the teacher an indication of how far the learners have gone in mastering the presented content. This will allow the teacher to plan remedial teaching and intervention strategies to address any backlogs in the learning process.

#### **4.4. Discussion of findings**

The study aimed at investigating causes of grammatical errors in learners’ English essays. With the sociocultural theory guiding the investigation, it became possible for the researcher to get the relevant data and to find the main causes of the grammatical errors in the learners’ English essays. The findings of the study were based on the analysis of data collected through the teachers’ semi-structured interviews and learners’ essay documents. The following findings emanated from the study as backed up by the collected empirical data:

##### **4.4.1. Poor sense of spelling**

Findings of the study have revealed the learners’ poor sense of spelling as one of the sources of their grammatical errors in their essay writing. The researcher assessed and analysed the sampled learners’ essays by specifically focusing on incidences of errors in tenses, spelling, word order, and punctuation. Based on the analysis, spelling errors were the most glaring error type permeating the learners’ written essays. This was a

demonstration of how learners' poor spelling puts a strain on their clarity of expression when writing EFAL essays. This finding is in collocation with results of a study by Altamini and Rashid (2019) which also showed that spelling errors are the most dominant when it comes to English writing. In the cited study, lack of proofreading and poorly developed reading skills were revealed as the main reasons for the participants' poor spelling. Similarly, in the current study, inadequate exposure to formal English print materials was also identified as the main source of learners' misspellings. However, there was no concrete evidence in the study at hand that lack of proofreading was a detrimental factor to the learners' spelling ability. Given the learners' demonstrated poor general English language competence, their ability to recognise misspellings and correct them was not adequately developed to allow them to carry out any significantly effective proofreading of their own work.

The study conducted by Esther (2018) also corroborated findings of the current study by confirming that spelling errors are dominant in the learners' English writing activities. According to the study, reasons students commit spelling errors include the fact that there are few books that emphasise spelling rules in the school library. This study also showed that, the learners' spelling errors are caused by letter omissions which ranked at 31% out of all the causes of the spelling errors. Although there were similar cases of letter omissions in the current study's results, their frequency was too far and wide to have any concrete significance.

#### 4.4.2. Inadequate instructional time allocation

The teachers who were interviewed identified inadequate allocated time for teaching grammar as one of the contributory factors towards the grammatical errors which learners commit in their writing. They raised a common concern that the teaching time allocated for the Language Structures and Conventions component of the curriculum is proportionally limited as compared to the time allocation for the other three content segments in EFAL teaching. This is mainly due to the underlying assumption that the teaching of grammar is inherently embedded in the teaching of other sections of the EFAL curriculum, and therefore, there need not be any intensively dedicated time for explicit grammar instruction and teaching. As a result, the limited grammar teaching time becomes a barrier against which the learners' literacy advancement cannot easily prosper. This finding is in tandem with results of a study by Emvula (2020), which also

revealed lack of explicit grammar teaching as the main cause of learners' poor grammatical competence. The teacher participants in the cited study attributed the lack of sufficient grammar teaching time to work overload in other aspects of the EFAL curriculum, such as literature teaching. Learners need more practise in grammar through application of acquired language structures. However, the acquisition of these language conventions can optimally take place through intensive and dedicated grammar instruction and teaching. This would maximise learners' exposure to good language habits which they can emulate and replicate in their own writing.

#### 4.4.3. Lack of interest in English language learning and home language influence

The study has revealed that learners show lack of interest in learning the English language. This lack of enthusiasm about the language is reflected in the poor performance on general EFAL classroom language tasks, and particularly in the poor quality of written English essays they produce. Learners regard English as a difficult language to master, and as such, they spend more time communicating in their Sepedi home language than in English. According to Gudu (2015), learners resort to using their mother tongue rather than English language because they have a negative attitude towards English, and their teachers use their mother tongue to explain concepts that are difficult for them to understand. The learners' developed negative attitude towards the English language makes it difficult to advance their proficiency in the language, and when they are required to write English essays, they draw on their knowledge of their Sepedi home language to compensate for their English language knowledge gaps. As a result, their essay writing is marred by traces of language transfer incidences whereby they carry over Sepedi language structures into their writing of English essays. A similar finding was arrived at in a study conducted by Kumala, Aimah and Ifadah (2018), whereby home language interference and transfer was found to be the main cause of learners' poor writing. The cited study's findings revealed that home language interference and transfer accounted for the highest percentage (61%) of grammatical errors found in learners' written essays. Chauke (2022) also conducted a study on the causes of grammatical errors, and the findings of the study indicated that learners do direct translation from their mother tongue to English, which results in grammatical errors. The research evidence has shown that learners think ideas out first in their mother tongue before expressing them in written English, causing structural incongruencies and incoherence in their written essays.

#### 4.4.4. Insufficient writing practice

The study findings have revealed lack of writing practice as another cause of the learners' poor grammatical skills. Learners were found to engage insufficiently in essay writing activities, which did not auger well for adequate development of their writing skills. This did not provide them with ample opportunity to rehearse their application of the grammar rules in their writing. According to Cole and Feng (2015), writing practice should be one of the main goals for students so that their writing may be thoroughly thought through. More frequent participation in writing activities would help learners to improve their grammatical skills and general essay writing competence, minimising the prevalence of grammatical errors in their written essays. Findings of a study by Emvula (2020) confirmed that learners' grammatical errors are caused by lack of knowledge of grammar and ignorance of applicable grammar rules. Furthermore, the study revealed that the occurrence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays could be linked to ineffective methods and strategies used by EFAL teachers to facilitate grammar lessons. Therefore, inadequate opportunity to practise writing skills in combination with ineffective grammar teaching strategies account for a significant chunk of the grammatical errors found in the learners' written essays.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to investigate causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays. Qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and documents from the 20 sampled EFAL learners and three EFAL educators was analysed using inductive thematic analysis and document analysis strategies respectively. The results of the study revealed evidence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays identified as errors in punctuation, word order, tenses, spelling and pronoun use. These errors were found to be caused by lack of resources, learners' lack of interest in the English language, insufficient English instructional time, home language interference, and limited English vocabulary range. The possible strategies that emanated from the collected data to curb the learners' writing problem include increasing time allocation for grammar teaching, frequently engaging learners in essay-writing tasks, teachers using more effective teaching methods, and the use of stimulating teaching and learning materials.

The study was guided by Vygotsky's (1986) Sociocultural Theory. Accordingly, the study aligned with the theory's scaffolding sub-theory. According to the theory, learning is a social process whereby there is interaction between people, which results in the development of knowledge and skills (Cherry, 2022). Therefore, this theory was relevant in this study because it guided the researcher in the revelation that one of causes of the learners' grammatical errors in their writing was the teachers' inadequate scaffolding efforts of the learners' writing. As such, the solution to the learners' writing partly lies in the engagement of support services of the knowledgeable other in scaffolding learners' writing efforts.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

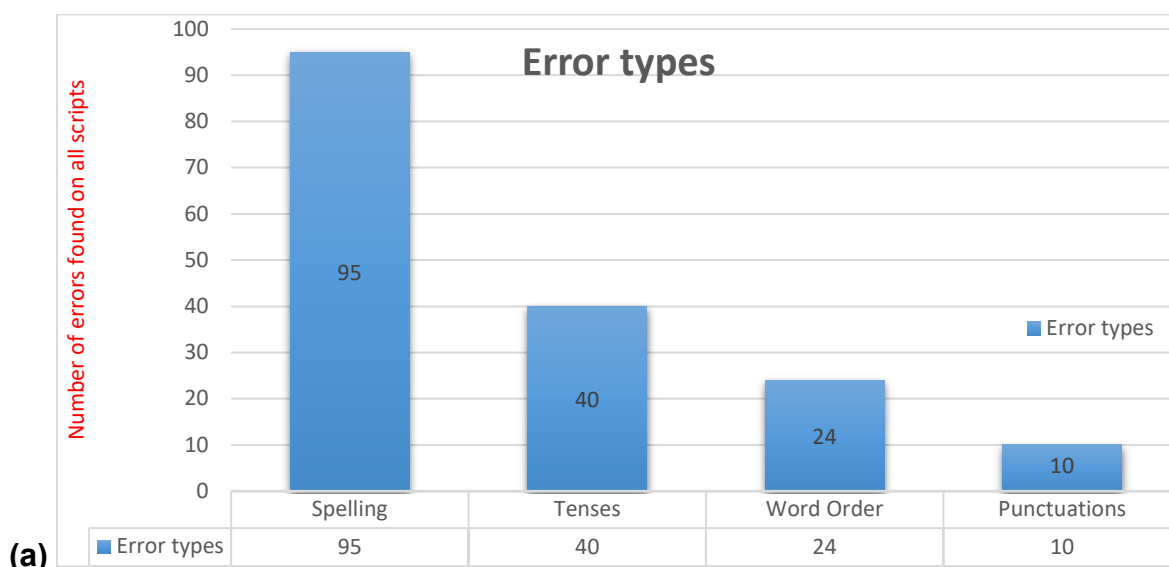
This chapter outlines the summary of research findings as revealed in the analysis of the data that was collected from the sampled teachers and learners through documents and semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the study was to investigate causes of grammatical errors in Grade 10 learners' English descriptive essays. This chapter also outlines the contributions and significance of the study and the recommendations emanating from the study.

### 5.2 Summary of results

#### 5.2.1 Summary of documents results

Results of the descriptive essay-writing task administered on the 20 sampled learners is summarised in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Summary of documents results**



#### (a) Spelling errors

According to the graph above, the number of spelling cases identified were 95 in total from all the 20 essay scripts sampled. Some of the spelling errors committed showed evidence of the learners' Sepedi home language influence. The use words that emanate from the Sepedi vocabulary highlighted the learners' tendency to draw on their knowledge

of Sepedi home language structures and sound systems when writing English words and sentences. As evident from the learners' sentence samples, another possible cause of the spelling errors is that the learners write the words the way they pronounce them, which results in letter omissions as evident in the misspellings. The omission of the letters also reflected how some words are pronounced, and therefore, this type of misspelling showcased the learners' inability to differentiate between spoken and written language discourses. The interviewed teachers who participated in the study revealed that spelling was not adequately addressed in the elementary school curriculum, and that today's students spell worse than students did in the past. This is an indication that the curriculum did not adequately support spelling acquisition, leading to students not knowing how to spell words correctly. Moreover, teachers do not create ample opportunity for learners to practise spelling in the classroom, hence the prevalence of the spelling problem.

#### (b) Tense errors

Another grammatical error that was evident in the learners' essay manuscripts was the use of incorrect verb tenses. As reflected in Table 4, there were 40 instances where learners committed tense errors in their writing, which could be an indication of their misalignment between the type of essay they were required to write, and the verb tense they should use in presenting their ideas. For instance, when writing a narrative essay, the past tense is the appropriate tense to use to narrate events that happened in the past. As such, when learners are not familiar with writing conventions for different types of essays, verb tense errors are likely to permeate their essay writing. Evidence from the analysed essays showed that learners have a poor concept of verb tenses. Evidently, the learners' inadequate knowledge of verb tenses negatively affects their clarity of expression when writing English narrative essays. This affects their verbal and written communication as they do not use tenses suitable for the writing genre at hand. The learners in the present study could not differentiate between simple and continuous tenses. Their essays contained an inappropriate overlap in the use of different tenses since they could not stick with the appropriate verb tense for the assigned essay-writing task and topic. The learners mostly alternated between past and present verb tense forms, which distorted the meaning of their writing.

#### (c) Word-order errors

According to Table 4, the number of word order errors identified in the learners' essays were 24 in total. Word order proved to be a problem in the learners' essay writing since learners could not properly put words in order so that the constructed sentences could make sense. These sentences were meddled up and did not make sense to the reader. The researcher was also puzzled and could not figure out what the learners wanted to say, or which ideas were being brought forth. This demonstrated that the learners had ideas that they could not express clearly in writing due to their lack of knowledge regarding English syntactical rules and conventions. Their lack of practice in English writing also seemed to have had a negative impact on their sentence construction skills. As such, this increased chances of the learners' propensity to produce poorly coordinated sentences. This means that mother tongue influence plays a role in the learners' word order problem and poor sentence construction because learners tend to think in their home language before writing down ideas in the target language. This largely accounts for the word order errors found in the learners' essays, which interferes with the meaning they intend to convey through writing. There was also evidence of direct translation of sentences from Sepedi into English. This mother tongue influence aggravates the grammatical errors that learners commit since meaning and sense of coherence is lost when learners perform direct translation of ideas from their Sepedi home language into English. This is mainly due the structural discrepancies that exist between the two languages. English grammatical rules differ from those that are applicable in Sepedi, hence the confusion and difficulty encountered by the learners when constructing English sentences.

#### (d) Punctuation errors

As illustrated by Table 4, another identified grammatical error was the incorrect use of punctuation marks. The number of cases identified in the learners' essays were 10 in total. The learners seemed to be unaware of the importance of punctuation marks and their effect on meaning construction when writing essays. Each punctuation mark serves a specific purpose in the coherence of written texts, which should be consciously considered in order to produce meaningful and structurally sound essays. The analysis of the essay documents showed that learners did not know the effect and use of an apostrophe in written texts, whereby the apostrophe, was inappropriately used, and some punctuations such as commas, full stops and question marks were left out. Learners also demonstrated difficulty in using different punctuation marks in their writing and that affected the meaning of their sentences.

## 5.2.2 Summary of semi-structured interview results

The researcher conducted interviews with three EFAL educators from the sampled school. The participants responded to five interview questions, which helped the researcher generate data in response to the operational research questions for the study.

### 5.2.2.1. Common language errors

The interview results showed that the teachers come across common errors when marking learners' essays. These include tense, punctuation, spelling, and pronoun errors.

#### (a) Tense errors

The teachers' response indicated that the issue of tense is a problem to the learners, as they get confused regarding the appropriate tense to use when writing. This negatively affects clarity of expression as it interferes with meaning. Tense errors distort the message learners wish to convey in their writing as sentences are temporally displaced.

#### (b) Spelling errors

Teachers also expressed that spelling errors are also a contributory factor towards the learners' poor grammar. These errors interfere with the meaning of words since the teachers themselves also find it difficult to figure out the learners' intended meaning as it is misrepresented by the misspelt words. Even a slight mis-sequence of alphabets in a word can disrupt the sense of the entire sentence. The spelling errors are also a reflection of the learners' limited vocabulary range that mostly stems from an inadequate exposure to standard written English.

#### (c) Incorrect use of pronouns

The teachers indicated that learners do not have a good concept of English pronouns, which is reflected in their use of inconsistent pronoun references when writing essays. They also mentioned that there were hints that the learners lack knowledge regarding the referential value of pronouns and how they should be used in sentences. This is an indication that the learners are not adequately familiar with the English parts of speech, which translates into their poor demonstration of how words belonging to different parts of speech categories relate to each other in discourse. The teachers also mentioned that when learners fail to master the language structures and conventions, their writing becomes poor and makes no meaning because language structures and conventions are

the core language basics that inform sentence construction and choice of vocabulary when writing.

(d) Incorrect punctuation

Incorrect use of punctuation was one of the errors that the teachers reported to have come across when marking learners' essays. The teachers indicated that learners fail to use correct punctuation when writing essays. The teachers mentioned that when words are punctuated incorrectly, meaning is affected. Furthermore, when learners fail to use appropriate punctuation to indicate whether a sentence is a statement or a question, more confusion may ensue. Ending a sentence in a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark forms an essential part of the meaning-making process when writing, and failure to punctuate sentences correctly negatively impacts the cohesion and coherence of written texts.

#### 5.2.2.2. Causes of grammatical errors

The participants also expressed their views regarding factors that could possibly contribute to the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' writing. They cited factors such as lack of resources, lack of interest in the language, insufficient instructional time, and lack of vocabulary as contributory to the learners' grammatical challenges.

(a) Lack of resources

Teachers cited lack of access to relevant language materials as one of the factors that contribute to the learners' grammatical challenges. The learners' inadequate exposure to English materials aggravates their writing problems because for learners to master the writing skill, they need to familiarise themselves with standard writing conventions through exposure to reading materials. If learners are not familiar with standard writing practices, they are likely to apply grammar rules incorrectly in their own writing since they do not have model writing to emulate. Limited exposure to reading materials is not helpful in cultivating a reading culture amongst learners, which also lowers their interest in writing. The teachers also mentioned that the bottom line is that if learners are not exposed to reading materials, it sets them back as they will not be able to refine their writing skills adequately, resulting in them committing language errors when writing academically.

(b) Lack of interest in the language

Learners' lack of interest in the English language was also cited as another cause of their poor writing skills. Learners who are not fascinated by English literacy activities tend to find the acquisition of English literacy skills a difficult task. These learners are likely to divert their attention to activities that do not advance their literacy development, which results in poor development of writing skills. Teachers also mentioned that the learners' lack of understanding of the English language contributes to the problem since they end up losing interest in the language. Since English is not their home language, they do not use it frequently enough to reach acceptable mastery levels of the language. Spending most of their time using their Sepedi home language does not enrich their English language learning experience since the two languages have different orthographies and structural incompatibilities. Hence, grammatical rules applicable in their Sepedi home language are not squarely equivalent with those that are applied in the English language. However, learners have a tendency to draw on their knowledge of their mother tongue to compensate for their English language inadequacies. The learners' general perceptions about the English language also serve as a self-imposed barrier in learning the language. They regard English as a difficult language to master and only belongs in the classroom. The hostile attitude towards English could culminate into unwillingness and lack of interest in learning the language. At the back of their minds, learners have it that English is not their home language, and therefore, it is justifiably difficult to learn and master. Logically, when learners have a negative attitude towards the English language, chances of them learning and mastering it become relatively slim. Their hostile attitude towards the language limits their chances of interacting fully with the language. Since their language of teaching and learning is English, other school subjects taught through the medium of English are likely to suffer as a result.

(c) Insufficient instructional time

Teachers indicated that lack of enough time is one of the contributory factors to the learners' language challenges. This applies to both teachers and learners because the amount of time allocated may not give the learners the full exposure they need in the subject. The EFAL subject has four (4) skills which have to be taught throughout the year and they all need to be thoroughly addressed and mastered. These skills are: Writing and Presenting, Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, and Language Structures and Conventions. The Language Structures and Conventions skill is allocated less time

because it is assumed that its teaching and learning is incorporated into the other three language skills' activities.

(d) Limited vocabulary range

The teachers mentioned that learners use informal language in their essays. They use abbreviations and other forms of social media language regardless of the formal nature of the academic writing context. Their limited repertoire of formal English vocabulary restricts their word choice and forces them to resort to using informal language as a compensatory language strategy. The learners' limited use of formal vocabulary manifests in their written essays as different forms of grammatical errors and poor meaning conveyance. It represents a missed opportunity for learners to experiment with language and make its learning an exciting experience. Vocabulary is the best way to make learners knowledgeable and be able to improve their writing skills.

#### 5.2.2.3. Strategies to improve learners' writing skills

The participants were also allowed to bring forth suggestive strategies that could be put in place to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays. Increased time allocation for grammar teaching, expanded opportunity to practise writing, and application of grammar rules were suggested by the teachers as strategies to ameliorate the learners' writing problem.

(a) Increased time allocation for grammar teaching

The general feeling amongst the interviewees was that the notional time allocated for grammar teaching was not enough. Teachers remarked that the current practice is that grammar is taught and assessed in conjunction with the other language skills, such as writing and presenting and reading and viewing. It does not receive any dedicated attention as a standalone component of the curriculum, and as such, insufficient focus is placed on developing and monitoring the learners' grammatical competence. This makes it difficult for teachers to track the learners' progress in terms of their writing skill development and devise appropriate intervention strategies and support programmes to effect improvements. Teachers also indicated that by so doing, learners will hopefully be given ample opportunity to acquire and master different aspects of English grammar that can be applied synthetically when writing academic essays. This systematic and focused approach in teaching grammar will enhance the learners' language monitor system to

enable them to detect errors in their own writing and work towards producing relatively error-free written pieces.

(b) Increased opportunity to practise writing and apply grammar rules

The study participants identified creating opportunity for learners to practise essay writing as one strategy that could be implemented to address the learners' writing problem. Engaging learners in intensive writing practice was identified as a helpful strategy in terms of providing learners with the opportunity to rehearse their formal writing skills and application of English grammar rules.

Furthermore, the teachers expressed their views regarding learners' perceptions and attitudes towards learning English grammatical skills. Their responses showed a general concern about the learners' overly despondent attitude towards learning English grammar. They indicated that learners do not show much interest in the grammar lessons as they find them very challenging. They also mentioned that learners are mostly passive in class when they are being taught grammatical skills and how to apply them in writing. In addition, the teachers stated that the learners' passiveness during lessons not only affects their academic performance, but also dips their confidence and interest in writing English essays. As such, their academic writing skills remain poor.

An inquiry was also made about the methods used by the teachers to deliver grammar lessons to the learners in order to determine the teaching philosophies that inform and regulate their EFAL classroom practice. The participants indicated that they work through previous question papers with learners as a way to develop their grammatical skills. The teaching philosophy that can be deduced from this grammar teaching strategy is that learners pick up aspects of grammar better when they attempt answering questions based on grammatical aspects. This implies that learners do not receive explicit instruction on aspects of grammar, they learn these aspects as they come up in the question papers discussed. Also, the teachers indicated that the strategies that they use are giving notes to outline the content learners should master. Focus is also on giving assessment activities to create an opportunity for learners to apply their acquired knowledge and skills. The learners' performance on these assessment tasks would give the teacher an indication of how far the learners have gone in mastering the presented content. This will allow the teacher to plan remedial teaching and intervention strategies to address any backlogs in the learning process.

### 5.3 Findings of the study as per research questions

The findings of the study addressed the preset research questions as follows:

#### 5.3.1. What sources of influence can the learners' grammatical errors be attributed to?

The study has found out that the main source of influence on the grammatical errors is the lack of interest in the English language, and the English subject as a whole. The lack of interest in the language does not only make the learners poor writers with inadequate writing skills, but it also affects their academic performance because other subjects are taught and assessed in English. As such, their struggle to understand other subjects can result in grade failure and retention due to poor general academic performance. The learners struggle to grasp content in the English language because they are not English language native speakers. The research results showed that Sepedi home language influence hindered their effective English language learning and usage. They find it hard to learn content presented in the medium of English because of their limited English vocabulary range. As a result, they draw on their home language as a resource to compensate for their inadequate English language knowledge.

#### 5.3.2. What are the educators' views on the causes of the learners' grammatical errors?

Lack of grammar teaching time was singled out by the teacher participants as one of the major factors that cause grammatical errors in the learners' writing. They emphasised the importance of having sufficient time for grammar teaching and learning, and bemoaned how inadequate the time allocated for teaching and learning English grammatical aspects is, making it difficult for the learners to acquire and apply the necessary language skills in their essay writing. Moreover, the learners' developed negative attitude towards the English language aggravated the situation. Their lack of interest in the language explains the lag in their development of English language skills. Lack of resources was also identified as a detrimental factor in the learners' English language learning. This results in learners' poor exposure to the English language, which makes them less equipped to write competently in English. The teachers also mentioned exposure to social media language as a contributory factor towards the learners' grammatical errors in written essays. Learners tend to use social media language when writing formal essays due to their lack of knowledge of appropriate vocabulary to use in formal contexts.

### 5.3.3. What intervention strategies can be implemented to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays?

Regular writing practice was purported as one of the strategies that can be implemented to curb the learners' writing challenge. Ample opportunity must be created to engage learners in regular writing activities to hone their writing skills. Regular writing practice will improve their chances of becoming better writers. Furthermore, the findings also showed that allocating teachers more grammar teaching time will make a lot of sense and can help teachers to cover essential content to improve learners' general language ability and writing skills.

### 5.3.4. What are the learners' perceptions and attitudes towards learning grammatical skills?

The study findings have revealed that learners are quite passive in the English language classroom, which negatively affects their academic performance. This is mainly due to their general perception that English is a difficult language to master and communicate in. This negative attitude towards the English language makes them to put little effort in mastering the language, which holds back their progression towards becoming competent users of the language in both spoken and written modes.

## **5.4. Significance and contributions of the study**

The study raised the EFAL learners' consciousness about the application of grammatical rules when writing essays. The study made the learners realise how important it is to be able to write in English and produce texts that are error-free because poor performance in the English subject negatively affected their average academic performance.

The study would help parents of the learners who face writing skills challenges identify the kind of support that is required by their children. This would increase the parents' level of involvement in their children's education as they offer them educational support in the home environment.

The study helped the EFAL teachers deal with the main causes of the identified problem regarding the learners' writing skills. It placed teachers in a better position to devise appropriate intervention strategies to deal with the learners' writing problems. Teachers would be able to gain insights into the causes of the problem and tailor their remedial

teaching and learning activities accordingly. Such efforts would reduce the frequency rate of grammatical errors learners commit when writing English essays.

The study made the Department of Basic Education aware of the problem English FAL teachers come across in their field of operation. This would ensure that teachers receive the necessary support from the Department of Basic Education in terms of physical resources and in-service training. This would empower the teachers and make them better prepared and ready to deal with the learners' writing challenges.

## **5.5. Recommendations from the study**

### **5.5.1. Using the time allocated for English grammar teaching more effectively**

The study has revealed that the learners and their teachers do not have adequate time to cover the necessary grammatical aspects in the classroom to equip learners with the required language skills for effective essay writing. Moreover, the limited allocated time for grammar teaching is not used effectively to create conducive conditions for intensive and progressive language teaching and learning. Hence, the study recommends that educators should ensure that learners are given quality classroom contact time with the English language through participation in expanded language activities. The study also recommends that schools should support teachers' EFAL classroom practice by introducing additional educational programs to raise an awareness about learners' writing abilities and challenges.

### **5.5.2. Adoption of more effective teaching strategies**

The study also found that teachers use ineffective methods to teach English grammar. These methods do not adequately develop the learners' language ability and writing skills. Therefore, the study recommends in-service training for teachers in order to upgrade their knowledge of language teaching strategies and familiarise them with modern trends in language teaching. This will encourage teachers to review their currently used teaching methods and adopt more effective strategies in their English language teaching. Learners will benefit greatly from such teacher empowerment initiatives through improvements in different areas of their English language learning, including their writing skills area of expertise. Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers apply a combination of teaching

strategies to cater for learners with different learning styles. In this way, learner involvement and participation in classroom activities will be maximised.

### 5.5.3 Incorporating a variety of teaching and learning materials

The study showed that teaching and learning resources are not adequately used in EFAL classrooms to facilitate language learning to help learners familiarise themselves with English vocabulary and acquire knowledge of English writing rules and apply them in their writing. Therefore, the study recommends that educators use stimulating teaching and learning materials that would motivate learners to learn English spontaneously. The materials should facilitate creation of opportunities for learners to engage with the English language in a leisurely and effortless manner to make their language learning experience fun. Incorporating different learning materials can help ease learners' tension and anxiety in learning English and develop a positive attitude and confidence towards English language learning.

### 5.5.4 Frequent writing practice

Based on the results of the study, learners commit grammatical errors because they are not exposed to extensive writing practice, hence their poorly developed writing skills and language competence. The study recommends that teachers should create ample opportunity for learners to rehearse and develop their writing skills. Collaborative writing exercises should also be introduced to allow learners to collectively produce writing texts and edit each other's work. This would sharpen the learners' sense of language monitoring which is helpful in identifying language errors and engaging in self-correction. Most importantly, teachers should also provide constant constructive feedback on the learners' writing to help them improve their writing skills and language competency. Furthermore, learners should engage in extensive reading activities to increase their exposure to good writing practices as exhibited in books and other reading materials. This would reflect positively on their own writing as they will be motivated to emulate the experienced good writing conventions when they write essays.

## **5.6 Limitations of the study**

### 5.6.1 Small sample size

The researcher sampled 20 Grade 10 learners and 3 English educators to take part in the study, which was a relatively small sample size. This put generalisability constraints on the study results since the results of the study might not be smoothly transferable and applicable to other schools within the designated population. A bigger sample size would have made the study's sample to be more representative of the population from which it was extracted, strengthening transferability of the results.

#### 5.6.2 The use of semi-structured interviews

The researcher experienced difficulties in engaging with the 3 English educators through scheduled interviews as they were not readily available due to professional work commitments. Their tight work schedules forced the researcher to reschedule their interview sessions numerous times, which was an inconvenience on the study's proceedings and plenary. In hindsight, a questionnaire would have been a more convenient data collection option that would have allowed for a more flexible elicitation of research data. Some teacher participants were sceptical about having their interviews voice recorded, which forced the researcher to rely more on field notes as data collection evidence. This diluted the confirmability aspect of the collected data.

### 5.7 Areas for further research

The study focused on the grammatical errors that learners commit when writing descriptive essays. To advance the scope of the research, it would be useful for future research to investigate the correlation between the learners' writing errors and the errors they commit in spoken language. A juxtaposition of the two sets of language errors would yield valuable insights into the deeper language dynamics at play in the learners' acquisition and learning of English as a first additional language.

Future research can also focus on the effect of teaching methods and strategies on learners' acquisition of language skills. This is an area of research that has not received much attention in recent years. Tapping into this line of investigation would help establish the real contribution of effective teaching practice on language learning in more empirical terms.

### 5.8 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays at a rural South African high school. The population for the study consisted of 9 secondary schools in the Maboke Circuit, in the Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. 20 Grade 10 English First Additional Language learners and three English educators were purposefully sampled to participate in the study. A qualitative research approach was adopted to carry out the study from an interpretivist point of view. Semi-structured interviews and documents were used to collect qualitative data from the sampled teachers and learners respectively. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What evidence of grammatical errors is present in the learners' creative essays?
- What sources of influence can the learners' grammatical errors be attributed to?
- What are the educators' views on the causes of the learners' grammatical errors?
- What intervention strategies can be implemented to curb the prevalence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays?

The results of the study revealed evidence of grammatical errors in the learners' essays identifiable as errors in punctuation, word order, tenses, spelling and pronoun use. These errors were found to be caused by lack of resources, learners' lack of interest in the English language, insufficient English instructional time, home language interference, and limited English vocabulary range. The study recommends increased time allocation for grammar teaching, frequent writing practice, the use of more effective teaching methods, and the use of stimulating teaching and learning materials as possible strategies to ameliorate the learners' writing challenges.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

P O BOX 794  
JANE FURSE  
1085  
03 OCTOBER 2023

THE PRINCIPAL  
MOSIPA SECONDARY SCHOOL  
PRIVATE BAG X5222  
CASTEEL  
1370

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL.

I, Komane R.M, student number 201827359, am a Masters student at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop campus). I am conducting research on the causes of grammatical errors on Grade 10 learners' English essays, under the supervision of Ramaoka S.I. I would like to use your school as a sample for my research. Your approval, in this regard, will be highly appreciated.

#### **Research Title:**

The case of causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays in a school in Maboke circuit, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

#### **Significance of the study**

The study will raise the EFAL learners' consciousness about the application of grammatical rules when writing essays. It will also help the parents of the learners who are facing writing skill challenges identify the kind of support required by their children. This study will help EFAL teachers deal with the main causes of the identified problem when it comes to the learners' writing skills.

## **Research plan and method**

Permission will be asked from English (FAL) language teachers and the parents of the Grade 10 learners for them to take part in the research as participants. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with teacher participants and learners will partake in creative writing activities and their scripts (documents) will be used for data analysis. All information collected from participants will be confidential and names of participants will not be included in the report. Participants may withdraw from the study at any given time without any penalty.

Researcher's Name: Komane R.M

Supervisor's Name: Ramaoka S.I

Institution: University of Limpopo

**APPENDIX B: LETTER TO THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION.**

P O BOX 794  
JANE FURSE  
1085  
03 OCTOBER 2023

MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
BOHLABELA DISTRICT OFFICE  
PRIVATE BAG X9399  
BUSHBUCKRIDGE  
1280

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICT UNDER MABOKE CIRCUIT

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL.

I, Komane R.M, student number 201827359, am a Masters student at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop campus). I am conducting research on the causes of grammatical errors on Grade 10 learners' English essays, under the supervision of Ramaoka S.I. I have identified a school in the Maboke Circuit, Bohlabela District as a potential research site for my study. which I will be conducting this research at and it under the Maboke circuit in Bohlabela district.

**Research Title:**

The case of causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays in a school in Maboke circuit, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

**Significance of the study**

The study will raise the EFAL learners' consciousness about the application of grammatical rules when writing essays. It will also help the parents of the learners who are facing writing skill challenges identify the kind of support required by their children.

This study will help EFAL teachers deal with the main causes of the identified problem when it comes to the learners' writing skills.

### **Research plan and method**

Permission will be asked from English (FAL) language teachers and the parents of the Grade 10 learners for them to take part in the research as participants. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with teacher participants and learners will partake in creative writing activities and their scripts (documents) will be used for data analysis. All information collected from participants will be confidential and names of participants will not be included in the report. Participants may withdraw from the study at any given time without any penalty.

Your permission, in this regard, will be highly appreciated.

Researcher's Name: Komane R.M

Supervisor's Name: Ramaoka S.I

Institution: University of Limpopo

## APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FROM MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION



Ikhama Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province  
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200  
Tel. 013 766 5552/5115; Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Litiko le Temfundvo; Umnyango we Fundo

Department van Onderwys

Ndzawulo ya Dyondzo

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### MS KOMANE RM

P.O. BOX 794  
JANE FURSE  
1085

**Dear Madam**

#### **APPROVAL OF REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS**

Kindly receive approval of your request to conduct research in Schools. The research title: The case of causes of grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays in a school in Maboke Circuit, Mpumalanga province.

Furthermore, please be informed that the Mpumalanga Department of Education will require access to your research findings and recommendations. You are advised to communicate with your chosen schools and ensure that no inconvenience is experienced at any given time. Teaching and learning must not be negatively affected as a result of this Research.

Your professionalism in this regard will be highly appreciated. Good luck on your research; your interest on matters of the District is applauded.

MS L.N. GOBA  
DISTRICT DIRECTOR: BOHLABELA

30 October 2023

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DATE

**APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR EFAL TEACHERS**

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this research study because the following were explained to me:

I can participate now and if I feel like withdrawing at any time, I can do that as participation is voluntary.

I understand the purpose of the study.

I agree that my interview can be audio-recorded

I agree and understand that in this report I will stay anonymous

I agree with the significance of the study and believe that it will help in my teaching.

I understand that my safety as a participant will be prioritized by the researcher.

Name of researcher: Komane R.M

Masters Degree in Language Education

Signature of the participant:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the researcher:

Date:

## **APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/ ASSENT FORM FOR LEARNERS**

**Research Title: Causes of Grade 10 learners' grammatical errors when writing English essays in a school in Maboke circuit, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.**

Dear Parent/ Guardian

I am a Komane R.M, a Masters student at the University of Limpopo conducting research on causes of grammatical errors in Grade 10 learners' English essays. As a Grade 10 learners' parent, I am asking for permission to involve your child as a participant in my research.

Please read the following information carefully.

### **Significance of the study**

The study will raise the EFAL learners' consciousness about the application of grammatical rules when writing essays. This study will also help the parents of the learners who are facing writing skill challenges identify the kind of support required by their children. This study will help EFAL teachers deal with the main causes of the identified problem when it comes to the learners' writing skills.

### **Procedure to be followed:**

The participants will also be required to take part in a creative writing task and their scripts (documents) will be collected for analysis.

### **Risks**

There are no potential risks involved, as the data will be collected during regular school hours.

### **Termination**

The participant may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Questions for this research may be directed to Komane R.M.

Contact details: 076 409 5144 or via email [rethabilemphahlele36@gmail.com](mailto:rethabilemphahlele36@gmail.com)

**Signing the form below means that you allow your child to participate in this research**

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
the parent\guardian of  
\_\_\_\_\_ a learner of  
\_\_\_\_\_ years of age. Permit his/her participation in the research named  
above being conducted by Komane R.M.

Date signed \_\_\_\_\_ :

Signature of a parent: \_\_\_\_\_ :

## APPENDIX E (SEPEDI VERSION)

### Batswadi/ Bahlokamedi

Thobela batswadi/ bahlokamedi, ke nna Komane R.M ke ithutela Masters ka Universithing ya Limpopo. Ke dira dinyakišišo mabapi le bothata bjo ke bo bonego ka dithutong tša bana ba lena. Ke lemogile gore bana ba mphato wa lesome (10) ba na le bothata bja go ngwala ditaodišo ka leleme la sejahlaphi, ditaodišo tša bona di na le diphošo tše dintši ka ge go laetša gore ba palelwa ke go šomiša melao ya popopolelo ge ba ngwala ditaodišo. Bjale, dinyakišišo tšaka ke go re ke hwetše seo se hlalago diphošo tšeo tša popopolelo ka gare ga ditaodišo tša bona. Ke kgopela tumelelo ya lena go berekišana le bana ba lena gore e be batšeakarolo dinyakišišong tšeo ke di dirago.

**Ke kgopela le baleng tshedimošo ye e latelago ka šedi.**

#### **Bohlokwa bja thuto ye**

Thuto ye e tšile go lemoša bana ba go tšea dithutwana tša sejahlapi bjale ka leleme la bobedi gore ba šomiše bjang melao ya popopolelo ge ba ngwala ditaodišo ka sejahlapi. Thuto ye e tla thuša gape le batswadi ba bana ba go kopana le ditlohlo ge ba swanetše go laetša bokgoni bja go ngwala, batswadi ba bana bao ba tla fa bana bao thekgo yeo ba e hlokago. Thuto ye e tlo thuša barutiši bao ba rutago leleme la sejahlaphi go ka šomana/swaragana le dibakikgolo tša bothata bjo bo hlophilwego ge go etla go barutwana bokgoning bja go ngwala. Thuto ye e tlo lemoša ba Kgoro ya Thuto gore barutiši ba go ruta leleme la sejahlaphi ba lebana le bothata ka gare ga dithutwana tša bona, ba Kgoro ya Thuto ba ka fa barutiši bao thekgo le didirišwa tša maleba gore ba rarolle mathata ao ba kopanago le ona ka gare ga dithutwana tša bona.

#### **Tshepedišo yeo e swanetšwego go latelwa:**

Barutwana ka ge ba tla be ba tšea karolo, ba tlo swanelwa ke go ngwala ditaodišo tšeo di tla go šomišwa bjalo ka kgoboketšo ya tshedimošo.

#### **Dikotsi**

Go ka se be le dikotsi ka ge monyakišiši a tla netefatša gore phapoši yeo barutwana ba tla be go ba ngwalela ka go yona e bolokegile gape e hlwekile.

#### **Kgaotšo**

Batšeakarolo ba na le tokelo ya go tlogela go tšea karolo ka nako engwe le engwe ge ba ekwa gore ga ba sa kgona go tšwela pele. Gomme monyakišiši a ka se be le pelaelo goba go sekiša batšeakarolo.

Dipotšišo kamoka mabapi le dinyakišišo tse di ka lebantšha Komane RM.

Nomoro ya mogala: 076 409 5144/ 083 232 7966

Emeili: [rethabilemphahlele36@gmail.com](mailto:rethabilemphahlele36@gmail.com)

Go saena fomo ye e latelago go tla itaetša gore le le batswadi ba barutwana le dumelela gore bana ba lena e be batšeakarolo ka gare ga dinyakišišo tše.

Ke nna \_\_\_\_\_

Motswadi/mohlokomedi wa \_\_\_\_\_

Morutwana wa mengwaga ye \_\_\_\_\_ . Ke a dumela gore ngwana waka e be motšeakarolo go dinyakišišo tša ga Komane R.M.

Letšatšikgwedi

Saena

## **APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

1. Which errors do you mostly come across when marking the learners' essays?
2. By your own observation as an English educator what do you think are the contributory factors to the committing of grammatical errors in the learners' errors?
3. Which strategies can be utilized to minimize the grammatical errors in the learners' essays?
4. What are the learners' attitudes and perceptions towards learning grammatical skills?
5. How do you teach grammar?

# APPENDIX G: MARKING RUBRIC FOR ESSAY

CAPS – Grade 10 Marking Guidelines

## ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR ESSAY – FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE [50 MARKS]

Criteria		Exceptional	Skillful	Moderate	Elementary	Inadequate
<b>CONTENT &amp; PLANNING</b> (Response and ideas) Organisation of ideas for planning, Awareness of purpose, audience and context <b>30 MARKS</b>	Upper level	<b>28–30</b> -Outstanding/Striking response beyond normal expectations -Intelligent, thought-provoking and mature ideas -Exceptionally well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>22–24</b> -Very well-crafted response -Fully relevant and interesting ideas with evidence of maturity -Very well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>16–18</b> -Satisfactory response -Ideas are reasonably coherent and convincing -Reasonably organised and coherent, including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>10–12</b> -Inconsistently coherent response -Unclear ideas and unoriginal -Little evidence of organisation and coherence	<b>4–6</b> -Totally irrelevant response -Confused and unfocused ideas -Vague and repetitive -Unorganised and incoherent
	Lower level	<b>25–27</b> -Excellent response but lacks the exceptionally striking qualities of the outstanding essay -Mature and intelligent ideas -Skillfully organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>19–21</b> -Well-crafted response -Relevant and interesting ideas -Well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion	<b>13–15</b> -Satisfactory response but some lapses in clarity -Ideas are fairly coherent and convincing -Some degree of organisation and coherence, including introduction, body and conclusion	<b>7–9</b> -Largely irrelevant response -Ideas tend to be disconnected and confusing -Hardly any evidence of organisation and coherence	<b>0–3</b> -No attempt to respond to the topic -Completely irrelevant and inappropriate -Unfocused and muddled
<b>LANGUAGE, STYLE &amp; EDITING</b> Tone, register, style, vocabulary appropriate to purpose/effect and context; Word choice; Language use and conventions, punctuation, grammar, spelling <b>15 MARKS</b>	Upper level	<b>14–15</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary highly appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Language confident, exceptionally impressive -Compelling and rhetorically effective in tone -Virtually error-free in grammar and spelling -Very skillfully crafted	<b>11–12</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary very appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Language is effective and a consistently appropriate tone is used -Largely error-free in grammar and spelling -Very well crafted	<b>8–9</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Appropriate use of language to convey meaning -Tone is appropriate -Rhetorical devices used to enhance content	<b>5–6</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary less appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Very basic use of language -Tone and diction are inappropriate -Very limited vocabulary	<b>0–3</b> -Language incomprehensible -Tone, register, style and vocabulary not appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Vocabulary limitations so extreme as to make comprehension impossible
	Lower level	<b>13</b> -Language excellent and rhetorically effective in tone -Virtually error-free in grammar and spelling -Skillfully crafted	<b>10</b> -Language engaging and generally effective -Appropriate and effective tone -Few errors in grammar and spelling -Well crafted	<b>7</b> -Adequate use of language with some inconsistencies -Tone generally appropriate and limited use of rhetorical devices	<b>4</b> -Inadequate use of language -Little or no variety in sentence -Exceptionally limited vocabulary	
<b>STRUCTURE</b> Features of text; Paragraph development and sentence construction <b>5 MARKS</b>		<b>5</b> -Excellent development of topic -Exceptional detail -Sentences, paragraphs exceptionally well-constructed	<b>4</b> -Logical development of details -Coherent -Sentences, paragraphs logical, varied	<b>3</b> -Relevant details developed -Sentences, paragraphs well-constructed -Essay still makes sense	<b>2</b> -Some valid points -Sentences and paragraphs faulty -Essay still makes some sense	<b>0–1</b> -Necessary points lacking -Sentences and paragraphs faulty -Essay does not sense