

**An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 First Additional Language learners  
in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa**

**by**

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**University of Venda**

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## DECLARATION

I, *Ndivhudzannyi Michael Nndwamoto*, hereby declare that the dissertation, ***An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 First Additional Language learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa***, for the English Language Teaching (ELT) Master Degree at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university, and that it is my own work in design and execution and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signed:

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NNDWAMATO NDIVHUDZANNYI MICHAEL  
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DATE

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

- God the Almighty. I have come to learn that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- My mother, Ntshengedzeni Emily Ndwamato, for her perennial encouragement towards putting value in education even at the time when there was barely enough to sustain us.
- My beautiful wife Vuledzani and our wonderful God-given children; Uhone, Wanga and Uatshila for the immeasurable sacrifice you have made when you allowed me to use your time for this study. Without that precious gift of love, there was nothing I could have done.
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## **ABSTRACT**

Learning English as a second language by the South African learners of English First Additional Language (FAL) causes many challenges, such as committing errors in concord as there are differences between the learners' mother tongue and the target language. Even at Grade 12 level, which is the exit point to institutions of higher learning or to the workplace, learners still display some deficiencies in the mastery of the English concord. This happens despite the fact that, in many South African schools, English is used as a medium of instruction and learnt as a First Additional Language (FAL) especially at high schools.

Through the analysis of the written concord errors committed by the 72 of the 720 sampled Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District, the study answered to two questions which formed its cornerstone which are: what are the most common types of written concord/ subject-verb agreement errors which are committed by Grade 12 FAL learners and what are the causes thereof? The study employed both the quantitative and the qualitative methods to pursue the primary question. Learners responded to the questionnaires and the researcher also analysed their teacher-marked English FAL composition scripts with the focus on concord/subject-verb agreement usage.

The findings were that concord/subject-verb agreement was a challenge to the majority of the participants. There was not even a single question which recorded a 100% correct entry. The question on collective nouns was found to be the hardest to the participants while comparatively, the singular indefinite pronoun question recorded the best results. The learners' written compositions were also found to have been marred by concord/subject-verb agreement errors. In most instances, the learners had resorted to simple sentences avoiding the complex sentence construction as those would have required complicated application of concord/ subject-verb agreement usage.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made: teaching of grammar should be intensified, and that teachers of English should be retrained even if it will be through the in-service programmes

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>CA</b>   | Curriculum Advisor                          |
| <b>CAH</b>  | Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis             |
| <b>CAPS</b> | Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement  |
| <b>CASS</b> | Continuous Assessment                       |
| <b>CT</b>   | Communicative Theory                        |
| <b>DBE</b>  | Department of Basic Education               |
| <b>EA</b>   | Error Analysis                              |
| <b>EFL</b>  | English First Language                      |
| <b>ESL</b>  | English as a Second Language                |
| <b>FAL</b>  | First Additional Language                   |
| <b>FET</b>  | Further Education and Training              |
| <b>GIS</b>  | Geographic Information System               |
| <b>HL</b>   | Home Language                               |
| <b>L2</b>   | Second Language                             |
| <b>LoLT</b> | Language of Learning and Teaching           |
| <b>n</b>    | Number of participants                      |
| <b>SPSS</b> | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences |

## **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

South Africa is a multilingual country with 11 languages which are all, statutorily, the official languages (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Regardless of this guarantee of the languages equality in status, English remains the unifying language of all the South African citizenry which come from these different language spectrums. Furthermore, in the South African schools context, English is the language of education both as a subject and also as the language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) from as early as Grade 4 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS, 2011). By the time learners reach Grade 12 they should have fully mastered the English language because it is an exit point to the world beyond school. The CAPS document lists English language items such as language structures and conventions, which should be taught in Grades 10 to 12 as part of language development and language use. Therefore, grammar forms an integral part of language development with subject verb agreement/concord in particular being pivotal to language competence.

Based on the diversity of the South African population, English is obviously the second language to many South African learners, thus making its learning to be marred by a number of challenges which stem from the differences in grammars of these languages; English and the learners' Home Languages (HL). The situation becomes even worse when teachers also struggle with certain grammatical aspects which they are supposed to teach. Research by Lambani and van Niekerk (2014) has found that Grade 7 teachers possessed adequate knowledge of the concepts selected but not sufficient enough to teach excellently. Despite this challenge, English is still widely used in South Africa as a language of communication, even in many spheres like the media and government; in the law courts (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This status afforded English in South Africa puts many citizens, including learners, under pressure of using it. Before one comes to use the language, one has to learn it. Learning a language means knowing its grammar.

Stork and Widdonson (1974) define grammar as a term used by linguists to refer to both the structure of words (morphology) and their arrangements (syntax) in sentences. Richards and Reppen (2014) propose that grammar can be viewed both as knowledge and as ability. When viewed as knowledge, the focus is on rules for sentence formation. When viewed as ability, the focus is on how grammar is used as a resource in the creation of spoken and written texts. However, every human language has its own grammar, which possibly would be different from the others' and as a result learners are bound to commit errors in the target language. Richards (1985) explains errors as the use of language item in an inappropriate manner in which a fluent or native speaker of the language views as wrong or incomplete learning. Van Els, Bongaert, Extra, van Os, and Janseen-van Dieten, (1984) and Maliwa (2009) expound that differences between languages contribute towards ungrammatical utterances and writing by target language learners. The ungrammatical expressions are viewed as errors rather than mistakes. Richards and Reppen (2014) attest to the fact that Second Language (L2) learners tend to make basic grammar errors even at the advanced level of language learning. As a result learners' lack of mastery of grammatical aspects such as subject verb agreement may not be discounted from being errors.

According to Johansson (2012) and User (2014) the grammatical agreement between the subject and the verb is referred to as subject-verb concord. Concord can also be defined as the relationship between two grammatical units such that one of them displays a particular feature or plurality that accords with a displayed or semantically explicit feature in the other. Crystal (2004) postulates that there are four different types of concord namely; grammatical, notional, concord of proximity and distance concord.

Grammatical concord is when the verb and the subject "*belong together*" (*I have, he has*). Notional concord focuses on the meaning of the whole entity. Notional agreement involves collective nouns (couple), plural expressions of quantity (twenty four months), plural proper nouns (United Arab Emirates), and some compound units with "*and*" (bread and butter) (Nordquist, 2010). User (2014) claims that the most important type of concord is of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person number agreement between subject and verb because one has to be

conversant with the inflectional rules for regular and irregular verbs (he sleeps,-s; he dresses,-es; he goes) required. Consequently, being competent in the rules of concord in grammar is obligatory if target language learners are to speak and write good English. Obi and Ezekulie (2014) contend that wrong usage of grammar in sentences either irritates the linguistic wary or corrupts the English language acquired by learners. Furthermore, errors have a negative effect on quality communication, either oral or written.

However, research findings on concord errors by Omotese (2012) revealed that learners committed errors of not applying the third person –s rule in affirmative as well as negative sentences. There was an addition of an –s even if the subject was plural. Johansson (2012) and Saadiyah and Kaladavi (2009) found that the most common errors committed were that of concord and verb errors related to time or tense including overgeneralisation of the third person singular “–s”. Aboud (2009) established that learners’ errors made were that of lack of number concord between subject and verb including the absence of –s on third person singular present tense verbs. Other errors include the use of false general concord (his, her, their), incorrect inflection of “y” as in the verb “cry” to “cries”, lack of concord for gender (which, who), use of –’s for plural figures and letters. Obi and Ezekulie’s (2014) findings revealed instances of the erroneous use of the third person singular verb (you has, you chooses, Mary were). Thagg-Fisher (1985) maintains that people make errors or mistakes owing to the *one “–s principle”*, which means that the final -s of the singular noun may be misinterpreted as the plural morpheme.

According to Köhlmyr (2001), the most common problem for Swedish learners of English was when the subject is a personal pronoun and there are two types of errors; “either the subject requires the verb to take the 3rd person singular –s or it does not.” Hovav and Levin’s (2001) findings discovered that when there is a long distance between the subject and the predicate, it is difficult to remember the number of the subject. Also, agreement errors become more frequent when personal pronouns occur in other clauses than their subjects/controllers. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) report that the concord/subject-verb agreement is a problem for learners at all levels and even puzzles native

speakers at times, which is the reason many reference grammars or style handbooks include a discussion on this topic. Despite the challenges faced by most L2 learners, South African English First Additional Language (FAL) learners need to have mastered the basics of language: grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation by the time they pass Grade 12 (CAPS 2011). It could be seen that the design of the South African education system is meant to develop English grammar.

Conversely, Richards (1971) and Saadiyah and Kaladavi (2009) uphold the view that errors allow for the prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language. They are pointers to assist teachers to be aware of the difficult areas encountered by learners and pay special attention and emphasis on them. These errors could be a worrying factor when learners or students fail to deal with them until they reach the academic level of Grade 12 status or universities. In their study, Lambani and Nengome (2016) have found that the third-year university English students were not clear on the rules of grammar and they would, instead, overgeneralise them and/or apply them incompletely. However, Stapa and Izahar (2010) add that errors reveal what the second language learners do not know and what they have internalised of the target language system. Zhang (2011) argues that errors are interference or intrusion of the mother tongue and have to be overcome in the learners' progressive learning until they are completely eradicated.

In view of the highlighted extent of the commission of written concord errors by the learners, teachers should help learners to write grammatically correct sentences with perfect harmony between the subject and the verb. Learners have to practise the rules of the concord so that they avoid errors of verbs regarding their being singular or plural and use the correct number and person of the verb in a sentence (Miglani, 2007). The argument on whether errors are helpful or not will depend on the magnitude of the errors committed. The bright side of the errors is that they indicate how difficult a certain aspect of language is, if there are too many errors the indication is, it is too difficult. For that reason the teacher will find better strategies to deal with the problem diagnosed through

the errors made. Importantly, grammatical error studies are significant because they are an indicator of whether learning has been achieved or not.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the exposure to language structures and conversions which are introduced through; the teaching of parts of speech and their appropriate positions in sentences as early as Grade 4, the contact time in terms of hours allocated for teaching of English FAL and the years that the learners spend learning English both as a subject and as a language, learners still struggle to correctly and convincingly deal with grammar in general and concord or subject/verb agreement in particular. The teaching approaches of English FAL as a subject, as directed in the CAPS policy, which should be both direct and in context of the other language skills seem not to yield the desired results. With the concord/ subject-verb agreement being mostly the first part of sentences in most instances, their incongruity, due to misplacement and/or incorrect use, stays exposed and thus affect the intended meaning by the speaker/ writer.

Every year after the release of Grade 12 results, the South African public is always concerned by the seemingly dwindling of the standard of education. The blame is apportioned to several possible causes including; the general system of education, the use of English as a medium of instruction, the learners' inability to learn English as a FAL due to the great differences between English and other South African official languages. Nationally, in 2014 and 2015 examinations, the disappointing 45% and 43% were the average marks for question 5 respectively, which is the question on Language and Editing Skills. The reports confirm that candidates did not do well in most questions which used formal language structures. Consequently, of the 692 Grade 12 learners who wrote English FAL at Dzindi circuit, one of the Vhembe District's 27 circuits in 2014, a worrisome 235 (33.96%) could not obtain 50% in English FAL. The situation deteriorated in 2015, when it was a massive 577 (46.61%) of the 1 238 Grade 12 population, who again scored less than 50% in English FAL and the grammar section recording another disastrous performance of 43% average mark and was the only question which could not show an improvement since 2014. In light of this, the study seeks to analyse the written concord

errors that the Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa commit and identify the possible causes thereof.

### **1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the current study is to examine and identify:

- the types of concord errors in the writing of Grade 12 learners of English FAL in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa
- the possible causes of these errors.

### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The overall objective of the study is to investigate the errors made by Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. The specific objectives include:

- To identify the types of written concord/ subject-verb agreement errors which are committed by Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa
- To evaluate the causes of these errors among the Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the most common types of written concord/ subject-verb agreement errors which are committed by Grade 12 FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa?
- What are the causes of these errors among the Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa?

### **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study will offer profound insights in terms of the realities concerning the mastery of English concord in English FAL classrooms. It will unearth whether the learners' proficiency in concord is desirable or not, by taking into consideration the type of good performance learners achieved as well as errors they would have made. Similarly,

the study will investigate the causes of errors based on the sample of errors the learners would have made. It is envisaged that the study will explain why certain types of concord errors occur regularly than others. In addition, possible recommendations regarding how to overcome or eradicate the recurrence of identified errors will be suggested.

The study will contribute towards the body of knowledge regarding the usage of concord by Grade 12 learners. The findings will help teachers develop strategies to fill the gaps exposed regarding the concord errors made by learners without first waiting for learners to commit these errors. This will be accomplished by making the results available to the District as well as making the results available online.

## 1.7 DEFINITIONS OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

**Concord:** This refers to a system in language where the choice of one element triggers off the use of a particular form of another element (Todd & Hancock, 1990). This is the prescription that Leech and Svartvik (1994) explain as grammatical concord which specifies that certain grammatical items must agree with each other. Hurford (1994) also, in concurrence, states that agreement is the relationship between one word in a sentence or phrase and some other word, whereby the form of one word is dictated by the other word. Baker (2008) believes that in subject-verb agreement the subject and verb must agree in number. This means that both need to be singular or both need to be plural. Subject-verb agreement is essential to ensure that a sentence is grammatically correct.

**Error analysis (EA):** The study of the errors usually made by the learners with the aim of: establishing their causes, problems and/or importance with learning, the teachers' reactions to these errors and also assessing if the teachers' responses make any difference to the learners' progress (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Richards and Schmidt (2010) explain EA as the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners which is carried out in order to identify strategies which learners use in language learning, to identify the causes of learner errors, and to obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

**Verb:** Freeborn (1995) explains that verbs represent the process in meaning and function as the grammatical predicator in clauses. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) breaks down types of verbs as auxiliary verbs and non-auxiliary verbs and lexical verbs. A verb is a word or a group of words that denotes action, or the state in which a thing or a person is (Shaw, 1993), or joins the subject with the rest of the sentence. There has to be at least one verb in the sentence to make it a sentence. A verb often consists of more than one word (Miglani, 2007). According to Crystal (2004) the formal definition of a verb refers to an element which can display morphological contrasts of tense, aspect, voice, mood, person and number. Crystal (2004) further states that functionally a verb is the element which, singly or in combination with other verbs (i.e. as a 'verb phrase'), is used as the minimal predicate of a sentence, co-occurring with a subject, e.g. "*she/wrote*". If the predicate contains other elements (e.g. object, complement, adverbial), then it is the verb which more than any other is the unit which influences the choice and extent of these elements; e.g. the verb *put* takes both an object and a locative adverbial, as in "*he put the book on the table*". In many grammatical theories, accordingly, the verb is considered the most important element in sentence structure (Crystal, 2004).

**Plural subject:** The grammatical category in nouns, pronouns, and **verbs** that refers to more than one thing. Most nouns become **plural** with the addition of -s or -es: hats, chairs, dishes, countries, and so on.

**Singular or plural verb:** When a verb is regular and ends with -s or -es, it is considered a present tense, a singular verb should be used with a singular subject. Sentences that have singular subjects and singular verbs are: "*The boy smiles.*" or "*The man confesses.*" Adding -s or -es is determined by spelling rules concerning words ending with s, ss or x. For instance, the word *confess* becomes a singular verb by adding -es because the base word ends with -s. The plural form of every regular verb will be the base word and will not end with -s or -es unless the spelling of the base word usually ends with -s (Rodrigue, 2015).

**Third person singular:** Third-person singular (plural third-person singulars) (grammar), is the form of a verb used (in English and other languages) with singular nouns and with the pronouns he, she, it and *one* (or their equivalents in other languages). The word “*is*” is the third-person singular of “*to be*”.

**Grammar:** Hurford (1994) states that grammar is a conventional system of rules for making and putting together the expressions that belong to the language. Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1998) further explain that grammar as a subject of those rules which govern the configurations that the morphology and syntax of a language assume, adding that these rules are part of what is known automatically by all native speakers of a language as they do not exist outside of native speakers.

**Morphology:** Huddleston (1984) explains morphology as the form of words, and Todd and Lewis (1986) claims that morphology is the study of the structures of words which are regarded as free morphemes or combination of morphemes. Peters (2013) on the other hand, views morphology as the internal structure of words, the meaning units of which they are composed, and the inflectional and derivational processes by which they are formed.

**Syntax:** According to Shaw (1993) syntax is the arrangements of words in a sentence to show their relationship. It is the body of rules that speakers of the language follow when they combine words into sentences (Baker, 1997). Katamba (1994) indicates that syntax is the study of sentence structures. Peters (2013) contends that syntax is the backbone of grammar, which is concerned with the structures which constitute sentences and the combinations of words into phrases and clauses that form predictions.

## 1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into five chapters aimed at analysing the written concord/ subject-verb agreement errors of Grade 12 English FAL learners of the selected schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. Following is the division of the study chapters:

Chapter One has presented the introduction, outline the research problem, research aims, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study and define the key operational terms.

Chapter Two reviews literature on concord/subject-verb agreement and the theoretical perspective of EA.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology and research design as well as justifications for their choices in relation to the current study.

Chapter Four presents the findings and discuss the types of written concord errors and their possible causes.

Chapter Five entails the conclusion, and also summarises the study and makes recommendations and suggestions for future research.

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter has outlined the background of this study by pointing out the value attached to English in today's communication approach. The chapter has also presented the statement of the problem. The aim and objectives of the study coupled with the designed research questions have also been covered. It has illustrated how significant the study will be towards the building of the body of knowledge on concord. It has also defined the operational terms that are closely related to the subject under study which have been used in the study and concluded with the structure of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study evaluates English FAL learners' grammatical errors on concord/subject-verb agreement. Therefore, this chapter discusses literature regarding AE, communicative competence theories with special reference to grammatical competence, defines grammar and its importance, the importance of grammar teaching and research findings on EA as the basis for the well-informed answers to the research questions the study seeks to answer.

### **2.2 ERROR ANALYSIS EXPLAINED**

As the rules of English concord/subject-verb agreement are not the same as the grammar rules for other languages such as Tshivenda for instance, Second Language speakers are bound to make mistakes and errors (the difference of which has been explained in the subsequent paragraphs). Hence, the analysis of errors is necessary to understand the causes and remedies thereof.

Error analysis, as already explained under the definitions of operational terms, refers to the study of the errors usually made by learners with the aim of: establishing their causes, problems and/or importance with learning, the teachers' reactions to these errors and also assessing if the teachers' responses make any difference to the learners' progress (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). It is an imperative process which complements second language learning.

For the sake of the better understanding of this concept, it would be fundamental that the differences between errors and mistakes should first be explained. Lee (1990) explains that errors arise because the correct form or use of a target item is not part of a speaker or writer's competence whereas mistakes arise (for reasons of fatigue, stress, inattention, etc.) even though the correct form or use is a part of the user's competence. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) succinctly add that a learner can readily self-correct a mistake but not an error as that is a product reflective of his or her current stage of L2

development, or underlying competence. Lennon (1991) asserts that an error is a linguistic form or combination of forms which in the same context and under similar conditions of production would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speaker's native counterpart. Brown (1994) upholds that an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner whereas a mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a 'slip' in that it is a failure to utilise a known system correctly. Brown (1994) asserts that mistakes are not the result of a deficiency in competence but the result of some sort of breakdown or imperfection in the process of producing speech. Errors, on the other hand, as stated by Ellis (1997), reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge and they occur because the learner does not know what is correct.

Errors are not always considered bad in target language usage attempt by learners. According to Corder (1967) errors are crucial because they are a means which learners use in order to learn. They offer an indication of the learners' competence of the target language they have to learn. The important contributions of language learners' errors in the area of language learning and teaching have been extensively echoed in the literature (Corder, 1967; Richards, 1971 & Keshavarz, 1994). When errors show out, an attempt to investigate them by the teacher is always expected as, according to Corder (1974), the systematic analysis of errors committed by L2 learners offers teachers an opportunity to decide which area needs attention. Researchers also believe that errors comprise important evidence with regard to the approaches that learners use in order to acquire a language (Richards, 1974; Dulay & Burt, 1974; Taylor, 1975 & Parrot, 1993). Despite their regressive nature, they could be a yardstick of the progress made by the learners.

Therefore in the L2 classroom, errors will always provide assistance by which teachers will evaluate learning and teaching and give an indication of which language areas require emphasis (AbiSamra, 2003). Although in some quarters errors are viewed as an unacceptable failure which requires being totally eliminated (Shekhzadeth & Gheichi, 2011), Khansir (2012) confirms that studies of second language acquisition focus on learners errors because they give a prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a

second language. Therefore, the analysis of errors has double functions; that of showing a distinctive learning shortcoming and foretelling what possible errors learners will commit.

### **2.3 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS (CAH)**

The theoretical fundamentals for the CAH were formulated by Lado (1957) who suggested that the target language aspects which are the same as the learners' mother tongues or native languages seem easy to comprehend, while those aspects which are different appear difficult to learn. Therefore, there was a need to come up with a contrastive analysis which is a method to explain the reason some features of the target language are more difficult to learn than others (Sanchez-Escobar, 2012). This is possible when the two are placed beside each other.

Interlingual or transfer errors are caused by the learners' interference of their mother tongue which to a certain degree prevents them from acquiring the forms and rules of the target language (Corder, 1971). These errors happen where there are great differences between the learner's mother tongue and the language the learner is trying to acquire (Zhang, 2011). Interference or intrusion of the mother tongue constitutes the negative influence to the learners' mastery of the target language. Therefore, EA underscores the significance of errors in the learners' interlanguage system (Brown, 1994). However, these errors have to be overcome in the learners until they are completely eradicated.

Scovel (2001) explains that intra-lingual interference is the confusion which L2 language learners experience when confronting patterns within the structure of a newly acquired language, irrespective of how the target language patterns might contrast with the learners' mother tongue. This error can be defined as the deviant form of language caused by conflicting information of the target language. Richards (1970) suggests that developmental errors are language forms created by the learners, but do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue. These are oversimplifications founded on limited contact with the target language. As a result learners improvise their own rules based on the little knowledge they gained and come up with the suppositions which do not match both the

target language and the mother tongue (Huang, 2002), and this results in errors of some kind.

Corder (1967); Richards (1971) and Richards (2013) reported the following sources of errors which are discussed below:

- **Language Transfer**

Transfer is the effect of one language on the learning of another. Positive transfer occurs when both the native language and English have the same form or linguistic feature. It makes learning easier and does not result in errors. Languages may share aspects of grammar such as some patterns of word order and the use of adverbs and these may allow for positive transfer. Negative transfer or “*interference*” is the use of a native-language pattern or rule that leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language. Littlewood (1984) also posits that in transfer, the learner uses his previous mother-tongue experience as a means of organising the second language data. In concurrence with the previous argument, Ellis (1994) believes that transfer takes place whenever habits of the native language differ from those of the target language. This error mostly happens in the beginning stages of learning other languages (Mbau & Muhsin, 2014). The huge difference between the students’ native language and the target language in language aspects like morphology, syntax and semantics, makes the target language, English in particular, difficult to learn (Mbau and Muhsin, 2014).

For example:

- \* *She has eaten all of my money.*
- *She has spent all of my money.*
- \* *She does not have ears.*
- *She does not listen.*

- **Simplification**

This occurs when learners reduce a complex aspect of grammar to a much simpler set of rules and reflects a process that is used when messages need to be conveyed with limited language resources. For example instead of making the distinction between “*he*” and

“she” the learner may use the masculine pronoun even where the feminine ones would have been a requirement. This is because Tshivenda, for example, does not differentiate between genders by using different pronouns. At other times, instead of distinguishing between first and third person in verbs (“I like, She likes”) the learner may use the first person rule for all persons (“I like, He/ She like”). This is also because Tshivenda does not offer different inflections with any of the different number of pronouns.

For example:

- \* *Ndi a funa manngo*
- I like mangoes
- \* *Ni a funa manngo*
- You like mangoes
- \* *U a funa manngo*
- He/She likes mangoes

In all these three examples, the verb inflections, “like” and “likes”, remains “funa” across all the pronoun forms. Brown (1994) explains this type of an error as intralingual transfer and claims that it is evident once learners have begun to acquire parts of the new system of the target language. Ignorance of rule restriction, occurring as a result of failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures causes simplification.

- **Overuse**

Overuse happens when learners become over-dependent on certain grammatically correct forms and use them in preference to other forms that might be known and available. For example the learner may become dependent on a phrase such as “last time” to refer to past events and use it when other ways of referring to the past time could have been used. For example:

- \* *I was with him last of last week.*

Correct version:

- *I was with him two weeks ago.*

Ellis (1994) believes that other forms of intralingual processes could also result in overuse, like when learners overgeneralise the regular past tense inflection even to irregular verbs in L2 English. For example:

- \* *It costed us a fortune.*
- *It cost us a fortune.*

Ellis (1994) further states that overuse could often be due to the avoidance or underproduction of some difficult structure. For example:

- \* *I am asking for a stapler*, when the correct version would have been:
- *May I use your stapler?*

- **Underuse**

Sometimes learners may underuse a form they have studied and practised many times by resorting to some other sentence construction formation. For example the learner may avoid using some constructions with “if-“: For example:

- *If I had known I would have told her about it*, and instead use:
- \* *I didn't know so I didn't tell her*, because it appears to them as more direct and easy to understand.

- **Fossilisation**

Sometimes a learner's grammatical development appears to have stopped at a certain level and recurring errors of both grammar and pronunciation have become permanent features of a learner's speech. This is referred to as fossilisation. It consists of the persistence of errors in a learner's speech despite progress in other areas of language development. Littlewood (1984) stresses that fossilisation is most likely to occur when a learner realises (subconsciously) that the error does not hinder him in satisfying his communicative needs (at the functional or social level). This is what Gass and Schacter (1989) refer to as a stage short of success as it is the stage when development ceases and even serious conscious efforts to change are often fruitless, and even if there might be some brief changes, those would just not take the learner anywhere as the learners always backslides to the stable state. Spada and Lightbrown (1993) add that this lack of change happens even after extended exposure to or instruction in the target language.

Brown (1994) indicates that this could be a problem even with those who have otherwise learned the language quite well.

For example, here are some examples of fossilised errors in an adult fluent speaker of English who uses English regularly and effectively, though often with a high frequency of what we might regard as basic grammatical and other errors. For example:

- \* *I doesn't understand what she wanted.*
- \* *He never ask me for help.*
- \* *She say she meeting me after work.*

Fossilised errors such as those above tend not to affect comprehension although they might be stigmatised due to the fact that they often reflect errors that are typical of very basic-level learners (such as omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s). It is therefore essential to discuss the global research findings on concord/subject verb agreement EA which will shed light on the complexity of the subject.

- **Overgeneralisation**

It covers the instances where the learners create a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structure of the target language. Nordquist (2010) defines overgeneralisation as the application of a grammatical rule in the case where it does not apply. Nordquist (2010) further explains that it is part of the language-learning process in which children extend regular grammatical patterns to irregular words. Two of the examples of overgeneralisation are:

a) When a learner adds a plural marker –s or –es on a noun which has a different plural formation as in:

- \* *Tooth – tootes/ tooths*
- *Tooth – teeth*
- \* *Equipment – equipments*
- *Equipment – equipment*

b) When a learner gives the past tense form of an irregular verb by adding –ed as in:

- \* *Teach – teached*

- *Teach – taught*
- \* *Buy – buyed*
- *Buy – bought*

- **Ignorance of rule restrictions**

It is a type of generalisation or transfer which occurs as a result of failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures. It involves making use of rules that the learners acquired before in new contexts where they do not apply. For example, learners misuse prepositions when they encounter these prepositions with each type of verb because of their wrong analogy to use the same prepositions with similar verbs as in:

- \* *We discussed about it.*
- *We talked about it.*
- \* *He makes him to do it*
- *He told him to do it.*

- **Incomplete application of rules**

This arises when the participants fail to fully develop a certain structure required to produce acceptable sentences. It involves learners failing to learn more complex types of structures since they think they can succeed effective communication by using relatively simple rules.

## 2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The respondents in this study are Grade 12 FAL learners who mostly come into contact with the English language at school and are expected to be proficient in English by the end of Grade 12. Therefore, communicative competence, especially grammatical competence, becomes central as good communication facilitates teaching and learning. Accordingly, the study adopted Hymes' (1966) and Canale and Swain's (1980) theoretical framework on communicative competence, with special reference to grammatical competence.

### **2.4.1 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE MODEL**

The concept of Communicative Theory (CT) was introduced by Hymes (1966) and thereafter many authors deliberated on the subject. His idea was that language speakers should not only have grammatical competence for successful communication, but they should also know how language is used by native speakers to achieve their purposes. Hymes (1972) devised the term 'communicative competence' in order to oppose Naom Chomsky's insufficient distinction between competence and performance. Chomsky (1965) explains that competence is the speaker and listener's knowledge of the language by the same people. The fundamental shared knowledge enables a user of a language to produce and understand an infinite set of sentences out of a set of infinite set of rules. The transformational grammar provides an explicit account of the implied knowledge of language structure, which is actually not conscious but is necessarily implicit. Therefore, FAL learners are expected to be competent in all aspects of communication including grammatical competence.

Additionally, Hymes (1971) posits that there should be a difference between linguistic competence that deals with producing and understanding grammatically correct sentences, and communicative competence that deals with producing and understanding sentences that are appropriate and acceptable to a particular situation. He argues that a language speaker should not only have grammatical competence in order to communicate effectively in a language, but also maintains that the knowledge of the rules for understanding and producing both the referential and social meaning of knowledge is important because there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. However, communicative competence is viewed by Hymes (1971) as the interaction of grammatical (what is formally possible), psycholinguistic (what is feasible in terms of human information processing), socio-cultural (what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance) and probabilistic (what actually occurs) system of competence (Cited in Midoul 2011). The other theorists, Canale and Swain (1980), also support the concept that communicative competence does not only rely on three aspects, but point out that the ability to produce grammatically correct expressions is equally important.

Thus, the emphasis on grammar in most English as a Second Language (ESL) in classrooms.

Similarly, Canale and Swain (1980) emphasise that the ability to communicate requires four sub competencies namely: grammatical competence – the ability to create grammatically correct utterances, sociolinguistic competence – the ability to produce sociolinguistically appropriate utterances, discourse analysis – the ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances and strategic competence – the ability to solve communication problems when they arise. Still many research findings support the view that attention should be placed on grammar (Rodriguez, 2009) because they believe that grammatical competence is associated with excellent communication. Hence many teachers in ESL classrooms focus on form, but the difference stems from how the learners should be taught and not that grammar is unimportant.

Canale and Swain (1980), cited in SLA Encyclopedia (2015), suggest that grammatical competence focuses on command of the language code, including such things as the rules of word and sentence formation, meanings, spelling and pronunciation. It is important to gain knowledge of, and ability to use, forms of expression that are grammatically correct and accurate (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010; Gao, 2001). Grammatical competence promotes correctness and eloquence in second language speaking and writing and develops the learners' target language competency (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010). Based on this insight, it is likely that the other three components of communicative competence depend on grammatical competence because without it one would not be declared proficient. For instance, strategic competence is normally used in order to complement effective communication when the speaker is unable to communicate appropriately.

However, Schmeller (2015) explains that grammatical competence focuses on command of the language code, including such things as rules of word and sentences formation, meanings, spellings and pronunciation. Diaz-Rico and Weed (2010) Gao (2001) (cited in Schemeller 2015) add that the aim of learning grammar is to acquire knowledge of, and

ability to use forms of expression that are grammatically correct and accurate such as in the use of concord/subject-verb agreement. Generally, grammatical competence by its nature of promoting correctness and confidence in second language production therefore increases the learners' ability to improve proficiency.

Ma (2009) clarifies that grammatical competence is an umbrella concept that includes increasing expertise in grammar (morphology, syntax and vocabulary). For instance, morphology is the formation of words by means of inflection and derivation; syntax entails the rules that govern the combination of words and phrases to structure sentences and semantics is the way in which meaning is conveyed through language and vocabulary is the body of words used in a particular language. In order to convey meaning L2 learners must have knowledge of words and sentences; that is to understand how words are segmented into various sounds and how sentences are stressed in particular ways. Therefore, grammatical competence enables speakers to use and understand English language structures accurately and unhesitatingly which contributes to their fluency. Similarly, Subasini and Kokilavani (2013) emphasise that using correct grammar is important to avoid misunderstandings caused by errors which might result in miscommunication between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. Again language with errors slows down the communication and conversations as the reader or listener will from time to time try to figure out the correct message. Moreover, the error-infested communication makes it harder for the writer or speaker to express ideas, thoughts clearly and concisely. Therefore the importance of grammar cannot be underestimated if good communication by FAL learners is to be achieved.

## **2.5 WHAT IS GRAMMAR?**

Grammar is a term used by linguists to refer to both the structure of words (morphology) and their arrangements (syntax) in sentences (Stork & Widdonson, 1974). It is that science which deals with words, forms of words, and words formation (Shaw 1993), their combination into larger units which results in sentences, amongst others, so that such a set of forms would have meaning and the elements, and sequences (Bell, 1981). It could therefore be concluded that grammar is the communicative tool, which could be both

spoken and written. Shaw (1993) further explains that grammar is the descriptive statement of the way language works. Wilcox (2004) discusses grammar as a system of rules which allow the users of the language in question to create meaningful communication by building both meaningful words and larger constructions of sentences.

Bell (1981) believes that by virtue of having meaning, language would require the shared knowledge of rules, grammar, by the users. It is this shared knowledge which would require a specific arrangement of words in order to create a sentence by categorising words according to their form (noun, verb, preposition, etc.) and function (subject, direct object, adjective phrase, etc.) (Wilcox, 2004). The shared knowledge makes meaning in different contexts. Thorne (1997) explains that grammar is the study of the organisation of language which involves taking language structures apart in order to see the ways in which we can communicate effectively in a range of situations and for a range of purposes. Similarly, Trask (1995) discusses the uniqueness of language and states that the grammar of any language is articulated in terms of a sizeable number of classes of items and forms in that language, which are called the categories of grammar.

In emphasising the uniqueness of language, Palmer (1983) maintains that grammar of English in particular or that of any other language should never be based upon the grammar of Latin or of any other language as no other language will be like 'our own' in their grammatical structures, as well as in their sound systems and their semantics. Palmer (1983) explains further that languages differ in their "logic" as well as in their grammar. Therefore, the speech or writing is judged by how well it follows the rules of grammar of that language (Merriam-Webster, 2015). In other words, different word classes have a particular position they occupy in a sentence in order for a sentence to be grammatically meaningful. It is therefore clear that if a speaker should disregard this fundamental rule of grammar, either or both intentionally and by mistake, the utterances by the speaker might be ungrammatical. As an illustration of this point, Trask (1995) insists that nouns have certain distributional properties which make them occur in certain positions in sentences, but not in the others, and so are the other word classes. Trask (1995) uses the following two examples to show that the words which should fill in the

gaps of the sentences should be nouns because grammar of English permits nouns, and only nouns, to appear in such positions:

- *The ... was nice.*
- *The ... were nice.*

It could be observed based on the predicates of the sentences that these nouns would differ in terms of numbers. For example, the nouns which could come in those gaps could, for argument's sake, be "**pudding**" and "**puddings**" for the respective sentences. It is apparent that the subject of a sentence should talk to the predicate by considering the inflectional properties (singular and plural forms) (Trask 1995), or else the sentence/utterance would not be clear and correct.

## 2.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR

Second language learners are required to master the target language because it is a non-native language officially recognised and adopted in a multi-lingual country as a means of public communication (Collins, 2012). These learners learn the second language after they have already acquired at least one language, which amongst others would be their Home Language (HL). The language learnt first can be of an advantage because learners will have an idea of how languages function. Nonetheless, the knowledge of the other language can contribute to learners making incorrect suppositions concerning how the target language functions and results in errors that native speakers of the language do not make (Aukland, 2012). There is no way that L2 learners are exempted from mastering the correct usage of grammar for the target language because of the fear of making mistakes or the complexity of the language. They should be able to recognise and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and use them effectively in communication (SIL, 1999). In other words, despite the speakers' backgrounds which could be due to the one being a native speaker and the other a second language learner, they still both have to produce excellent language usage.

The knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is the basis for the English language, therefore it is crucial to put grammar at the centre for second language teaching. As

already explained, grammatical competence is one of the features of communicative competence – knowing how to use the grammar and vocabulary of the language is important to achieve communicative goals in an acceptable manner. Communicative goals are the goals of learners' studying English language, so the mastery of grammar is necessary to achieve the communicative goals (Zhang, 2009). Bell (1981) expounds that language is a combination of both the linguistic and social knowledge which serves to create communicative acts which cannot only be socially appropriate but should also be grammatically correct. This means that the appropriate usage of grammar is essential to avoid confusions so that there is an understanding between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. The expression of language with errors does not only slow down communication between the writer and the reader and the speaker and the listener, it also irritates. In addition, wrong usage of grammatical aspects makes it difficult for the writer or speaker to express the message clearly and this often results in the misjudgement of the speaker's intelligence (Wither, 2015). Examples of the following erroneous construction are what could make the speaker to be mistaken as foolish whereas s/he is not:

- \* *I do not know of nobody who came last night.*
- *I do not know of anybody who came last night.*
- \* *Sheeps are very much expensive during the festive seasons.*
- *Sheep is very much expensive during the festive season.*
- \* *I will borrow you my car for two weeks.*
- \* *May I lend your my car for two weeks?*

In the first pair of sentences, it is clear that in the first sentence the speaker/ writer does not know that a sentence may not have two negative markers; “not” and “nobody”, rather the other negative marker must be positive, as in the second sentence, for the correct construction. The first sentence in the second pair reflects lack of understanding of uncountable nouns and their correct usage, of which ‘sheep’ is an example. Uncountable nouns do not require the plural inflectional marker “-s” and the plural verb “are”. The last two sentences in the third pair of sentences are both incorrect. The words “borrow” and “lend” have been misplaced. For the correct placement, they words must swap their

places in the sentences. The intended meaning, as with the first sets of pairs of sentences, may still be achieved even when there are grammatical errors. However, with the third and last pair, what the speaker intends to say may be confusing and it is open to different interpretations. Whether the speaker/ writer's intended meaning could be encoded or not, may not always be the chief concern, but the correctness of the constructions does as it exposes the speaker/ writer's esteem to criticism. Knowledge of all these grammatical dynamics is not something that is obviously at disposal of every English language user.

Haussamen, Benjamin, Kolln and Wheeler (2003) mention the three goals of grammar as; **a)** every student, from every background will complete school with the ability to communicate comfortably and effectively in both spoken and written standard English, with awareness of when the use of standard English is appropriate; **b)** every student will complete school with the ability to analyse the grammatical structure of sentences within English texts, using grammar correctly and demonstrating knowledge of how sentence-level grammatical structure contributes to the coherence of paragraphs and texts; and **c)** every student will complete school with an understanding of, and appreciation for, the natural variation that occurs in language across time, social situation, and social group. These are the goals that define the mastery of the English language that learners should demonstrate when they use the language outside the school environment. It is these goals' involvedness that indicates how fundamental English grammar is.

Zhang (2009) explains that the number of possible new sentences is constrained only by the vocabulary at the learner's command and his/her creativity as grammar is a kind of 'sentence-making machine'. Zhang (2009) also believes that English language learners who have been lacking in grammar rules instruction can neither use English language accurately to make a complete sentence, nor speak English fluently on accuracy. Zhang (2009) further argues that grammar, after all, is a description of the regularities in a language, and knowledge of these regularities provides the learner with the means to generate a potentially enormous number of original sentences. Detaba (2013), proclaims that knowledge of grammar helps the student in the correction of mistakes and

improvement of written work. It is the same view that is held by Mbau and Muhsin (2014) who proclaim that grammatical sentence means that the sentence should follow the rules of the language. Communication in English language is only possible when the speaker/writer could identify grammatical mistakes and self-correct them.

Therefore, FAL Grade 12 learners are also required to master the grammatical aspect of subject verb-agreement before being promoted to the institutions of higher learning where communication is mostly in English. Although a person is educated in a particular area of study, if he or she is unable to communicate efficiently, his/her ability to share that knowledge is negatively affected. Writing incorrect subject-verb agreement sentences can convey a wrong and confusing message to the reader. Amongst others, good communication in the English language, calls for one to match a singular subject with a singular verb and a plural subject with a plural verb. Despite all the resources on offer to support the Further Education and Training (FET) learners for the envisaged crop of learners that can use their additional language at a high level of proficiency as preparation for their further and higher education or their world of work, many learners still cannot communicate well in their additional language even at Grade 12 (CAPS, 2011). It is because of this reason that in a school situation, lack of good grammar can never be absolved from the poor display of language usage because the teaching grammar has been regarded as crucial to the ability to use language (Widodo, 2006). There should, therefore, be no excuse for the learners not to be good English language users.

## **2.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSES**

One of the chief reasons for studying English as a subject at school, particularly its grammar, is to produce good English language speakers/ writers from those to whom English has been a foreign or second language. This calls for a vigorous process from both the teachers and the English language learners' sides. It is because of its fundamental advantages which prescribe that, despite it all, the process still has to be pursued. Grammar is the bedrock of good communication, both spoken and written. Widodo (2006) affirms this assumption by asserting the advantage of grammar as the enhancement of vocabulary, which provides a pathway to learners of how some lexical

items should be combined into a good sentence so that meaningful and communicative statements or expressions can be formed. It is the same point held by Mart (2013) who argues that knowing more about grammar will enable learners to build better sentences in speaking and writing performances, which does not only make sentences clear but also makes communication effective. In its 2014 National Senior Certificate Diagnostic Analysis, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), as one of its suggestions for English FAL results improvement, agreed that the teaching of grammar should be given serious attention as grammar question tests basic skills which must be taught, practised and studied for improved language efficiency.

Mulroy (2003) maintains that sentences always have and always will consist of clauses with subjects and predicates and of words that fall into classes fairly well described as verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections, and further clarifies that individuals who understand these concepts have a distinct advantage over others where the use of language is involved – and that means everywhere. It is only through the formal language learning that the learner would differentiate these parts of speech, know where and when to use them and that for effective communication, they cannot just be thrown around.

Ellis (2006) defines grammar teaching as a process which involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalise it. Based on this point it could be seen that Ellis (2006) supports grammar teaching based on the results of grammatical competence between the naturalistic and instructional learners' research which shows that though the acquisitional processes of the two learning processes were the same, the instructed learners progressed more rapidly and achieved higher levels of proficiency.

It appears convincing that grammar teaching and not language acquisition alone is a vital tool for those who want to study language further as rightly placed by Richards and

Renandya (2002) who claim that students may want or need a higher level of grammatical correctness than is required for mere comprehensibility. In motivation of grammar teaching, Richards and Renandya (2002) point out a) comprehensibility – which is knowing how to build and use certain structures for making it possible to communicate common types of meaning successfully for without those structures it is difficult to make comprehensible sentences – a point which calls for the identification and teaching of these structures, and b) acceptability – knowing when to use certain words in some social contexts as serious deviance from native-speaker norms can hinder integration and excite prejudice as a person who speaks ‘badly’ may not be taken seriously or may be considered uneducated or stupid as the two good reasons for teaching grammar. Long (1988) also bears the same sentiment but admits that to be effective, grammar has to be taught in a way that is compatible with the national processes of acquisitions.

English has many confusing words, a distinction and/or mastery of which cannot just be automatic but requires some grammatical learning since a wrong choice distorts meaning altogether. Tabbert (1984) refers to situations when students confuse “*lie*” and “*lay*”, do not choose “*who*” and “*whom*” correctly, say “*infer*” instead of “*imply*”, mismatch subjects and verbs as in “*advice*” and “*advise*”, mix up pronoun reference as in: “*She is taller than I*” and not “*me*”, use double negatives like in: “*They never meant not to hurt you*” instead of “*They never meant to hurt you*” or “*They meant not to hurt you*”, etc. These mistakes are evidence of the need to study grammar. To be effective language users, learners should study grammar because grammar skills will help learners to organise words and messages and make them meaningful (Mart, 2013). Haussamen *et al.* (2003) highlight that it is the consciousness understanding of grammar; which includes knowing the parts of sentences and how they work together, knowing how sentences connect with one another to build meaning, and understanding how and why we use language in different ways in different social situations which advocate for the conscious knowledge of grammar which comes through teaching.

## 2.8 CONCORD/SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

K12-Reader (2012) explains that in English, the subject-verb agreement is when the subject and verb in a sentence agree in number. That is, they both must be singular or they both must be plural. There is no singular subject with a plural verb or vice versa. For example: “*He teaches Mathematics*” and “*The parents plan for the children’s future*”. In these situations, “*teaches*” is singular and it agrees with the singular subject “*he*” whereas in the second sentence, verb “*plan*” is plural and it also agrees with the plural subject “*the parents*” too. The reciprocal placement of the two verbs in the two sentences would have defied the agreement rule, thus resulting in the sentences being grammatically wrong. According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985) each noun phrase is either singular or plural, and its number is determined in general by its head, which is typically a noun. Lorimor (2007) assumes that agreement (between the verb and the subject) is a basic property of language. The conclusion could be that one does not know the language unless if one understands the rules of subject-verb agreement and can apply them in context.

On the other hand, Corbett (2006) argues that in some languages, word order consistently affects agreement patterns while in other languages the effect of the word order on agreement appears sporadically and it is speaker or situation dependant.

For example, in Tshivenda, when someone wants to say that; “*The Pastor came*”, one could say:

\* *Vhafunzi vho da.*

Or

\* *Vho da Vhafunzi.*

It is clear that in both these sentences, the message is still the same regardless of the altered word order. However, the English version of the statement remains put and would strictly call for the same word order. The other examples which highlight Tshivenda as the language that does not have a strict and fixed word order, have already been discussed under simplification earlier on in the chapter.



plural verb “*look (are)*”. Therefore it is important that subjects and verbs agree with one another by identifying the number of subject(s) and use the correct verb form(s).

Even though this is termed the default type of agreement, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) also explain that the ESL/English First Language (EFL) learner tends to simplify and leave off altogether the third person singular inflection -s as in an example below:

- \* *He live in Seattle.*
- *He lives in Seattle.*

Ellis (2006) also contends that most learners have no difficulty in grasping the rule for English third person -s but they have enormous difficulty in internalising this structure so they can use it accurately. Hoshino (2014) believes that acquiring present tense third person singular –s is difficult for Japanese learners but advised that instructors could make them pay attention to the form in meaningful contexts with explicit instructions. In their study, Mbau and Muhsin (2014) have, amongst other errors, found that there were incorrect sentences with the omission of the singular marker –s and/or –es at the end of the verbs for the subject of the third person singular. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) further state that occasionally some learners will overgeneralise the inflection and apply it even to uninflectable forms such as modal auxiliaries as in the example below:

- \* *Jack cans dance disco.*
- *Jack can dance disco.*

Karim, Fathema and Hakim (2015) have found that the Bangladeshi tertiary level EFL learners cannot deal correctly with singular subjects and singular verbs form. The study also affirms that a similar problem occurred even with the plural subjects. Instead, the students would mix the singular subject with the plural verb or vice versa.

Quirk *et al.* (1985) point out that when the subject is realised by a noun phrase, the phrase counts as singular if its head is singular or vice versa:

- *The change in male attitudes is most obvious in industry.*

- *The changes in male attitude are most obvious in industry.*

Quirk *et al.* (1985) also state that finite and non-finite clauses generally count as singular:

- *How you got there doesn't concern me.*
- *Smoking cigarettes is dangerous to your health.*

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) also believe that some learners of English fully understand the third person singular present ending and can produce it systematically when they write in English, however, they omit it frequently when they are speaking because the sound system of their native language tends not to permit final /s/ sounds in particular or final consonants in general. This is what Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) term slow acquisition of the third person singular inflection. Larsen-Freeman (1976) also believes that the other reasons for this slow acquisition – even when there is no phonological interference from the learner's native language – might be its lack of perceptual saliency (i.e. whether or not it is easy for learners to hear) and its low frequency of occurrence in native speaker speech. In agreement with this, Murray and Simon (2004) also state that 'singular subject + don't' and 'there's +plural' are 'non-standard' or 'vernacular' patterns within American English varieties.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) claim that the reason why some learners overuse the inflection is that they interpret the –s ending as a plural marker on the verb to be used in agreement with plural subjects.

- \* *They/ the boys (goes) to the movies often.*
- *They/ the boys go to the movies often.*

### **2.8.2 INDEFINITE PRONOUNS**

Indefinite pronouns refer to people, places, objects, or things without pointing to a specific one (EnglishPlus, 2009). Quirk *et al.* (1985) describe indefinite pronouns as those pronouns which lack the definiteness which is found in the personal, reflexive, possessive and demonstrative pronouns and to some extent also in the wh-pronouns. Indefinite pronouns have numbers: some are singular, others are plural and some can be either

singular or plural (Kolln & Funk, 1998; Senn & Skinner, 2001 and Rozakis, 2003). As explained with the third person subjects in the previous section, a verb must agree in number with an indefinite pronoun used as a subject (Senn & Skinner, 2001). Kolln and Funk (1998) further explain that the verb of the sentence is singular when the modifier of the subject headword is also singular. For example:

- *All of the cake was eaten.*
- *Some of the water is polluted.*
- *The remainder of this chapter is especially important.*

Kolln and Funk (1998) state further that other singular-in-form nouns, such as remainder, rest and number also have a plural meaning in certain contexts as their number depends on the modifier. For example:

- *The remainder of the job applicants are waiting outside.*
- *The rest of the books are being donated to the library.*
- *A number of customers have come early.*

In these set of examples, it could be seen that a singular verb agrees with a singular indefinite pronoun, and a plural verb agrees with a plural indefinite pronoun too.

Table 2.1

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Singular            | Another, anybody, anything, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, much, neither, nobody, no one, somebody, someone, something |
| Plural              | Both, few, many, other, several  |
| Singular/<br>Plural | All, any, most, none, some   |

(Senn & Skinner, 2001)

Indefinite pronouns that end in *-one*, like: “*anyone*”, “*everyone*”, “*someone*”, and “*one*” and those that end in “*-body*”, like “*anybody*”, “*somebody*” and “*nobody*” are always singular. On the other hand, indefinite pronouns that are in the second box; “*both*”, “*few*”, “*many*”, “*others*”, and “*several*” are always plural. Lastly, the indefinite pronouns in the third box; “*all*”, “*any*”, “*more*”, “*most*”, “*none*”, and “*some*” can be singular or plural,

depending on how they are used. The singularity or plurality of these pronouns depends on the quantity of the things they refer to. i.e. non-particulate things, such as loyalty or air, are not countable, and therefore take singular verbs:

- *All of my loyalty vanishes.*
- *Some of the air is gone.*

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) and Senn and Skinner (2001) also agree that the number of an indefinite pronoun in this last group of Table 1. is determined by how they have been used. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) give an example of 'none' which they argue that when it refers to a mass noun, the inflection is uncontroversially singular. Senn and Skinner (2001) mentions that the object of the preposition that follows the pronoun in the sentence also prescribes the singularity or plurality of the sentence. Doest (2004) advises that if *none* refers (explicitly or implicitly) to a singular noun (e.g. "information"), use a singular verb, but if it refers to a plural noun (e.g. "researchers"), use a plural verb. Peters (2013) echoes the sentiment when stating that indefinite pronouns like ANY and NONE as head of a noun phrase, can be found with singular or plural agreement of the verb. For example:

- *Most of my picnic basket is empty.*
- *Most of the devilled eggs were eaten by Sam.*
- *None of my family has eaten.*
- *None of my friends have eaten.*

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) further claim that ESL/EFL learners experience problems with the quantifiers "all", "each", and "every(one)". For "each", "every" and "each and every", Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983), state the subject-verb agreement is always singular when the quantified subject noun is also singular. Celce-Larsen and Larsen-Freeman (1983) also advise that even when the quantified subject noun refers to a definite plural set, the subject-verb agreement for the subjects with the quantifiers should still be singular.

For example:

- *Each of his examples was out of context.*

- *Every one of these athletes runs the mile in four minutes.*

From the above examples, it could be concluded that the focus is on individual members of the set and not on the entire set in its totality, hence the singular verbs for their collaborations with their individual singular subjects.

However, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) report of problems which arise when “*all*” is used to quantify a collective subject as their findings suggest that one should be able to use either singular or plural subject-verb agreement in such cases.

For example:

- *All my family is present.*

From the above example, it could be seen that the results of the survey seem to be affected by the use of the preposition “*of*” after the quantifier “*all*”. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) note that the presence or absence of the preposition “*of*” definitely seems to have an effect on subject-verb agreement since without “*of*” their consultants favoured singular agreement to a noticeably greater degree, but if the noun that “*all*” modifies is a mass noun subject which is without “*of*”, then the subject-verb agreement is singular.

### **2.8.3 COLLECTIVE NOUNS**

According to Kolln and Funk (1998) collective nouns name a group of individual members. Senn and Skinner (2001) further describe collective nouns as names of a group of people or things and add that a collective noun may be used either singular or plural – depending on how it is used in a sentence. Both foreign learners and native speakers of English are often faced with the problem of how to treat collective nouns since there is a choice between singular and plural concord marking (Vantellini, 2003). Richards and Schmidt (2010) contend that collective nouns are nouns which refer to a collection of people, animals, or things as a group, in which the use of the plural verb suggests that the noun refers to something which is seen as a group of individuals and the use of the singular verb suggests something seen as a single whole. The words: “*couple*” and “*flock*” are examples of collective nouns.

In a situation where the noun could be viewed as singular or plural, Anderson (1954) explains that the choice of the verb is determined by meaning of the subject rather than by its form. Similarly, Brenner (2011) explains this as notional agreement and states that it is when the subject and the verb agree based on the intended meaning behind the words as in: “*None of the peas are left on Sean’s plate*”. With notional agreement we would recognise that “*none*”, a singular pronoun, is the subject of the sentence and thus requires “*is*” to be the verb: “*none is*”, however, the notion behind “*none*” is “*peas*” a plural noun: hence “*none are left*” (Brenner, 2011). Peters (2013), in assertion, explains that in notional agreement, the sense of the noun (as singular/ plural) is matched in the verb, overriding the noun’s actual form as singular or plural. Brenner (2011) believes that collective nouns and indefinite pronouns can also be placed under notional agreement because they can also take a singular or a plural verb based on the context in which they are used, as in the following examples:

- *The choir is singing a new song.*
- *The choir are taking their song papers from the choir master.*
- *The jury have to decide on the matter.*
- *The printers is on the right hand side.*

In the first illustration, the whole group “*the choir*” is seen as one based on their unity in what they are doing “*singing*” and also on their common understanding “*a song*”. However, in the second and third illustrations, the verbs have the plural form. Anderson (1954) explains that the singularity or plurality of the verb in collective nouns depends on the unity or division of the subject noun. Senn and Skinner (2001) posit that the members of choir are acting independently in this sentence – where each one is taking his or her own song papers, unlike what it was in the first illustration where there was oneness in their undertaking. Pooley (1934) argues that instead of the traditional rule which advocates that a verb must agree in number with its subject, rather it could agree with the feeling or intention of the subject no matter what the form.

In the third illustration, it is obvious that a meeting of individuals “*jury*” would be called before their common decision or different opinions could be known, hence the plural form

of the verb. In the last illustration, Peters (2013) explain “*printer*” as the premises of a particular business. However, Peters (2013) seems to admit that the use of singular/plural agreement with collective nouns is to some extent regionally conditioned and claims that the use of singular agreement tends to underscore the unity of the group.

Research on collective nouns by Örlégård (2014) confirms that the singular verbal agreement is the preferred number of agreement within the news genre as observed in the Swedish English and that plural concord is thus influenced by stylistic and semantic factors. The study also shows that Swedes prefer singular verbal agreement with collective nouns even though plural forms occur which seem to be closer to British English and American English (Örlégård, 2014). According to Örlégård (2014), the plural forms of political parties that seem to constitute collective units show variation in Sweden whereas such nouns take only plural concord in both American and British English.

#### **2.8.4 AMOUNTS, FRACTIONS AND MEASUREMENTS**

Loberger and Shoup (2009) stress that expressions indicating quantity or amount to be considered as a unit require a singular verb. Even if amounts and measurements sometimes appear to be plural, many amounts and measurements express single units. Loberger and Shoup (2009) report of nouns which are plural in form but singular in meaning and say that even those require a singular verb. Loberger and Shoup (2009) further explain that a verb is never affected by a subject complement.

For example:

- *The gift he gave his friend was books.*

In this example, “*books*” is the subject complement and should not determine the number of the verb *was* as plural (Loberger & Shoup, 2009). It is clear that despite the word order, the subject of the sentence still remains “*the gift*”, and since it is singular so should be the verb “*was*” of the sentence.

Other examples from Senn and Skinner (2001) are:

- *One thousand rand is nothing these days.*
- *Five kilometres walk per day is too much.*

- *Half of my time is wasted every day.*

In all these illustrations, the subject choice is not what could always be clear and obvious. The complements “*these days*”, the plural noun yet denoting one amount “*five kilometres*” and the fraction “*half of my time*” could be taken as plural subjects of the respective sentences, thus resulting in the incorrect choices of verbs.

### 2.8.5 PHRASES OF INCLUSION

A verb agrees with its subject, regardless of whether or not a noun or nouns intervene between the verb and its subject (Pooley 1934). For example: “*The actor, together with his entourage, arrives at the award ceremony*”. “*The actor*” is the subject; and “*his entourage*” is not included in the quantity of the subject and it should therefore not influence the subject – verb match.

Certain phrases, such as “*along with*”, “*including*”, “*as well as*”, and “*together with*” do not operate on the subject in the same way that the word “*and*” operates. The word “*and*”, however, is used to connect two nouns or pronouns compounding them into a plural subject. For example: “*You and I are always together*”. In this illustration, “*You and I*” is a plural subject which requires a plural verb “*are*”. But the phrases listed above only interrupt the link between subject and verb, leaving the subject’s quantity unchanged (Owl, 2015). This means that if the subject has been plural, it will remain plural and a singular one would also remain as such.

### 2.8.6 NEITHER AND EITHER

Neither and either always take singular verbs when acting as the subject of a sentence. When these pronouns appear by themselves, they are singular, even though their use connects two things (Gulcat, 2004).

For example:

- *Neither of these movies is very entertaining.*
- *Either restaurant is fine with me.*

However, when they appear with the conjoining words “*nor*” for “*neither... nor*” and “*or*” for “*either... or*”, they are now called compound subjects or coordinated noun phrases (Wardhaugh, 2003). Senn and Skinner (2001) explain that a compound subject is when two or more subjects in one sentence have the same verb and are joined by a conjunction. Leech (2006) terms them correlative conjunctions and explains them as a term used of a construction in which two parts of a sentence that are linked together by two words – one word belonging to one part and the other word belonging to the other. Senn and Skinner (2001) further explain that when two subjects are joined by the set of conjunctions, the verb agrees with the subject closer to the verb. It is because of this reason that Lorimor (2007) believes that there is no prescriptive rule which either sets conjoined subjects as singular or plural as the plural verb agreement, in some of such cases, come from somewhere other than from the lexical number on either of the individual nouns, and singular agreement too is also possible when the conjoined nouns have a singular referent.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) explain that either and or, and neither and nor are correlative and argue that traditional grammarians argue for the proximity rule which states that the subject-verb agreement should occur with the noun nearest to the verb. Wardhaugh (2003) asserts that if the subject contains coordinated noun phrases, the agreement is usually with the second noun phrase when the two phrases differ in number. Peters (2013) simplifies it by saying that proximity of the verb reflects the number of immediately preceding noun, usually when the subject is long and/or complex.

For example:

- *Neither you nor your friends are welcome at my party.*
- *Either the democratic candidate or the republican candidate is going to be elected in November.*

In both these situations, the verbs “*are*” and “*is*” agree with the closer subjects “*your friends*” and “*the republican candidate*” in the two sentences respectively.

### 2.8.7 OTHER INTERRUPTIONS

There are other interruptions which come with compound nouns which might also be confusing. Anderson (1954) maintains that other subjects, although compound in form, are clearly singular in meaning or intent. Anderson (1954) explains that the singularity of nouns which might be based on the two nouns qualifying the same person and the totality of the subject is what is confusing with certain sentences at times. For example:

- *His teacher and good friend has retired.*
- *The training and discipline was effective.*

In the above examples, the subjects are the two nouns; “*his teacher*” and “*good friend*” referring to one person, and “*the training*” and “*discipline*” which both do not denote the plural forms of nouns, hence the singular verbs *has* and *was* in those respective sentences. Anderson (1954) further explains that the lack of knowledge of these grammatical dynamics could be another problem which could result in grammatical errors of sentences.

The other interruption which also poses a challenge to English speakers/ writers is that of prepositional phrases. Kirsznier and Mandell (2006) posit that a prepositional phrase cannot contain the subject of the sentence and warn against the confusion which might arise when a prepositional phrase comes between the subject and verb as this could result in an error which could lead to an incorrect verb choice. The same scenario applies to phrases that come between the subject and the verb (usually set off with commas, parentheses, or dashes), they also do not contribute to the quantity of the verb (Kirsznier & Mandell, 2006). For example:

- *The weather in April, although periodically broken by afternoon thunderstorms, was generally quite pleasant.*
- *My marks (taken as an overall barometer of my conduct at the university) show that I am an exemplary student.*

### 2.8.8 HERE AND THERE

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) claim that the proximity rules applies when sentences would begin with ‘*there*’ followed by the conjoined noun phrase. When the verb

comes before the subject as in “*there*” or “*here*” sentences, it agrees with the subject that immediately follows the verb (Gulcat, 2004). The following two examples extracted from Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) help illustrate the assertion:

- *There is a girl and two boys in the room.*
- *There are two boys and a girl in the room.*

## **2.9 ERROR ANALYSIS OF CONCORD/ SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT**

The concord/ subject-verb agreement is a problem which cuts across the boundaries of all the countries universally, because of the differences in structures of all languages in the world. Some research studies from Europe, Asia and Africa will be reviewed in order to gain insight of what has been found on the subject in question. However, the current study will only discuss a selected number of EAs studies relevant to subject-verb agreement among students. The ESL learners lack competence in the concord because of sectional restrictions imposed by the English verbs studied (Oseny & Agbo 2014). This appears to be inconsistency to the learners and thus causes confusion to the application.

### **2.9.1 RESEARCH STUDIES ON CONCORD/ SUBJECT-VERB ERRORS IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

Africa is no exception to the problems of written subject-verb agreement. A number of written subject-verb related problems have been the focus of research over time, and these research projects allude that the problem affects Africa inasmuch as it affects the international world.

Maliwa (2009) conducted research among Grade 10 and Grade 12 South African isiXhosa learners and found that concord errors are problematic to both groups. The following are some examples of recorded concord errors from the learners:

- \* *My father go to his work on town. (Grade 10)*
- \* *My lips was very big. (Grade 10)*
- \* *The traffics wants a license. (Grade 12)*
- \* *She have nothing. (Grade 12)*

Below are the correct versions of the above erroneous statements:

- *My father **goes** to his work on town. (Grade 10)*
- *My lips **were** very big. (Grade 10)*
- *The traffics **want** a license. (Grade 12)*
- *She **has** nothing. (Grade 12)*

These committed errors reveal that both groups of learners had not fully mastered the subject-verb agreement rules. The concord errors committed by the learners from both groups suggest that concord is a problematic area in the language of the learners (Maliwa, 2009). It is unfortunate that even the Grade 12 learners are entangled in this mess.

Research conducted among iSizulu Grade 10 to Grade 12 learners show that learners in all the grades were not yet competent on the usage of concord. They were not conversant with the fact that the verb should always agree with the subject, i.e. a singular subject is followed by the singular verb form, and the plural subject is followed by the plural verb form. This error has been observed in almost all the respondents (Nzama, 2010), as reflected in the excerpts of the research findings listed below:

- \* *Those **who offers** bursaries can help me. (Grade 10)*
- \* *I shall be glad when my **dreams has** come true. (Grade 10)*
- \* *Taverns **does** not help. (Grade 11)*
- \* *I want to have all the **things** that **is** needed. (Grade 11)*
- \* *My **friends** that **makes** us to absent ourselves. (Grade 12)*
- \* *Everyone **have** got dreams. (Grade 12)*

The correct answers should have been these:

- **Those** who **offer** bursaries can help. (Grade 10)
- I shall be glad when my **dreams have** come true. (Grade 10)
- **Taverns do** not help. (Grade 11)
- I want to have all the **things** that **are** needed. (Grade 11)
- **My friends** that **make** us absent ourselves. (Grade 12)
- **Everyone has** got dreams. (Grade 12)

This error has been observed in almost all the respondents (Nzama, 2010). The findings reveal that all the grades have not yet grasped how concords work. They do not understand that the verb should always agree with the subject, i.e. a singular subject is followed by the singular verb form, and the plural subject is followed by the plural verb form.

Krishnamurthy, Kangira, Tjiramanga and Bronwen (2010; 2011) in their research conducted on concord error among Namibian Polytechnic students found that concord error was the most common as compared to other errors. The error of not applying the third person -s rule in affirmative including negative sentences and cases where an –s was added if the subject was plural were detected, as it is evident in the following examples:

A. Examples of not applying the third person –s:

**Incorrect version:**

**Correct version:**

\* *Each person **have** ...*

*Each person **has** ...*

\* *No one **pay** ...*

*No one **pays** ...*

\* *God **don't** have ...*

*God **doesn't** have ...*

B. Conversely, the adding of an –s to the verb when the subject is plural:

**Incorrect version**

**Correct version:**

• *What people **likes** and **dislikes** ...*

*What people **like** and **dislike** ...*

• *We **was** ...*

*We **were** ...*

• *They **tells** us ...*

*They **tell** us ...*

Similarly, research conducted among Nigerian university students revealed that students experienced problems with regard to the subject-verb agreement. The cause of the errors was that most Nigerian languages do not have subject verb agreement, as it is the case with English.

Also the research findings on concord conducted among Ghana Technology University College students by Klu (2014) revealed that students were not conversant with the rules which govern the use of concord within tenses. For example, sentences like:

- \* *The police left the scene of the accident after they **took** measurement of the place,*
- \* *Communication **help** human beings to spread information,*

were found in the students' scripts. It is obvious from the two examples that when it comes to the use of concord within tenses, and the subject-verb agreement, students are not conversant with the rules which stipulate that whenever one wants to describe two events which occurred in the past, the correct tense to use is the past perfect and that the singular subjects agree with a singular verb as it is the case in the respective sentences. The correct sentences, which students should have written are: "*The police left the scene of the accident **after they had taken** measurement of the place*" or "***After the police had taken** measurement of the place of accident, they **left** (the place)*" and "*Communication **helps** human beings to spread information*", (Klu, 2014). Though the meaning could still be decoded, the poor sentence construction is not what could have been expected at this level of English language learning.

## 2.9.2 RESEARCH STUDIES ON CONCORD/ SUBJECT-VERB ERRORS IN SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

There are several research findings regarding subject-verb/ concord errors among second language learners in Europe. A few will be highlighted and discussed in short in this section.

Thagg-Fisher (1985) conducted research among Swedish university students investigating errors in English translations, compositions and spoken language. Bergström (1987) also carried out a study on spoken and written material produced by Swedish students in upper secondary school. The findings in both the studies show that most subject-verb/ concord errors henceforth "*S/V concord*" occur in speech and in essays and in free compositions than in elicited data respectively. Bergström (1987), also in agreement with Thagg-Fisher's conclusion (1985), found that students focus on content when writing essays and hence focus less on form. The causes of errors were attributed

to the fact that learners focus a lot on content rather than grammatical correctness in speech and composition, hence the errors. Also, in Ruin's (1996) study, however, fewer S/V concord errors were found in essays than in translations and tests. According to Ruin (1996), there are fewer errors in essays because the students use simpler sentence structures and thus avoid the more difficult ones that can cause errors.

Hartsuiker and van Zee (2001) investigated the attraction in subject-verb agreement construction among the undergraduate students at the University of Nijmegen in Europe and found that there were significantly more agreement errors in the subject-modifier mismatch condition than in direct-object.

Karlsson's (2002) investigation included compositions and translations written by Swedish students at Lund University from A to C level. Like Ruin (1996), Karlsson (2002) observed more S/V concord errors in translations than in free compositions.

However, Vaurula's (2012) research on finite verbs in written productions of Finnish learners gives a positive report. The research reports 15.5% (31 of the 200 cases) from A1 levels, 10.5% (44 of 418 cases) from A2 levels, 4.4% (14 of 318 cases) from B2 levels, and 0% (0 of 23 cases) from B2, of incorrect number of uses of the subject-verb agreement from the respective levels. The research findings reflect a better understanding of the usage of the subject-verb agreement by the Finnish Secondary School learners of ESL.

### **2.9.3 RESEARCH STUDIES ON CONCORD/ SUBJECT-VERB ERRORS IN SELECTED ASIAN COUNTRIES**

A causal observation of speech errors made by Chinese learners of English is that subject-verb agreement is a perennial problem for these learners, reflected in the rampant errors in sentences which require that the subject and the verb agree in number (plural or singular), this despite the fact that subject-verb agreement is an important grammatical feature found in most Indo-European languages (Chen, Shu, Liu & Zhao, 2007).

Stapa and Izahar (2010) found that a great number of students could not master the use of subject-verb agreement in constructing grammatically written correct sentences; the same point that Mbau and Muhsin (2014) made when they found that most Indonesian students found it difficult to learn English due to the big differences between their HL and English in all respects: morphology, syntax and semantics.

The research findings for EA of subject-verb agreement in argumentative essays among Malaysian students also showed that students have a problem with four types of subject-verb agreement: the subject verb agreement of number, verb agreement of person, agreement of verb, and agreement of subject (Radin & Fong 2014).

Most Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulty in using concord in English because they are often confused in establishing correspondents between subjects and verbs which may result from their understanding of some concord rules (Khudhayer, 2010). The Chinese and Korean learners make mistakes of subject-verb agreement because of the process of second language acquisition; some errors may happen regardless the first language background problem of L1 interference (Zheng, 2013).

The United Arab Emirates male university students also displayed subject-verb agreement mastery deficiency (Murshidi, 2014). The research found that the subject had the most frequent grammatical errors with a repetition percentage of 60% among the students. Consistent with the results, Murshidi (2014) reports of more frequent cases of the singular subjects being matched with the plural verbs and the plural subjects being matched with singular verbs as in the following examples:

Plural verbs being incorrectly matched with singular verbs:

- \* *My mother work ...*
- \* *He also work ...*
- \* *My brother like ...*

Singular verbs being incorrectly matched with plural subjects:

- \* *My grades was ...*
- \* *My favourite hobbies is ...*

- \* *My abilities ... has ...*

In addition, Wang, Zhao and Shi (2015) attest that subject-verb agreement has its challenges on students. In their research on subject on the third person singular forms, they found that subject-verb agreement errors form 21.8% of the verb errors from the statistics from a typical ESL group. They offer the following examples as evidence of the findings:

- \* *He likes apple but she like orange.*
- \* *She will name him whatever she want to.*
- \* *I love her because she give me life.*

## **2.10 SUMMARY**

With the help of the knowledge that was gleaned from the views of other scholars on subject-verb agreement/ concord subject and the related components in the three continents, this chapter has successfully addressed matters that have a bearing on the subject of the study. The chapter has also offered examples from other sources, including the findings of the preceding research, as evidence of the severity of the spread of the problems related to subject-verb agreement/ concord.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the research methodology which will be used in the study. It also explains how data will be collected and analysed. The chapter, furthermore, entails the ethical considerations that serve as the bedrock of the researcher-respondents' interactions.

### **3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH**

In order to investigate the type, frequency and causes of errors made by Grade 12 learners of English FAL in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, the current study adopted a mixed method approach. Creswell (2003) defines mixed methods as the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which data is collected concurrently or sequentially, is given a priority, and which involve the integration of data at one or more stages in the process of research. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) further explain that it is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing and integrating (or mixing) quantitative and qualitative research (and data) in a single study or a longitudinal programme of inquiry. Apart from being a combination of quantitative and qualitative it also involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing or integrating both approaches in a study (Creswell, 2014). Other researchers, like Babbie (2008), term this method triangulation and assert that it uses several different research methods to test the same findings. It is the use of multiple methods reflecting an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Boeije (2010) refers to triangulation as an examination of a social phenomenon from different angles.

The choice of this method comes with the accompanying advantages. The purpose of this form of research is that both qualitative and quantitative research, in combination, provide a better understanding of a social research problem or issue than either research approach alone (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Its application ensures that the inherent

bias of one measure or method is counterbalanced by the strengths of the other and that the results converge or corroborate one another, thus strengthening the validity of the findings (Greene & Caracelli, 2003). Since triangulation is the use of complementary methods, theories, data or investigators in the research and the intention, the approach thus compensates for any one-sidedness or dictation that may result from an individual method, theory, database or researcher (Flick, Von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004). The study envisages indisputable and credible results, hence the adoption of this approach.

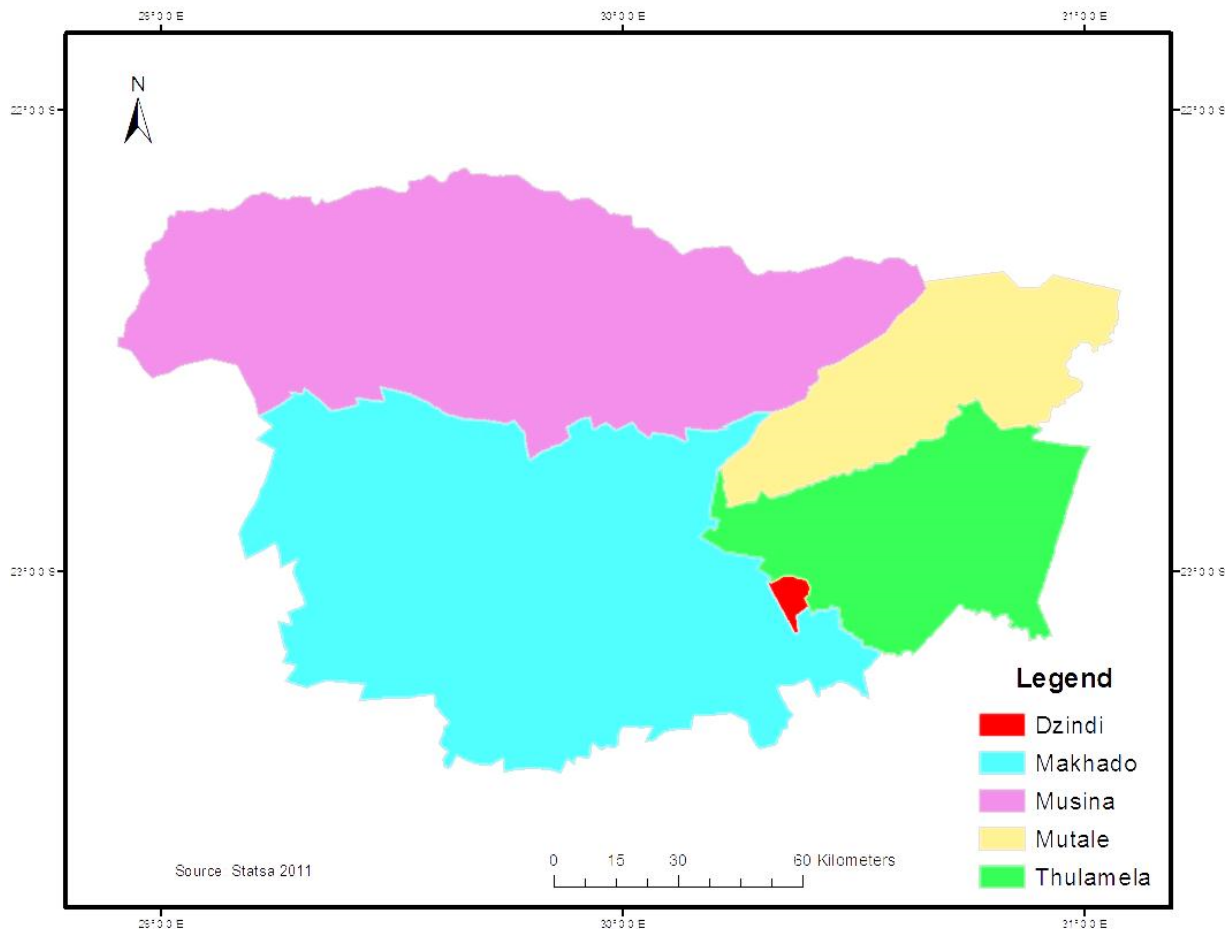
### **3.2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Experimental design is the process of planning a study to meet specified objectives. Planning an experiment properly is very important in order to ensure that the right type of data and a sufficient sample size are available to answer the research questions of interest as clearly and efficiently as possible. The experimental design is used in order to improve the precision of the research answers (Easton & McColl, 1997). The reason for the researcher to follow the experimental process is to ensure that the research questions regarding the learners' competence of concord are answered validly, objectively, accurately and economically (Kumar, 2005).

### **3.2.2 RESEARCH SETTING**

Research setting refers to the place where data are collected. The study was conducted at Dzindi Circuit, one of the 27 circuits which fall under Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The circuit comprises 11 secondary schools. In the 2014 Grade 12 results, Dzindi Circuit got position one with 92%, in the whole District in particular and the Province in general. All of the schools in the circuit, but one, had obtained over 80% pass rate. Even this other school was very close with a 79.5%. Since almost all the subjects are done through the medium of English, this academic achievement could be equated to some better mastery and usage of English language. Therefore the situation portrays a fertile environment for an academic research of this magnitude, hence the choice of this circuit for this study. The choice has also been influenced by the fact that the researcher has been a teacher of English FAL at high school for over two decades until January 2016.

FIGURE 3.1 Map of Municipalities (Dzindi Circuit) of Vhembe District



Source: Geographic Information System (GIS) Laboratory (UNIVEN)

### 3.2.3 POPULATION

This is the entire set of objects or people which is the focus of the research and about which the research wants to determine some characteristics (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006). Babbie (2008) maintains that a population for a study is that group about whom we want to draw conclusions. The research population for this study comprised of all the Grade 12 English FAL learners enrolled at 11 secondary schools in Dzindi Circuit. Suitability criteria stipulate the characteristics that people in the population must possess in order to be included in the study (Polit & Hungler, 1999). In this study, the participants were the 2016 first entering Grade 12 learners, attending school within Dzindi Circuit and who were willing to participate.

### 3.2.4 SAMPLING

Sampling is a practical way of collecting data when the population is infinite or extremely large thus making a study of all its elements impossible (Bless *et al.*, 2006). Due to a number of compelling yet necessary elements – as highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs of this section – the researcher has decided to work with only a few distinct members of the entire population. This is the approach that is referred to as purposive or judgemental sampling.

Kumar (2005) succinctly explains that the primary consideration in purposive sampling is the judgment of the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. According to Bless *et al.* (2006), purposive or judgemental sampling is based on the judgement of a researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample. Purpose sampling method is a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research (Oliver, 2006). According to Gray (2014), purposive sampling methods allow the researcher to obtain participants relevant for the study as they are selected purposefully based on their information.

It was because of the above affiliation that the researcher went for the five top performing schools in the Dzindi circuit of Vhembe District. After purposefully choosing these schools, non-probability sampling was used to select the individual learners who should be part of the study. Hartman and Hedblom (1979) state that non-probability-oriented sample offers an advantage of working with the persons who happen to be in a particularly good position to supply information. Therefore, the non-probability sampling method was used to systematically select the participants from the known population. The intention was to include the representative sample of 72 learners for both the qualitative and quantitative methods, which is  $\pm 10\%$  of the entire 2016 population of 720 learners from the schools forming the 2015 Top Five Grade 12 population at Dzindi Circuit. The sample was, among

others, influenced by considerations of saving time, cutting costs, working with a manageable group and the academic potential of learners.

### **3.2.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

Punch (2006) explains that a research instrument answers to the question on how data will be collected. Since this study applied the mixed methods approach, two instruments for each of the selected methods were used.

The researcher used a standardised test and memorandum, for quantitative research based-section, because Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006) contend that standardised research instruments in the form of a test and memorandum enable the researcher to interpret the numbers and give them a voice and also to make explanatory generalisation about the population in question. Tests and memorandum also permit the researcher to make comparisons across studies and with different populations (Monette, Sullivan & De Jong, 2008).

The other reason for the choice of a standardised test and memorandum as an appropriate instrument is that the learners are familiar with tests and examinations as they are always tested on this by their teachers, almost all the time. According to The Programme Assessment Support Services at the Centre for Assessment and Research, when educators want to know a student's current level of understanding in some domain of knowledge, they typically administer some kind of achievement tests. Additionally, tests are again economic both in terms development, administration and other resources. Even the researcher could develop one which could be used across all the sampled learners according to what he wants to test. They are also easy to score and analyse because they shall have been developed particularly for that purpose.

The Programme Assessment Support Services at the Centre for Assessment and Research lists two general types of instruments that can be used to measure learning and development as "*selected-response*" and "*constructed-response*". The researcher used the former and the sampled Grade 12 learners of English FAL were expected to

choose the correct form of the word(s) within brackets and write it down in the appropriate space as a way of completing the disjointed present tense statements. The questionnaire also had a section on the biographical information of the respondents which was gathered by ticking against the appropriate applicable entries for each respondent. This was included to help understand the learners being studied.

On the other hand, the researcher has applied the document analysis approach for the qualitative section of the research. Marshall and Rossman (2006) maintain that qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: participating in the setting, observing directly, interviewing in depth, and analysing documents and material culture. The advantage of this method is that it offers authentic information to what the study aims to investigate.

### **3.2.5.1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEST**

In this study, the researcher will develop a test on correct usage of concord/ subject-verb agreement, by extracting question items from *English Communication Skills in the New Millennium Level III* (Senn & Skinner, 2001) and use it to analyse written errors committed by sampled Grade 12 learners of English FAL. The test will be given to Curriculum Advisors (CA) in the Vhembe District for moderation and standardization. These CAs are responsible for the setting of the common tests and examinations which are used for Continuous Assessment (CASS) for all the FET Grades in the Vhembe District. They have been delegated with the authority and tasked with the responsibility to set standardized tests and assist with any other curriculum-related matters across the country; their expertise therefore is needed.

### **3.2.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

de Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005) advise that in order to obtain valid and reliable data the researcher must ensure before implementing the study, that the measurement procedures and the measurement instruments have acceptable levels of reliability and validity. Reliability and validity are the two most important concepts in the context of measurement. The following terminologies have been explained hereunder:

### **3.2.6.1 VALIDITY**

According to Babbie (2004), validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure. On the other hand, de Vos *et al.* (2005) explain the significance of validity as to ascertain that the instrument actually measures concepts in question, and ensure that the concept is measured accurately. Therefore, the test developed for this study will intend to measure Grade 12 learners' competence of subject verb agreement/concord based on the text book and the curriculum prescribed. The test will also be moderated by the Grade 12 English Subject Advisors.

### **3.2.6.2 RELIABILITY**

The reliability of a measurement procedure is the stability or consistency of the measurement which is seen if the same variable measured under the same conditions produces identical (or nearly identical) measurements (de Vos *et al.*, 2005).

The pre-test will be given to the non-sampled Grade 12 English FAL learners twice in order to determine its reliability.

### **3.2.7 PRE-TEST**

In order to guarantee the credibility of the study, the researcher administered a pre-test in an effort to identify possible problems regarding the suitability of the instrument. Bless *et al.* (2006) point out that pre-testing is useful to the researcher because it reveals potential areas of challenges with the approach or resource materials. It also assists with the determination of the correctness and relevance of any research instrument developed. For this study, pre-testing was conducted with ten Grade 12 English FAL learners who were found within the prescribed research settings. However, these participants were not included in the current study. The purpose was to evaluate the instrument's capacity and appropriateness to collect the desired data (Caspar & Peytcheva, 2011).

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

Marshall and Rossman (2006) believe that in a proposal, the methods planned for data collection should be related to the type of information sought. Different methods also dictate to the different instruments to be used in the actual process of data collection. This study has adopted the mixed method approach, as explained earlier on. Since a mixed method approach is not an independent research method but a combination of a number of methods; quantitative and qualitative in particular, it is fundamental that the two involved methods and how each would be used in the study should be explained in full, as it has been done in the subsequent subsections:

#### **3.3.1 QUANTITATIVE METHOD**

The quantitative research approach was used because it is an approach in which the researcher uses strategies of enquiry such as experiments and surveys and collects data on pre-determined instruments that yield statistical data (Cresswell, 2003). Monette *et al.* (2008) state that quantitative research involves measurement of phenomena using numbers and counts. For that reason, quantitative methods are a methodical procedure in which statistical data are organised and measured to deal with the accumulation of facts and then used to get information about the world. On the other hand, Shuttleworth (2008) cautions that quantitative experiments can be difficult and expensive and require a lot of time to perform and caution that they must be carefully planned to ensure that there is complete randomisation and correct designation of control groups. The current study included the quantitative approach because, after statistical analysis of the results, a comprehensive answer is reached, and the results can be legitimately discussed and published.

The researcher, together with the assistant, travelled to the sampled schools and administered a test to the sampled candidates. In the questionnaire, the candidates were required to supply the biographical information whereas in the test they were required to identify the correct forms of subject-verb agreement provided by the researcher in the form of a multiple-choice question format. Both the questionnaire and the test scripts were collected as soon as the participants had finished writing. They were both given to a

statistician for further administration. The test was marked against the provided marking memorandum, thus identifying the subject-verb agreement errors that were committed by the candidates. Thereafter the collected data were quantified and analysed.

### **3.3.2 QUALITATIVE METHOD**

Qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things (Berg, 1995). Babbie (2008) adds that every observation that a person makes is qualitative at the onset. It is the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering meanings and patterns of relationships and it is the most typical of field and historical research (Babbie, 2010). Boeije (2010) explains that qualitative research is meant to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. According to Boeije (2010) this method produces rich, descriptive data that need to be interpreted through the identification and coding of themes and categories leading to findings that can contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical use. This could even be done on public documents like newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports or private documents like personal journals and diaries, letters and emails (Cresswell, 2014).

Marshall and Rossman (2006) maintain that qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: participating in the setting, observing directly, interviewing in depth, and analysing documents and material culture. In this study the researcher followed the document analysis data method as it provides authentic evidence to what the study aims to investigate. The 2016 Grade 12 Preparatory teacher-marked English FAL composition scripts were studied with focus on the subject-verb agreement. This was to ascertain if learners could apply the subject-verb agreement rules when they write, especially when they have not been cautioned to mind the application thereof. In this way the researcher was able to find out the types of subject-verb agreement committed by the learners when they write English FAL.

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Marshall and Rossman (1999) describe it as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is conducted so that the researcher can detect consistent co-variance of two or more variables (Bless *et al.*, 2006). Bloomberg (2008) further states that in this section researcher reports on how data was managed, organised, and analysed in preparation to write up and present the findings. According to Chavan (2016), data analysis is the process of extracting, compiling, and modelling raw data for purposes of obtaining constructive information that can be applied to formulating conclusions, predicting outcomes or supporting decisions in business, scientific and social science settings.

The nature of the study, which is a mixed methods approach, dictates that the data should also be analysed differently per method. Cresswell (2003) believes that data analysis in mixed methods research relates to the type of research strategy chosen for the procedures and such should occur both within the quantitative (descriptive and inferential numeric analysis) and the qualitative (descriptive and thematic text or image analysis) approach, and often between the two approaches.

#### 3.4.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

de Vos *et al.* (2005) suggest that quantitative data in professional research can be analysed manually or by computer. Babbie (2014) maintains that quantitative analysis is numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect.

The researcher has sought the services of a professional statistician to analyse data by means of descriptive statistics using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 version. Errors committed by learners will be quantified, scrutinised, and grouped and conclusions will be drawn based on the types of errors committed. A pattern of the errors will then be established in order to understand their types, causes and recommendations of their rectification. The number of errors per different questions used will be quantified and then computed for ranges, mean, frequency, graphs and other

statistical related terminologies. Graphs will also be used to display the errors clearly for easy and fast analysis. Based on the types of errors committed and the related literature review, the researcher will establish the possible causes for errors after which recommendations on what could possibly be done to address the errors will be made.

### **3.4.2 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

Henn *et al.* (2006) believe that qualitative data can be found all around us, even in newspapers we read, memos we receive at work, etc. Nigatu (2009) contends that amongst others, qualitative data analysis is the transcript of individual interviews, and focus groups, field notes from observation of certain activities, copies of documents, audits and/ or video recordings. Nigatu (2009) further explains that this is a process and procedure during which we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating. Babbie (2014) explains qualitative data analysis as the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, content analysis, in-depth interviews and other qualitative research techniques, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationship.

In this section of the study, the researcher will work through the 2016 Grade 12 Preparatory English FAL composition scripts, looking at how the learners deal with subject-verb agreement/ concord in their sentence construction. Focus will only be on incorrect cases of subject-verb usage. These will be identified and extracted for the investigation of the types, frequency and causes of these errors so that there should be a better suggestion of the intervention to counteract the anomalous sentence construction.

### **3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher has the responsibility to respect the integrity of the participants and therefore the researcher should inform the respondents about the purpose of the study. Therefore, the researcher will adhere to the following ethical considerations.

### **3.5.1 INFORMED CONSENT**

According to Monette *et al.* (2008) informed consent entails telling the potential research participants about all the aspects of the research that might reasonably influence their decision to participate.

The researcher will seek permission from the Department of Education – Vhembe District, and the principals of the sampled schools. The sampled learners will be informed that participation is voluntary. For those who are underage informed consent will be obtained from their parents or guardians. The researcher will ensure that the participants are conversant with all the procedures to be followed during the entire research duration (de Vos *et al.*, 2005).

### **3.5.2 RIGHT TO PRIVACY: ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

According to de Vaus (1995) anonymity is the non-disclosure of the participants' identity. Gray (2009) emphasizes that the researcher should inform the participants that there would be no revelation of confidential information unless prior permission is obtained from the participants. The names of the participants will not be publicized; instead numbers will be used representing names which will be kept in a safe place for reference and / or for clarity's sake whenever needed.

The researcher will assure the respondents that any published information about or data collected from them in the study will not, in any way, be possibly linked to any individual.

### **3.5.3 NO HARM TO PARTICIPANTS**

Research ethical standards compel researchers not put participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm as a result of their participation. Harm can be defined as both physical and psychological (Trochim, 2006). The two major standards of confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants will also be informed that the study findings will not form part of their assessment. The participants will also be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study whenever they feel like doing so.

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter has detailed the research methodology, and the motivation thereof, which this study aims to adopt in pursuit of the objectives outlined in chapter 1. The chapter has also outlined how the research methodology related concepts would be applied for the most valid and reliable findings.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS, INTERPRETATIONS AND SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSIONS**

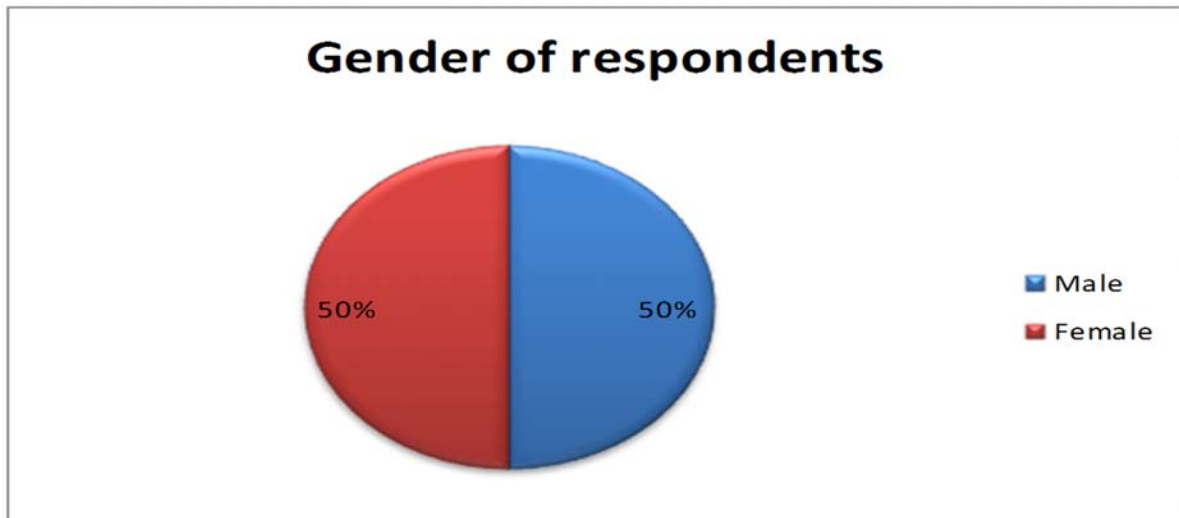
### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter Three has covered the research methodology through explaining the research approach and all of its components. This chapter aims to present the research findings, interpretations of the data gathered through the use of the questionnaires and the analysis of the learners' written compositions and the discussions thereof. For a quick and better understanding of the collected data and its interpretation, there shall be accompanying tables and graphs with comprehensive numerical details. The data analysis will be aimed towards the exposition of the research topic: 'An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa', and its related research questions:

- What are the most common types of written concord/ subject-verb agreement errors which are committed by Grade 12 FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa?
- What are the causes of these errors among the Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa?

### **4.2 PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (QUANTITATIVE)**

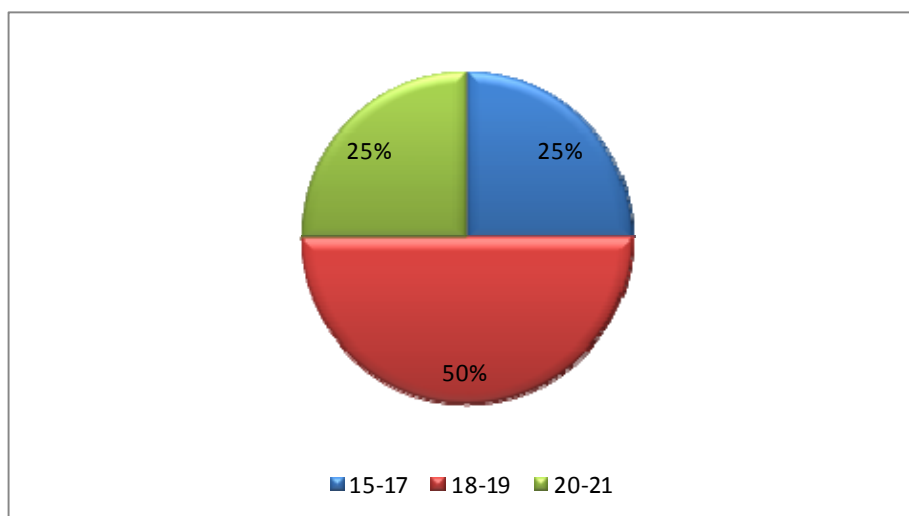
This part of research was included in this study just as to define the conformities of the participants to the standards that were set for the success and validity of the research. Even though the findings in this section do not directly answer to the posed questions, their observation is what builds the credibility of the sought answers.



**Figure 4.1: Participants by gender (n = 72)**

The figure presents 72 participants, 50% of whom are males and another 50% females. The findings are like this because the participants have been chosen deliberately in order to satisfy the purposive sampling procedure which is based on the researcher's judgement of who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study, and also to accommodate the researcher's decision informed by, amongst others, the capacity of the participants.

## Age range



**Figure 4.2: Participants by age (n = 72)**

According to the accompanying figure, 25% of the participants are between 15 and 17 years of age, 50% is of those between ages 18 and 19 years, and the last group, which makes 25%, is representing the 20 - 21 years age bracket. These age-ranges fit in with the projected ages (of between 17 and 20 years) at which most learners, based on the different ages they started school and other circumstances which could have resulted in them failing other grades, finish their secondary education. These findings align with the suitability criteria which is benchmarked on particular characteristics for the inclusion of participants in the study.

| Grade | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|
| 12    | 72        | 100     |

**Table 4.1: Number of participants in Grade 12 (n = 72)**

The information reveals that all of the participants are doing Grade 12. This information satisfies the research population requirement which prescribes that in this study, the participants will be the 2016 first-entering Grade 12 learners, attending school within Vhembe District (Dzindi Circuit) and who are willing to participate.

| No. of years | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 1            | 72        | 100     |

**Table 4.2: Number of years in grade (n = 72)**

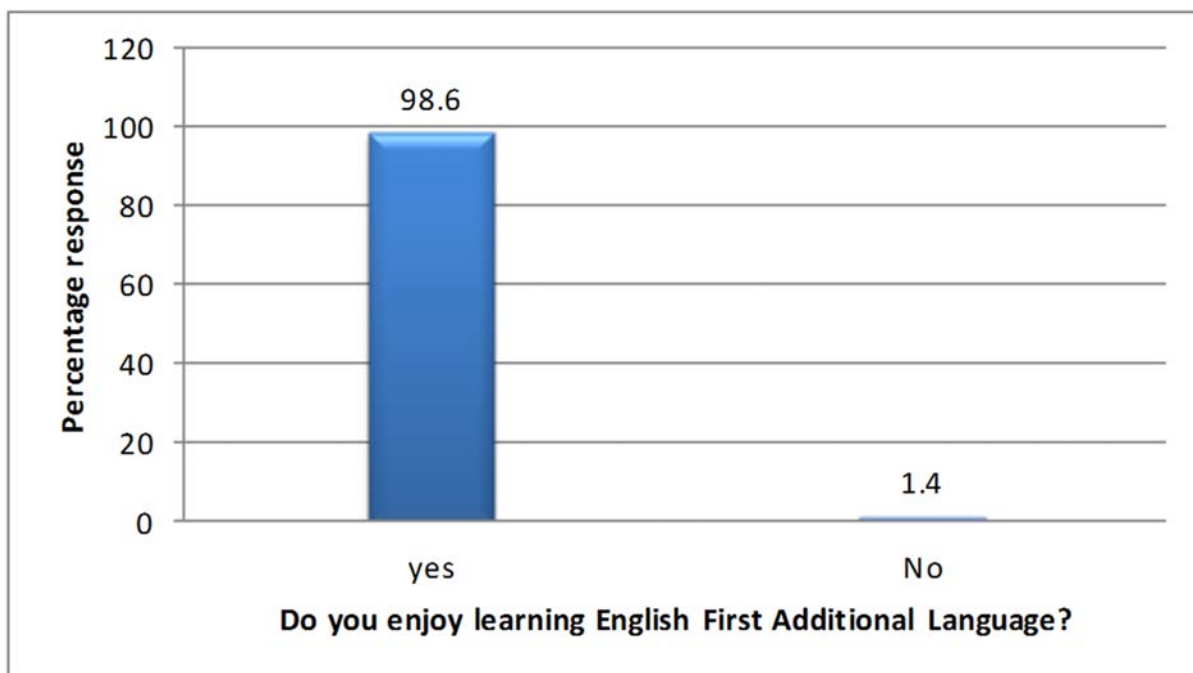
All the participants are doing Grade 12 for the first time. This is also in line with the prescription that the participants in the study must be first-entering Grade 12 learners. This again answers to the purposive sampling procedures as stipulated under sampling.

#### **Participants per primary languages**

|           | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Tshivenda | 72        | 100     |

**Table 4.3: Participants whose mother tongue is Tshivenda (n = 72)**

This table indicates that all the 72 learners speak Tshivenda as their primary language, thus making English an additional language to these learners' population. This revelation also concurs with what has been stated in the background to the study that the multilingual nature of the South African state obviously makes English to be the second language to many of the country's learners.



**Figure 4.3: Participants who enjoy learning English FAL**

Figure 4.3 presents 71 (98.6%) as the number of the participants who enjoy learning English FAL as against one (1.4%) who does not enjoy learning the subject. The reason the higher number of the participants affirm that they enjoy learning English FAL could be attributed to the compulsory status afforded English as the language of education; in being both a subject and the LoLT, in the South African school context (CAPS, 2011). The level of study of the participants, coupled with the importance of English in their education endeavour, work place and its social status, should be able to stir up their interest in English, which is the reason why the one (1.4%) who indicates his/ her dislike for English FAL could be regarded as the stray group with tenuous reasons.

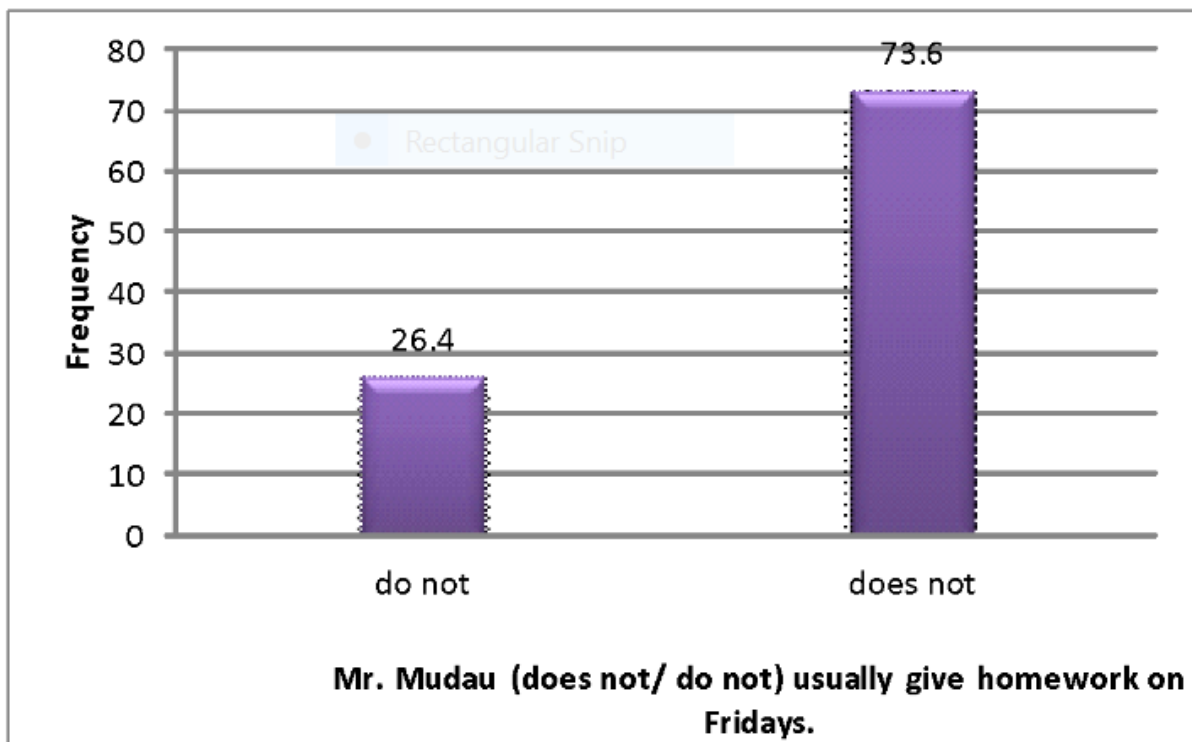
#### **4.3 DATA ON SUBJECT-VERB CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS**

This is the section that has a direct bearing on what is being researched with regard to the written concord errors among Grade 12 FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. A mixed-method approach was used to gather data in this study as it has been explained and motivated in the earlier parts of the study. The procedure

on how each method was used and what evidence it has yielded will be detailed in the subsequent sections.

#### 4.3.1 QUANTITATIVE APPROACH ANALYSIS

In this section the presented analyses of the results will be accompanied by illustrated graphs with comprehensive numerical details, as already stated in the introduction of this chapter.



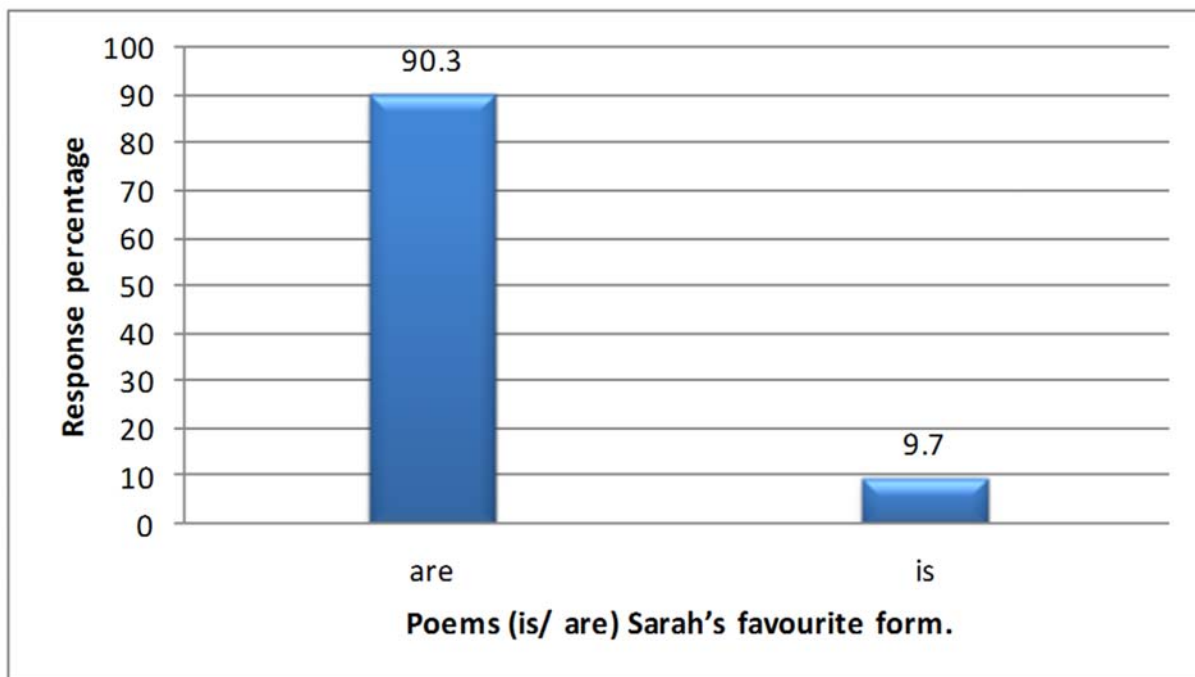
**Figure 4.4: Third person singular subjects**

This figure reveals that the majority of the participants (73.6%) were competent in knowing which auxiliary verb, “*does not*”, agrees with the singular subject, “*Mr. Mudau*” while 26.4% of participants were incompetent in choosing the incorrect plural subject-verb match, “*do not*”. The majority (15.6%) of these incompetent participants were females and 11.1% were males. These findings are in line with the 95% of the correct entry on Lambani and Nengome’s (2016) research on the same subject.

This is the formal agreement, which is simply termed the default type of agreement, where the form of the noun is matched in the verb with its –s inflection present for the singular form, and absent for the plural form and where the subject and the verb in a sentence agree in number (K12-Reader, 2012 & Peters, 2013). Even though the percentages are low, the results affirm Omotese's (2012) findings which revealed that learners committed errors of not applying the third person –s rule in affirmative sentences. The results seem to affirm Mbau and Muhsin's (2014) study which has found that there were incorrect sentences with the omission of the singular marker –s and/or –es at the end of the verbs for the subject of the third person singular.

The 26.4% who chose the incorrect answer should be a worrying factor and whatever could have triggered off the assumption needs to be closely looked into for an informed intervention. It could be supposed that the –es singular inflectional marker on the auxiliary verb 'does' could have been interpreted by these learners as a plural marker as when it is used with plural subjects. The error could thus be an indication of overgeneralisation of plural formation rule which could also be associated with fossilisation.

Grade 12 is the exit point to either the tertiary education or the workplace where good English language usage would be a requirement, a point supported by User (2014) who claims that being competent in the rules of concord in grammar is obligatory if target language learners are to speak and write good English. The nine years of studying English should have equipped these participants with the necessary skills of dealing with the subject-verb agreement, and this error should have been completely eradicated.

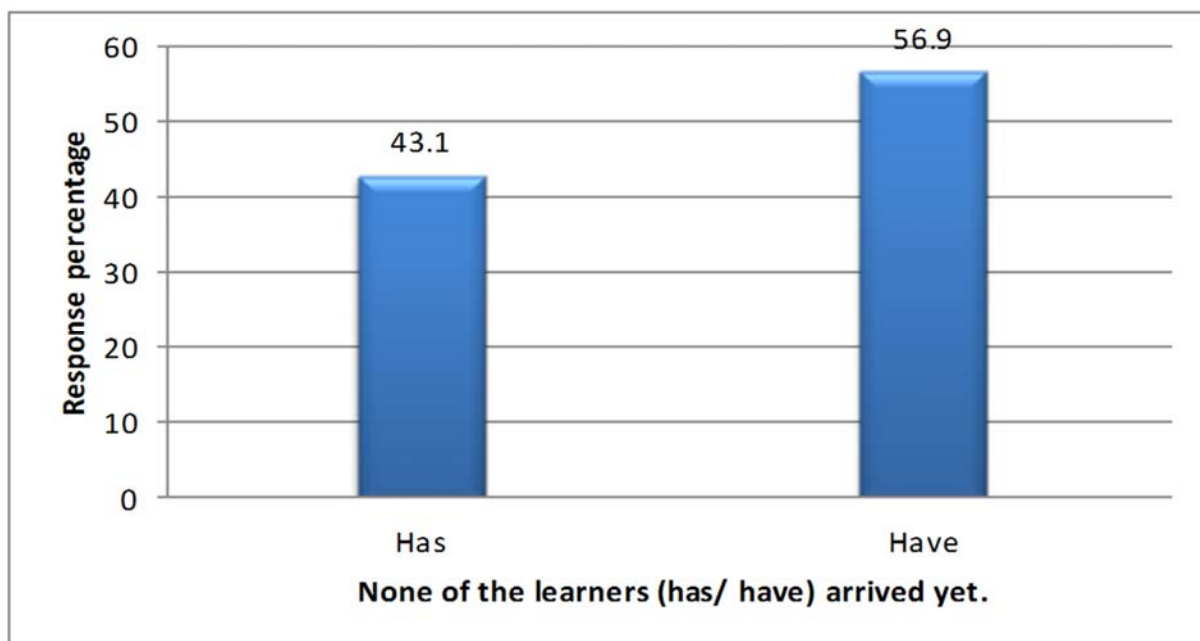


**Figure 4.5: Third person plural subjects**

In this figure, 90.3% have had the correct subject-verb match and just 9.7% had the incorrect choice. Of those who were incompetent, 4.2% were males and 5.6% females.

Despite the success of the majority of the participants, there is still a problem of the other 9.7% who lack knowledge of how the third person plural subject-verb agreement works. The incompetent participants validate the research conducted among iSizulu Grade 10 to Grade 12 learners which showed that the learners in both grades were not yet competent on the usage of concord (Murshidi, 2014).

The error in this situation could be attributed to *simplification*, which happens when learners fail to distinguish between first and third person in verbs and use the first- person rule for all persons. As explained under the CAH, this is because Tshivenda does not offer different inflections with any of the different number pronouns. The –s on the subject could have also misled the participants into choosing the verb “is” as these seem to rhyme.



**Figure 4.6: Singular indefinite pronouns**

Figure 4.6 presents a question on indefinite pronouns. The findings are that more than half (56.9%) were not aware that the verb choice should be singular and only the remaining 43.1% had the competence to choose the correct choice. Several factors could have resulted in most participants picking out the incorrect verb; some of which could be what has been discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

The proximity rule could have been applied conflictingly. The participants might have presumed that *“the learners”*, which is both plural and closer to the verb, should be the subject to define the verb choice, hence *“have”* as the verb choice by this higher number. The participants might have also mixed up the proximity rule in the correlative conjunctions; which prescribes that the subject closer to the verb informs the verb choice, and how the indefinite pronouns work.

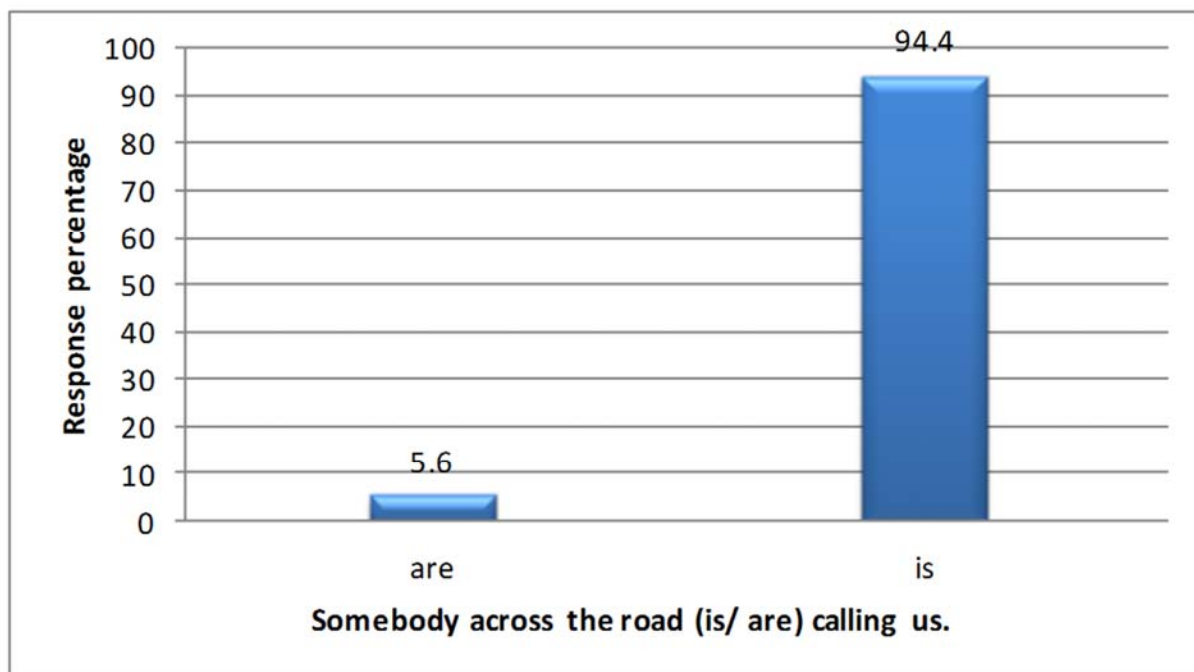
The other reason might have been the dual status of the pronoun *“none”* which stands to be used either as singular or plural. In both these situations, there should be an analysis of how the pronoun has been used so that the verb choice should be correct which would

not have been the case in this situation. In the illustration in question, profound analysis deficiency might have been the problem with many of the participants, something that the majority of the participants failed to notice. For the correct completion of the sentence, the verb should have been “*none*” which is singular and refers to a mass noun.

The sentence consists of a pronoun “*none*”; which is the subject, and a prepositional phrase “*of the learners*”. To someone with little understanding of syntax, it could be difficult to know that prepositional phrases of sentences have no interference with the subjects of the sentence in terms of their numbers. Based on the error committed by the participants, it could again be supposed that some of them could have taken the sentence as having two subjects; “*none*” and “*the learners*”, each of which could be plural. Participants would then have thought that the verb of the sentence should, as such, be plural as well.

It could again be concluded that the choice might have been the element of sheer confusion of not knowing which, exactly, is the subject of the sentence before taking the whole antecedent as the subject, which decision would have resulted in this error.

Based on the supposed causes of the error, it could be concluded that either overgeneralisation or simplification could have made the learners to choose the incorrect answer.



**Figure 4.7: Singular indefinite pronouns**

The findings on this question show that the majority of the participants 94.4% were competent in choosing the correct answer 'is' while only a few, 5.6%, could not determine the correct subject-verb choice. It was only 2.8% of both males and females who showed lack of competence.

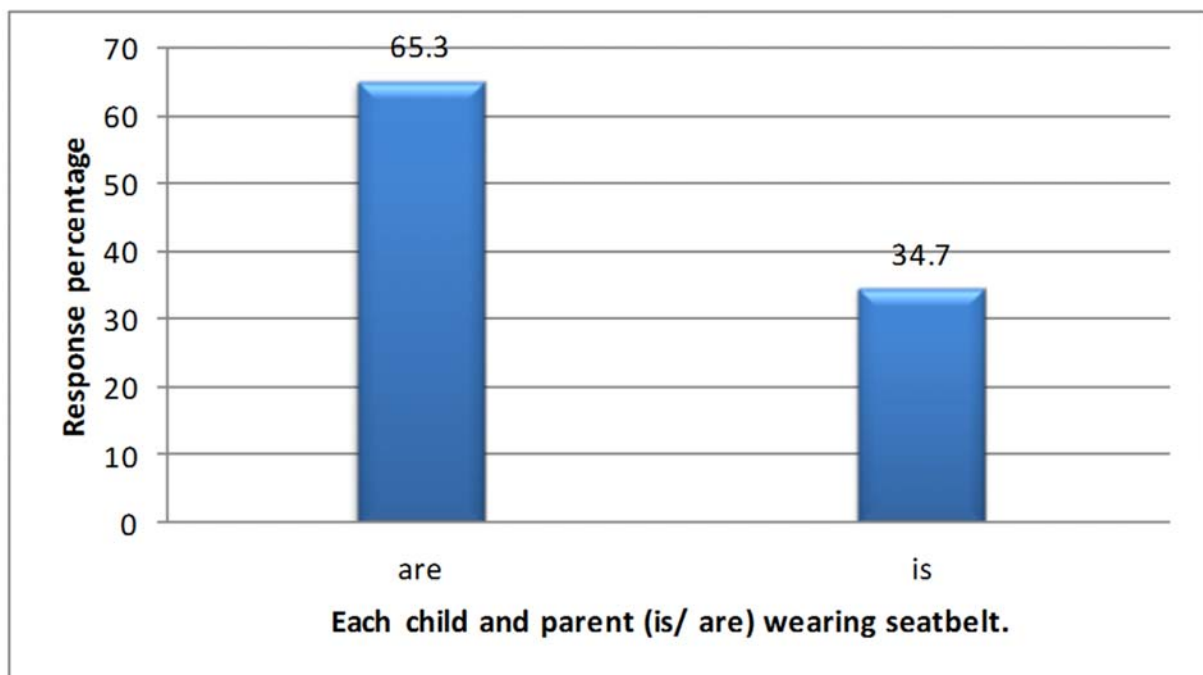
A number of factors, as explained in the subsequent paragraphs, could be attached to the reasons why there are still some participants, regardless the percentages, who would still struggle with subject-verb agreement involving singular indefinite pronouns.

The few who were incompetent in dealing correctly with the question might have confused "somebody", which is singular, with "some", which could be both singular and plural depending on how they have been used. It could also be inferred that the syllable "some" on "somebody", could have suggested that the pronoun "somebody" should be plural. The plural verb choice by some, though the percentages are minimal, could have stemmed from this interpretation.

This sentence also consists of a pronoun “*somebody*” and a prepositional phrase “*across the road*” just like the previous one. Even though, the identical constructions yield opposite answers. With this sentence, the number of the incorrect responses has drastically gone down to only 5.6% whereas it was 56.9% with the previous question. It could be presumed that the singularity of both “*somebody*” and “*the road*” could be the difference in the number of the incorrect choices between the two questions.

The inclusion of “*us*” at the close of the sentence, which is also plural, could have been another cause for the error.

All the causes of this error might have stemmed from simplification and/or overgeneralisation. Many other factors, which do not necessarily apply in this case, would have played a role in the choice of the incorrect plural answer *are*.



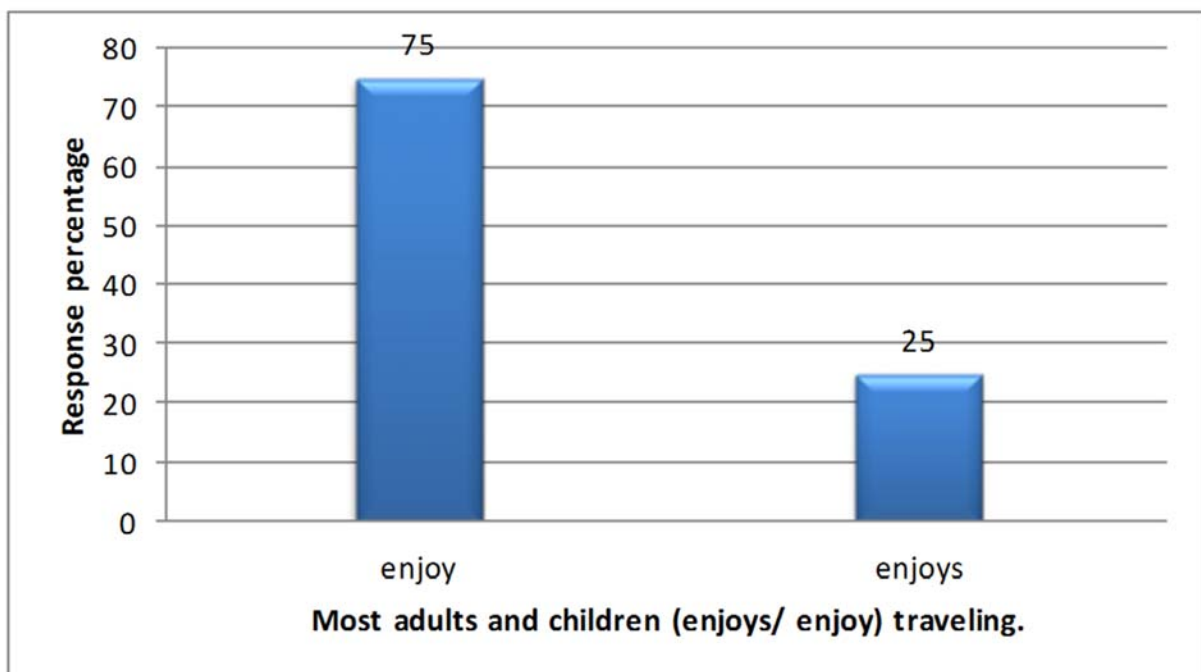
**Figure 4.8: Singular paired indefinite pronouns**

According to Figure 4.8, the findings show that 65.3% of the participants committed an error and chose the incorrect answer and 34.7% had the ability to make the correct

choice. The pronoun *each* is always singular and it should be followed by a singular subject noun and a singular verb. Two reasons could be attributed to this inaptness.

In this illustration, *each* is qualifying both the *child* and the *parent*, each on its individual basis as singular but paired indefinite pronouns. In other words, there should have been a pronoun *each* just before each of the two nouns, in which case, each of them would have stood independently and being singular, like: *Each child and each parent is wearing seatbelt*. It could be seen that the second *each* has been left out to avoid redundancy, but that does not have an effect on the meaning of the sentence.

The participants could have overlearned the conjunction rule and got swayed into thinking that the coordinating conjunction *and* is in this sentence joining the two singular nouns *child* and *parent* into a compound noun which should be plural and therefore accompanied by a plural verb *are*. It could be seen that the grammatical rules have been applied inconsistently, a problem that could be associated to simplification and/or overgeneralisation.



**Figure 4.9: Plural paired indefinite pronouns**

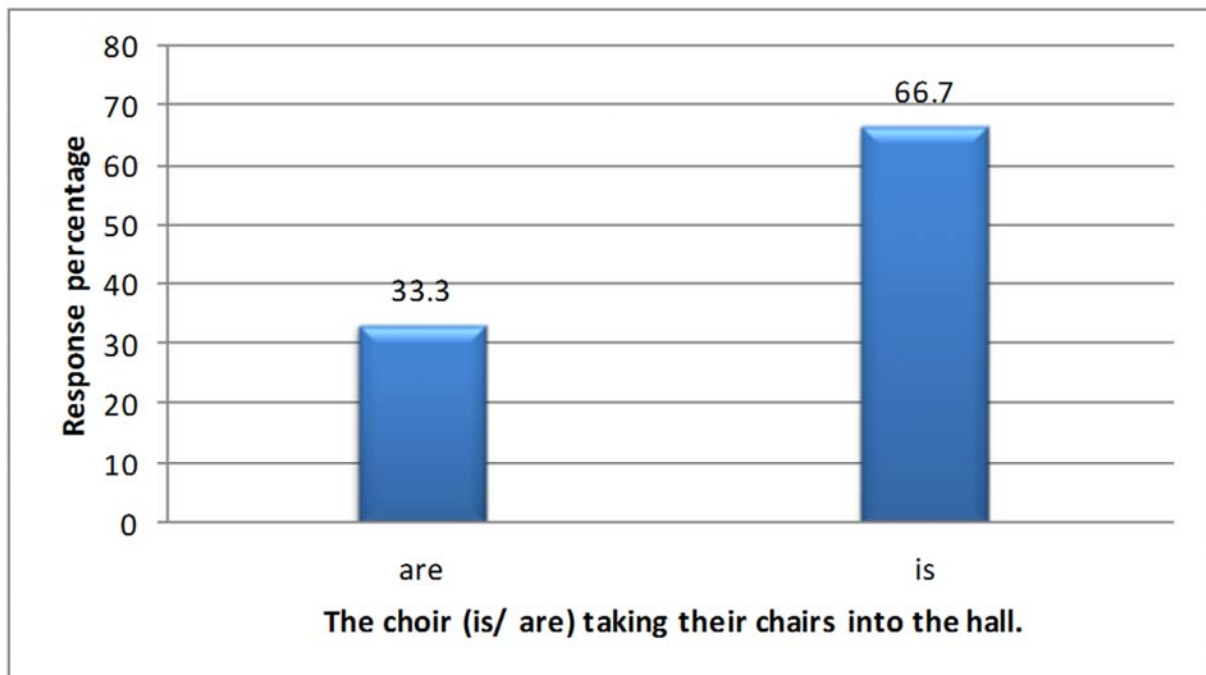
Figure 4.9 reveals that 75% of the participants were able to identify and choose the correct verb option while 25% could not do it.

Among the other reasons for the majority being successful, it could be attributed to the fact that the qualifying adjective “*most*”, the paired nouns “*adults*” and “*children*” are all plural and so should be the accompanying verb “*enjoy*”.

Those who could not pick the correct answer could not have been conversant with the plural and singular forms of third person singular present verbs. The participants could still have known that the subject is plural but have, however, chosen the singular verb “*enjoys*” thinking that the singular inflectional marker –s is a plural inflectional marker.

The pronoun “*most*” could be both singular and plural with its correctness depending on how it has been used in that particular instance. Since it has been used with plural nouns “*adults*” and “*children*” in this sentence, it should assume the plural form which should prescribe that the accompanying verb should be plural too.

Apart from the earlier stated assumptions, it would appear that the incorrect answer could have been due to the misinterpretation of the rule, the basis of which cannot be traced and/ or explained.



**Figure 4.10: Collective nouns**

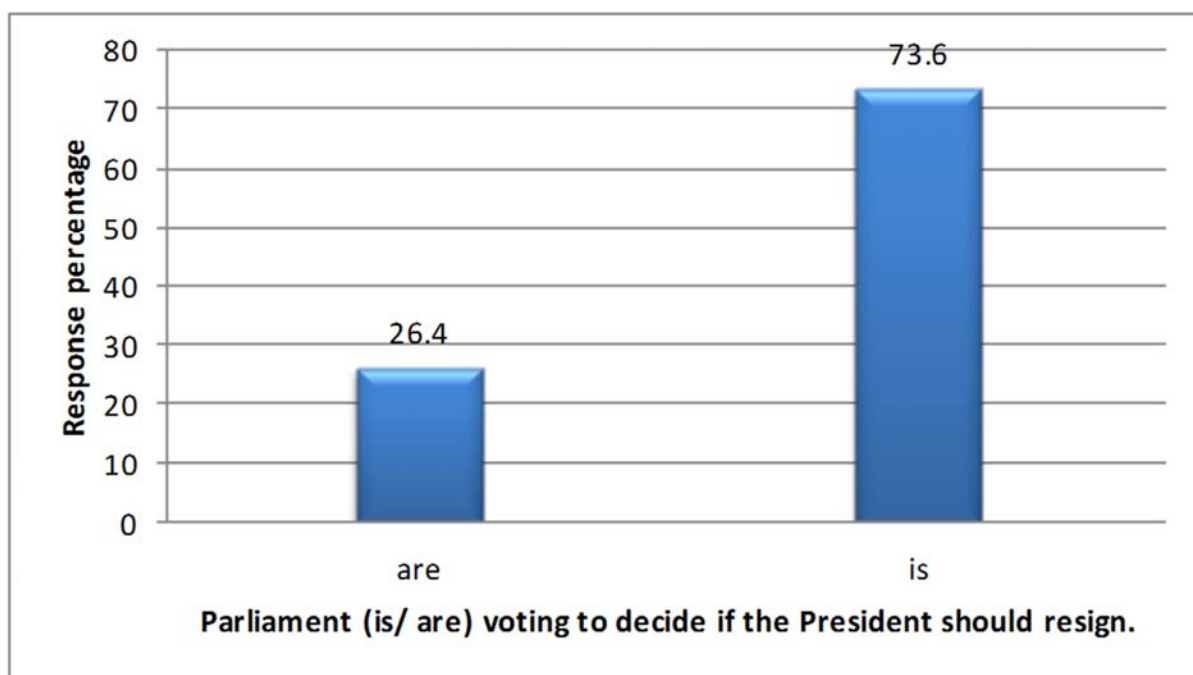
Figure 4.10 shows that only 33.3 percent of the participants got the answer correctly with 66.7 percentage not being able to do so. Of the incompetent participants, there were females of 20.8% and 12.5% being their males' counterparts.

These results reflect that most of the participants could have focused on collective nouns as a group of people which should be seen as a unit and singular, without considering the diversity of sentence construction which accommodates both the singular and plural choice of verbs per particular sentence construction, something that is also referred to as notional agreement.

This type of an error could have been due to simplification, fossilisation and/or incomplete application of rules as it could be seen that the participants would not have analysed the sentence construction closely to determine the individual intension of each member. Even though a choir comprises of many members who could be considered collectively for a singular verb "is", from this given sentence, the individuality or division of the choir

members is evident when each member is taking his or her own chair, thus taking care of their individual feelings and/ or intention, hence the plural verb “are”.

The results reflect the English usage of the Swedish news reporters who prefer to use a singular verb even with the plural concord in collective concord in collective nouns (Örlegård, 2014).

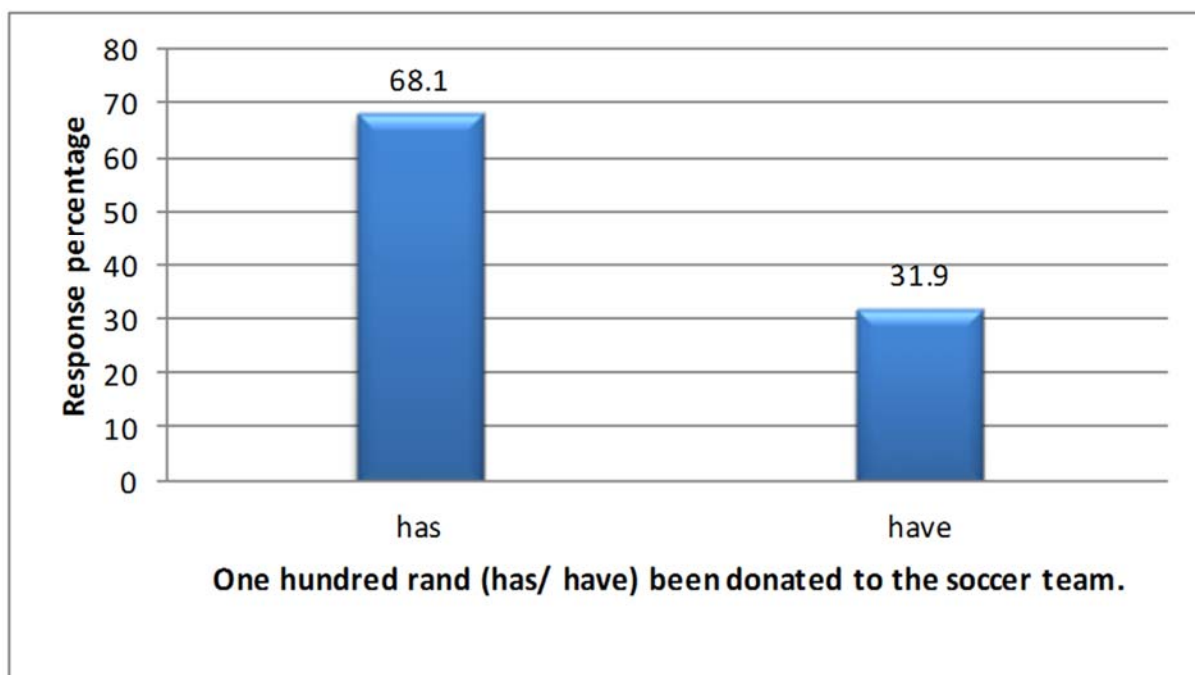


**Figure: 4.11: Collective nouns**

The findings are that 26.4% of the participants were able to determine the correct answer against 73.6% that could not do it. Males of 13.9% and females of 12.5% lacked the competence to deal with the question correctly.

Just like the previous item, this is also an example of a collective noun question which expresses the individuality of the members of the unit, resulting in the plural form of the verb choice. The reason that members are voting already shows that there has not been any consensus on one candidate, hence their individuality and the plural meaning.

The results of the two questions; figures 4.10 and 4.11, are almost the same. In both the questions, participants have shown lack of competence in this category of item. The correct verb choice deficiency from these two examples could also be attributed to the reduction of the complex aspects of grammar to a much simpler set of rules, simplification, which reflects a process that is used when messages need to be conveyed with limited language resources. Since Tshivenda does not have a grammatical rule to cover similar diverse meanings as the concerned English sentence construction, ‘*a choir*’ and ‘*parliament*’ to refer to individual members, those will thus remain singular across all Tshivenda extents, hence the participants’ choices.

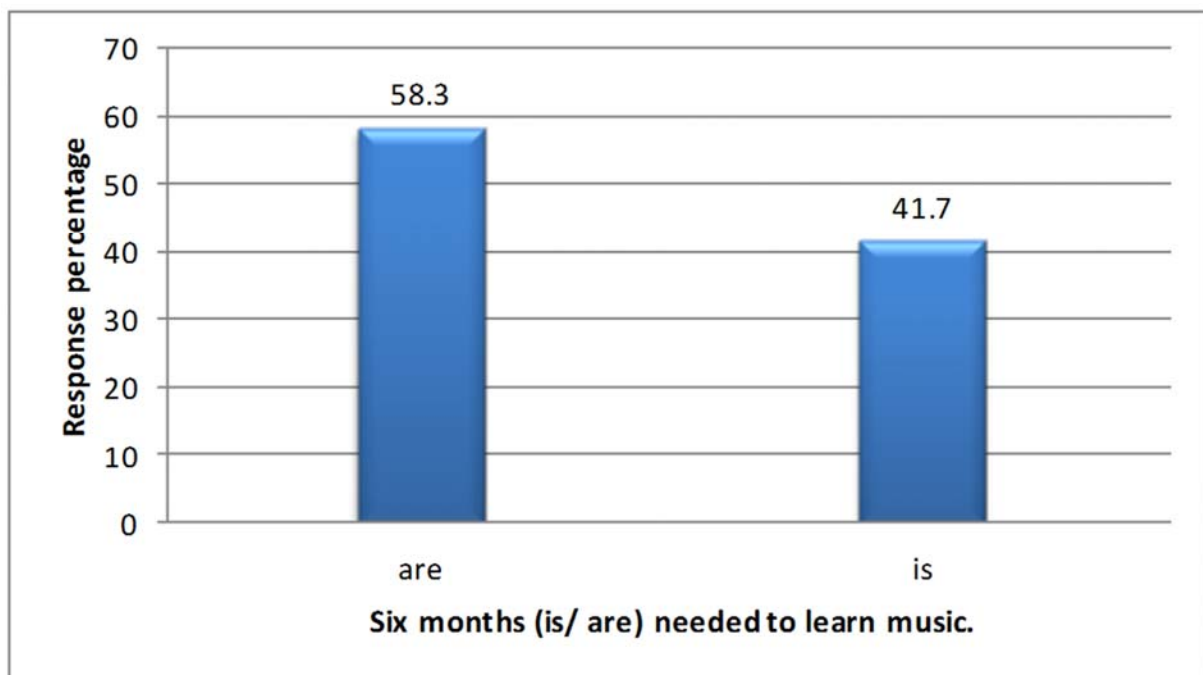


**Figure 4.12: Subjects expressing amounts**

The results of the findings as revealed in Figure 4.12 are that 68.1% of the participants were competent in identifying the correct answer and the remaining 31.9% lacked such competence.

Despite the majority of participants displaying competence in this area, their level of study is not what could accommodate the 31.9% of those that were incompetent. The expressions indicating quantity or amount are to be considered as a unit which requires a singular verb. Some confusion in the sentence analysis could have misinformed the participants, resulting in the wrong verb choice.

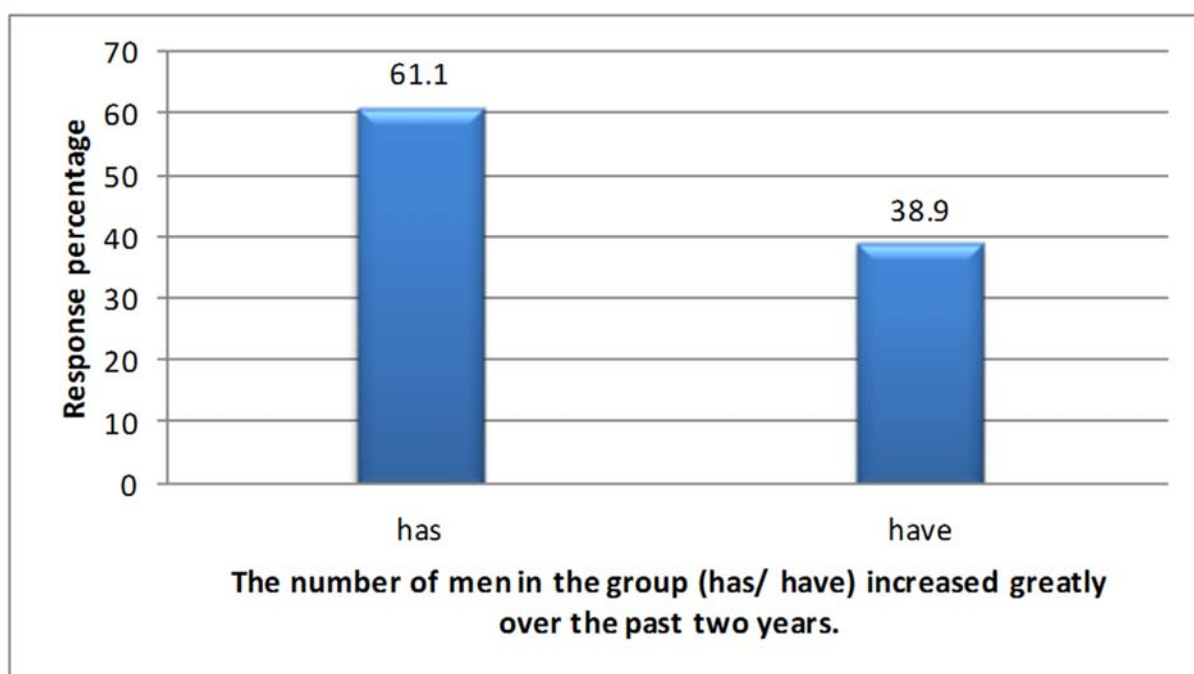
The incompetence could be linked to the perception that an amount is not always presented as a single note, this because of fossilisation. The inclusion of “*hundred*” in the sentence, which on its own implies many, could have been the bedrock of the wrong answer. The focus could have been on every single rand added together until they make a hundred which expresses a large sum of money which could never be seen as singular. The conclusion then could have been that the sentence expresses the plural meaning.



**Figure 4.13: Subjects expressing measurements**

The findings in Figure 4.13 reveal that more participants, 58.3% picked out the wrong plural verb *are* and 41.7% got it right by choosing the singular verb *is*.

The subject, “*six months*”, which is formed by two words “*six*” and “*months*” which are both plural and is on its face value appears as plural, could be what would have misled the participants to consider the plural verb *are*. This wrong choice is despite the proclamation that expressions indicating quantity or amount should be considered as a unit which should take a singular verb even if the amounts or measurements appear to be plural. The failure by the learners to discern that six months is a period made up of many months which should be considered as a unit has been due to simplification and/or overgeneralisation that an –s inflection on the noun renders it plural.



**Figure 4.14: Subjects expressing fractions**

Figure 4.14 presents 61.1% of the participants who scored the correct answer and another 38.9% who made the wrong verb choice.

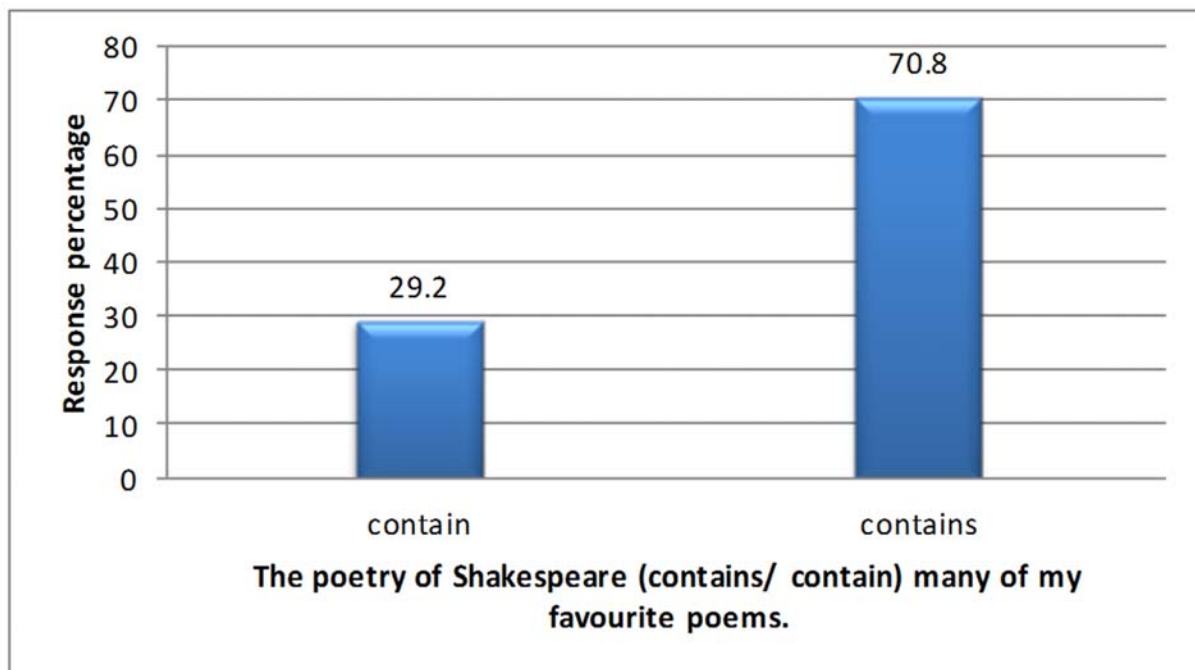
From the sentence itself, it could be presumed that the inclusion of the word “*men*” preceded by “*number of*” and the phrase “*in the group*” which are both plural could have

misinformed the substantial number of the participants to think that the subject is plural and that the verb should also be plural for an agreement of the two.

It could again be supposed that as the verb “*increased*” is associated with plurality, there could be some participants who would have understood that the plural verb choice would be correct, especially based on the rule of proximity.

It is possible that some participants’ answers could have been based on some mysterious reasons, like that of considering the prepositional phrase “*over the past two years*”. This phrase could have been deemed as the subject of the sentence or implying the plural state of the subject or sentence for this plural, yet wrong choice.

However, it could be seen that the number of the subject rests on the definiteness of ‘*the number*’ which thus renders it singular and should be accompanied by a singular verb “*has*”. This is an expression of nouns which are plural in form but singular in meaning which should thus require a singular verb. It could again be noted that a verb choice is never affected by a subject complement. This error type could be attributed to overgeneralisation of rules.



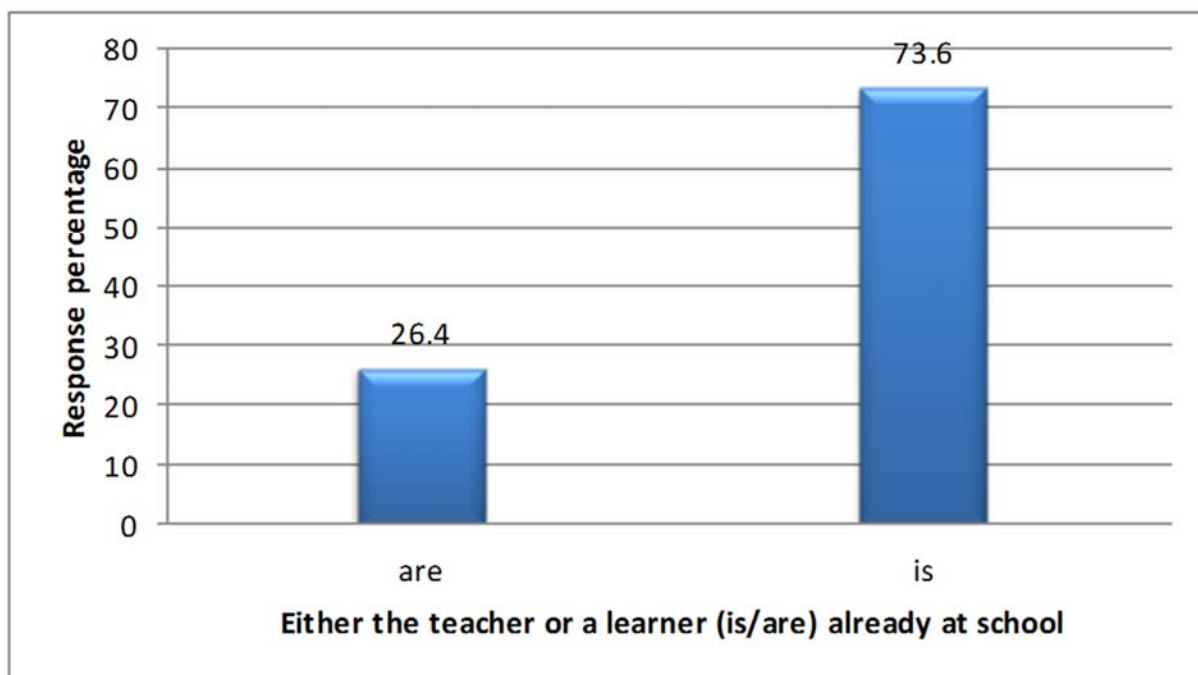
**Figure 4.15: Phrases of inclusion**

The findings are that the majority, 70.8% of the participants had the competence to choose the correct answer, “contains”, which is singular and 29.2% did not have such competence and went for the wrong verb, “contain”, which is plural.

The incompetent participants might have considered “poetry” as suggesting a number of poems which should then be taken as plural since it covers many poems.

It can also be presumed that the adjectival phrase “many of my favourite poems” which is not only plural in nature, but is also very close to the verb, even though it comes after the verb, might have been another ‘guide’ for some participants.

This should be the matter of simplification of rules without the proper analysis of the different sentence construction.



**Figure 4.16: Correlative conjunctions**

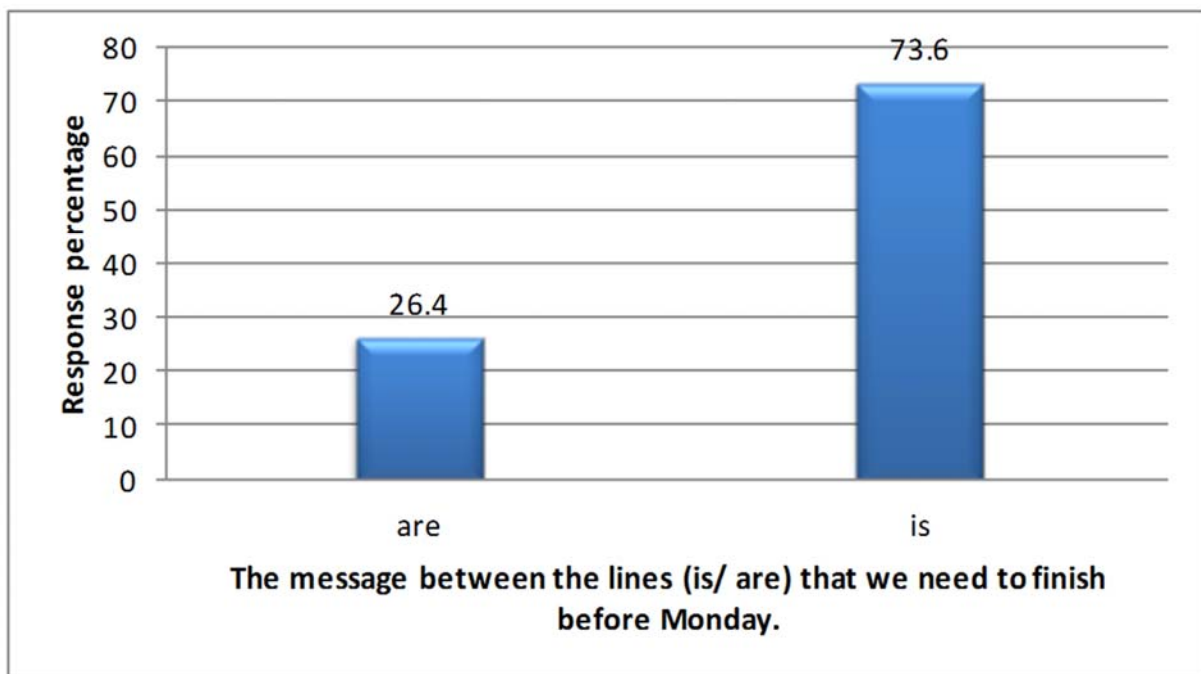
The findings indicate that 26.4% of the participants did not have the capacity to know the correct verb form to complete the sentence while 73.6% were the ones that knew the answer.

In the case of this example, the correct answer is *“is”* since *“a learner”* is the singular subject that is closer to the verb and should therefore determine the singularity or plurality of the verb.

The reason for the wrong choice could be attributed to the notion that when these pronouns appear by themselves, they are singular and they should as such take singular verbs. However, when *“either”* or *“neither”* appear with conjoining words *“or”* or *“nor”* respectively, they are called compound subjects or coordinated noun phrases, for which the choice of the verb will be per the subject closer to it.

It could again be concluded that some participants would have thought that the conjunction “or” joins the two subjects “*the teacher*” and “*a child*” together to make them plural.

Whatever could have been the reason for the wrong answer, it could be established that the participants would have overlearned how “*either*” and “*neither*” work without considering the different sentence constructions, as is the case with this one, thus resulting in overgeneralisation and/or simplification.



**Figure 4.17: Other interruptions**

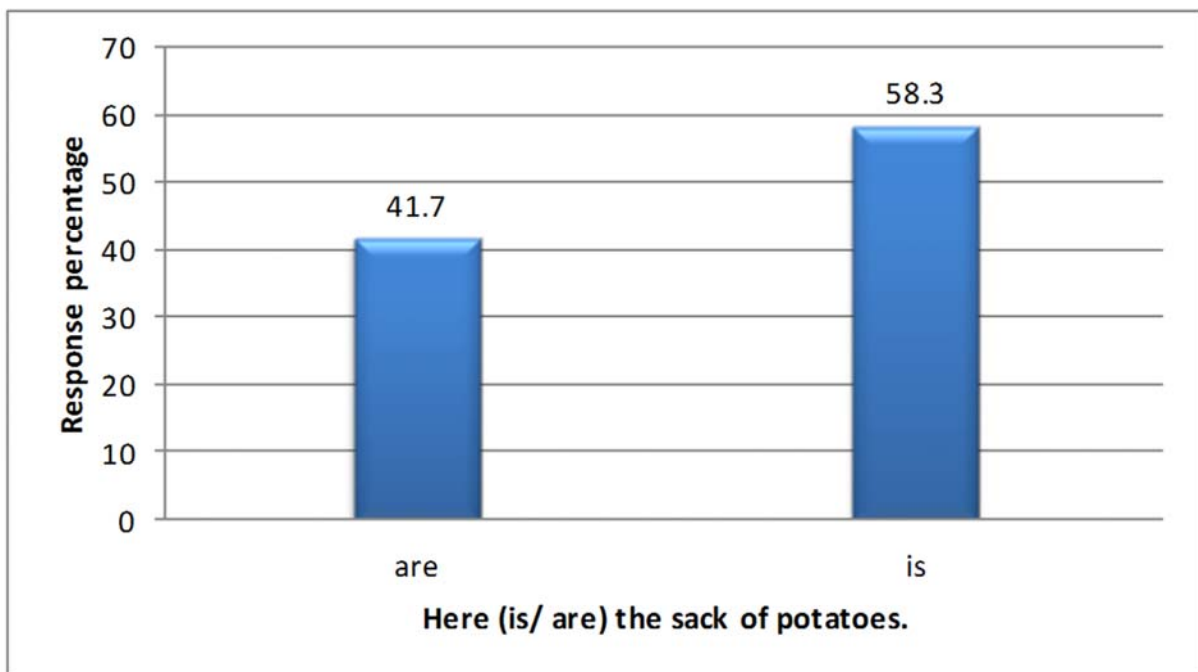
Table 4.17 presents 73.6% of the participants who attempted the question correctly and the other 26.4% who attempted it incorrectly.

The subject “*the message*” and the verb “*is*” are too far apart. This makes the relationship between the two not to be easily worked out. The prepositional phrase “*between the lines*” which comes between the two also aggravate the situation. It could be assumed that

these two factors could have obstructed with some of the participants' reasoning when they chose the answers.

It could again be reasoned that the wrong choice could have been due to the phrase, "*the lines*", which is not only plural but it is also closer to the verb. Some participants would have applied the rule of proximity without considering other elements. They would have thought that because of "*the lines*" which is plural, so is the verb.

It could therefore be concluded that without the sound knowledge of how the subject is determined where there is a prepositional phrase, this type of an error is inevitable. This is an example of the incomplete application of rule error type.



**Figure 4.18: Subjects that come after the verbs**

The findings in Table 4.18 indicate that 41.7% of the participants had the wrong answer and 58.3% knew the correct answer.

Multiple factors could have resulted in this worrisome number of participants who did not show competence in answering the question.

When the verb comes before the subject as in “*there*” or “*here*” sentences, it agrees with the subject that immediately follows the verb. It is evident that the subject is “*the sack*” even though it comes after the verb and it is also singular and it should have had a singular verb “*is*” too.

In this situation, it cannot only be the majority and the minority factor that should be the cause for concern, but the higher number of those that did not display competence in answering the question.

The sentence construction itself is complicated, thus making its analysis in terms of the parts of speech, difficult and confusing. This failure could be attached to the ignorance of the rule restrictions. It can be presumed that the construction would have made the participants not to pick out the subject correctly, especially when it is not the first part of the sentence as it is in many other instances. Once this incompetence sets in, this is likely what happens; the participants stumble as it is the case with the question.

As in many other questions with prepositional phrases, the participants might have mistaken “*of potatoes*” to be the subject of the sentence. Since the phrase is plural so they would have thought that by making the verb plural, the whole sentence would harmonise.

Lastly, the kind of ‘false rhyme’ that is created by “*here*” and “*are*” could also have influenced some participants into choosing the wrong verb.



**Figure 4.19: Subjects that come after the verbs**

This figure shows that 73.6% of the participants knew the answer as against the other 26.4% who lacked the skills.

Even with this sentence, the subject “*your books*” is still after the verb, but the number of the correct entries is higher than what it was with the previous question. It is, therefore, untraceable why such a large number of participants would get the correct answer with this question whereas it was not the case with the previous sentence regardless of the identity of the two sentences. One would have supposed that if participants had issues with subjects that come after the verb, the number of those who struggled with the first preceding sentence would have been more or less the same with the ones struggling with the current attempt.

This inconsistency could be based on the guess-games by the participants. For example, the ‘rhyme-like sound’ created by “*there*” and “*are*” when they go together could have positively attracted the participants into choosing the verb *are* unawares. The number of the plural-indicative words; “*your*”, “*you*”, “*them*” and “*books*” could have suggested that

the answer should be plural, something that could be blamed on overgeneralisation.

#### 4.3.2 QUALITATIVE APPROACH ANALYSIS

The researcher has examined the 2016 Grade 12 English FAL June Examination composition scripts with the focus solely on the learners' application of the concord/ subject-verb agreement in their sentence construction. This approach offered the researcher an opportunity to interact with the learners' authentic language usage. The analysis was guided by what was tabled as the scope of the study which covered the: third person singular and plural subjects, indefinite pronouns, collective nouns, amounts, fractions and measurements, phrases of inclusion, neither and either, other interruptions and here and there types of sentences.

It was not each one of the listed sentence type that was found in the learners' compositions, and such omissions have been captured for recording's sake. The researcher attributed the exclusion of the sentence types to the learners' limited mastery of the English grammar and language usage. This is what has been found:

##### 4.3.2.1 THIRD PERSON SINGULAR AND PLURAL SUBJECTS

Contrary to what the English grammar rules state that a singular subject should be followed by a singular verb and so should be the plural subject, these two sentences were picked out from the learners' writing:

- \* ***The protest have been going*** on for more than two months now.
- \* ***Irregularities*** during examinations ***is*** not allowed.

In the first sentence, the "*the protest*" is singular and it should have been followed by a singular auxiliary verb *has* and not "*have*". The learners seem not to have been aware that *has* and *have* are singular and plural auxiliary verbs respectively. In the second sentence, "*irregularities*" is a plural noun yet '*is*' is a singular, hence the grammatical discord of the sentence.

#### 4.3.2.2 INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

There was not a single example of a sentence with indefinite pronouns used in the whole composition.

#### 4.3.2.3 COLLECTIVE NOUN

\* *The government give a learner money to go to school.*

The notional agreement rule should have been applied to determine if “*the government*” implies the totality of the institution, which of course is the case in this situation, or the disjointed units of the institution. In this situation, it is clear that it is the government in its unison which is handing out money to a learner and so the verb should have been singular. The learner’s ignorance or lack of dynamics involved would have failed the learner in determining the matching subject-verb combination.

#### 4.3.2.4 AMOUNTS, FRACTIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

No example to this effect was found in the learners’ work.

#### 4.3.2.5 PHRASES OF INCLUSION

This sentence was extracted from the learners’ composition:

\* *Children who do not eat protein takes time to grow.*

The subject of the sentence “*children*” has been separated from its complementary verb *take* by a relative phrase “*who do not eat protein*”. Apart from the fact that the two seem not to be related because of remoteness, it could be assumed that the learner might have taken the verb ‘*takes*’ based on the proximity of protein to the verb.

#### 4.3.2.6 NEITHER AND EITHER

There was nothing that was recorded under this subject.

#### 4.3.2.7 OTHER INTERRUPTIONS

Nothing was found on this subject.

#### **4.3.2.8      HERE AND THERE**

There was not a learner who had anything to this effect.

As discovered and stated in the discussions of the findings, a plethora of factors were found to have contributed to all these incongruities, such as: overgeneralisation of grammatical rules, incomplete application of rules – which were also the two major problems experienced by Lambani and Nengome’s (2016) participants, ignorance of the rules of restrictions, simplification of language rules or reduction of the complex aspects of grammar, and fossilisation. In most instances, a number of them and/or their combination were found to have been the cause of grammatical error across many of the sentences.

#### **4.4      SUMMARY**

With the aid of the figures and/ or tables, this chapter has clearly presented the research findings and their interpretations. Comprehensive discussions on the two have also been carried out as a way of giving meaning to the collected data. The research findings were able to be tied up with the views of other scholars as presented in the literature review and in other parts of the study. Where relations between the findings and the presented literature were established, such were defined inasmuch as contradictions which suggested parallels and their causes, were also drawn and explained.

## **CHAPTER 5: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter Four presented and discussed the research findings and their interpretations. This chapter will presents the overview of the whole study, the conclusion and makes recommendations informed by the realities concerning the mastery of English FAL and/or the related causes of subject-verb/ concord errors and how such could be overcome and/or eradicated – thus contributing towards the body of knowledge regarding their usage by the Grade 12 learners.

### **5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE STUDY**

The study has been divided into five chapters, including this one. The focus of each chapter has been on different, yet interconnected components of research which are hereafter.

Chapter one presented the background to the study, explaining English as an internationally acclaimed language. The chapter has also indicated the difference in English grammar to those of other languages. In addition, the chapter has highlighted the difficulties that non-native English speakers experience when they are situationally compelled to use the language regardless of their grammatical challenges. The aim and the objectives of the study and the definitions of the operational terms have also been explained.

The second chapter has mainly reviewed other scholars' literature regarding the subject-verb agreement. As a way to understanding the causes, depth of and the possible solutions to the identified errors, the chapter has also explained the EA and the differences between an error and a mistake. Due to the nature of English which is an additional language to the learners, the CAH was also explained.

The grammatical competence, of the communicative competence, was singled out and explained as the theoretical framework to the study. Therefore, grammar, its importance and the importance of teaching it in the classroom have also been highlighted. Finally, the subject-verb agreement and the subject-specific challenges from the selected countries were discussed.

The third chapter has focused mainly on the research methodology used in the study. The advantages of a mixed research approach, which amongst others include, the compensation for any one-sidedness or dictation that may result from either of the methods have been foregrounded and explained in detail. In order to work with the manageable size of data, the researcher has streamlined the research setting to a circuit which comprises only 720 Grade 12 learners.

A questionnaire and document analysis were the instruments used to gather data. The professional assistance of a statistician was employed for the analysis of the questionnaire-related questions while the researcher analysed learners' composition scripts focusing on the concord/subject-verb agreement usage

Also as the standard and prescriptive way of conducting research, the researcher has been guided by the ethical considerations.

Chapter four has presented, interpreted and discussed the research data, both the questionnaire-gathered and those extracted from the analysed learners' scripts. Correlations between the learners' errors and the possible causes were also drawn and discussed.

### **5.3 REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

The study sought to analyse the written concord errors among Grade 12 FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa by answering the following research questions:

- What are the most common types of written concord/ subject-verb agreement errors which are committed by Grade 12 FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa?
- What are the causes of these errors among the Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa?

The study has found that the majority of the participants have had some challenges in language usage in general and concord/subject-verb agreement in particular. There was not even a single item which had a 100% of correct entry.

The question which proved to be the hardest to the participants was that on collective nouns which express the individuality of the members of the set/ group. The consistency of the higher percentages of the two questions point out to the underlying misconception participants would have internalised. It should be noticeable that the participants never analysed the construction of the sentences closely so as to get to the concept of notional agreement. The results suggest that collective nouns could not have been taught holistically with emphasis on the diversity of the subject in different contexts.

The second hardest question was registered on singular paired-indefinite pronouns as subjects. Surprisingly, the results improved with the identical but plural version of the sentence construction. The two sets of questions had a difference of 50% in between them. It could be concluded that the two extreme answers question the understanding of the fundamentals of the rules that govern the subject-verb agreement. These results could be a suggestion of a guessing game by the participants at worst or a shaky understanding of the rules at least.

The study findings on subjects expressing amounts, fractions and measurements also indicated the participants' incompetence in this regard. The majority of the participants could not deal correctly with the question on measurements. Even with the other two similar questions representing subjects expressing fractions and those representing amounts, though the figures have been better compared to the former, the numbers of

incompetent participants have also been too high for the Grade 12 learners. The conclusion could be that the results of the latter two questions would have been established on the same grammatical principles, hence the consistency.

The questions on singular indefinite pronoun registered 56.9% and 5.6% of incorrect answers. The two records lie at the extreme opposite sides. The plural indefinite subject was the simplest to all the participants whereas the singular one was the fifth hardest. This is another example of the questions which reveal inconsistent knowledge and understanding of the grammatical rules of subject-verb agreement, or else the gap between the two would have narrowed for the better understanding.

The two questions on subjects that come after the verbs have also been difficult for the participants. The findings revealed that the participants' competence has been low. The scores did not show a solid understanding of how the correct relationship between the subject and the verb works.

The phrases of inclusion and the question on subjects with other interruptions have also shown lack of competence of the participants. The higher percentages of incorrect answers on the questions pointed out the inconsistencies of the rules of grammar. It was concluded that the learners would not have mastered the fundamental principles that govern the correct sentence construction in this regard.

The questions on the correlative conjunction also posed challenges to the participants. Though the majority was competent, the level of incompetence has been grade-matching. The best translation of the findings could be what has been said about the other questions which displayed the participants' incompetence.

The findings on questions on the third singular and plural subjects were the only ones to have displayed improved, and encouraging, results compared to the rest. Just like with the others, it was the level of incompetence that has been worrisome. The results' percentages presented the bad state of the knowledge of the rules governing the subject-

verb agreement.

#### **5.4 SUMMARY**

The study has found that concord/subject-verb agreement is a challenge to the Vhembe District Grade 12 English FAL learners. There was not even a single item which had a 100% correct entry. Even with all the correct answers, the percentages have not been outstandingly good to match the level of the study of the learners (Grade 12).

The researcher's analysis of the learners' scripts also opened a window to see how these learners use English language and grammar in an unstructured language usage setup on a daily basis. A similar concord/subject-verb agreement language usage marred by errors has been persistent if not aggravated in their essay writing. The exclusion of certain sentence types, as shown in Chapter Four, is an indication that these learners avoid complex sentence construction that would require complicated application of concord/subject-verb agreement.

Despite the difficulties posed by English language usage to many learners, including those from the entire international countries as shown in other studies, the South African school context does not leave a choice to any learner or teacher to decide either to learn or teach English grammar respectively in the classroom, particularly the concord/subject-verb agreement as it is a prescription.

The CAPS document explicitly states that English grammar, the concord/subject-verb agreement in particular, should be taught in South African schools. The study has also indicated that the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is the basis for the English language and it should be sanctioned in South African schools for better communication and improved Grade 12 results. The study has also emphasised that the effective teaching of concord/subject-verb agreement should be by explaining the rules which apply to the different aspects of the subject under study. For its efficacy, this strategy should be tied up with the practical application of the learned rules which should be through the adoption of the communicative approach.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study was conducted on 72 learners of the five top performing schools of Dzindi Circuit, one of the 27 circuits in the Vhembe District. This geographic location choice was, amongst others, influenced by the monetary factors which could not have covered any area of the researcher's choice. The study was also relatively hampered by the limited available literature on the subject being studied. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the study could not be exhaustive in content and context.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study analysed the written concord errors among Grade 12 English FAL learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. Based on the findings and discussion in the study, the researcher recommends that:

- The teaching of grammar should be emphasised in the school curriculum.
- The teaching of English grammar, particularly the concord/subject-verb agreement be intensified for an improved language mastery and usage situations.
- English grammar should be taught explicitly and in context from as early as Grade 4.
- Learners should be made aware of the different Englishes (formal and informal) as they are found in the learners' daily domains and be advised to strive for the formal one at all times.
- English should be taught by teachers who have done English beyond their professional qualifications.
- Teachers of English should be retrained on grammatical usage through in-service programmes.

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## ANNEXURE A: Questionnaire

Dear participants:

Would you kindly respond to this questionnaire which forms part of my research project?

**RESEARCH TOPIC: An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 First Additional Language learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.**

**Instructions to respondents:**

Please read very carefully through each item, and respond honestly to all the questions below. Tick the options that best relate to you and your opinion with a  $\surd$ .

### SECTION A: Personal information

1. Gender

|      |  |        |  |
|------|--|--------|--|
| Male |  | Female |  |
|------|--|--------|--|

2. Age range

|         |  |         |  |         |  |
|---------|--|---------|--|---------|--|
| 15 – 17 |  | 18 – 19 |  | 20 – 21 |  |
|---------|--|---------|--|---------|--|

3. Grade

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 12 |  |
|----|--|

4. Number of years in the Grade

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 |  | 2 |  |
|---|--|---|--|

5. Primary language

|           |  |         |  |                  |  |
|-----------|--|---------|--|------------------|--|
| Tshivenda |  | English |  | Others (Specify) |  |
|-----------|--|---------|--|------------------|--|

6. Do you enjoy learning English First Additional Language?

|     |  |    |  |
|-----|--|----|--|
| Yes |  | No |  |
|-----|--|----|--|

### SECTION B: Content-related questions

**NB. Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative from those supplied within brackets. Write your choices in the spaces provided after each question.**

**For example:**

| STATEMENTS                      | ANSWERS |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| 1.1. Lucas (is/ are) my brother | is      |

| QUESTION STATEMENTS  | ANSWERS |
|--|---------|
| 1.1. Mr. Mudau (does not/ do not) usually give homework on Fridays.                        |         |
| 1.2. Poems (is/ are) Sarah's favourite form.   |         |
| 1.3. None of the learners (has/ have) arrived yet.   |         |
| 1.4. Somebody across the road (is/ are) calling us.  |         |
| 1.5. The choir (is/ are) taking their chairs into the hall.                                |         |
| 1.6. Parliament (is/ are) voting to decide if the President should resign.                 |         |
| 1.7. One hundred rand (has/ have) been donated to the soccer team.                         |         |
| 1.8. Six months (is/ are) needed to learn music.   |         |
| 1.9. The number of men in the group (has/ have) increased greatly over the past two years. |         |
| 1.10. The poetry of Shakespeare (contains/ contain) many of my favourite poems.            |         |
| 1.11. Either a teacher or a learner (is/ are) already at school.                           |         |
| 1.12. Each child and parent (is/ are) wearing seatbelt.                                    |         |
| 1.13. Most adults and children (enjoys/ enjoy) traveling.                                  |         |
| 1.14. The message between the lines (is/ are) that we need to finish before Monday.        |         |
| 1.15. Here (is/ are) the sack of potatoes.   |         |
| 1.16. There (is/ are) your books, you can collect them if you want.                        |         |

**ANNEXURE B: Ethics Clearance**

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:  
**Mr NM Nndwamato**  
**Student No: 9705128**

**PROJECT TITLE: An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 English first additional language learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.**

**PROJECT NO: SMS/16/HU/01/0806**

**SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS**

| NAME            | INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT | ROLE                   |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Dr MN Lambani   | University of Venda      | Supervisor             |
| Dr E Klu        | University of Venda      | Co-Supervisor          |
| Mr NM Nndwamato | University of Venda      | Investigator - Student |

ISSUED BY:  
**UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Date Considered: June 2016

Decision by Ethical Clearance Committee Granted

Signature of Chairperson of the Committee: .....

Name of the Chairperson of the Committee: Prof. G.E. Ekosse




University of Venda

PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA  
TELEPHONE (015) 962 8504/8313 FAX (015) 962 9060  
*"A quality driven financially sustainable, rural-based Comprehensive University"*

## ANNEXURE C: Permission Application Letter

Enq. NM Nndwamato

Cell: 082 707 0051/ 015 962 8013

Email: *ndivhudza.nndwamato@univen.ac.za*

The District Senior Manager  
VHEMBE DISTRICT

PO Box 3577

THOHOYANDOU

0950

June 09, 2016

### **Request for permission to conduct a research project at the selected schools in Vhembe District, South Africa**

1. I am a Master's Degree student in the Department of English, School of Human Sciences, at the University of Venda, and as part of my studies I am doing a research project on: **An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 English First Additional Language learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa**. I am kindly requesting for permission to conduct this project at these five secondary schools: Dimani, Ligege, Magalannge, Shayandima and Thambatshira.
2. English remains an important language which unifies the whole world into a global village. Even in our country, South Africa, English is regarded as superior because it is widely used in many spheres of government and all institutions of learning. Even though learners in South Africa start learning English since Grade 4, they still show some elements of difficulties in its mastery, with written concord in particular. There should be a hidden problem behind this situation which needs to be investigated, hence this study. My assumption is that the findings and recommendations of this study will be useful to both the educators and the learners in particular and the Education Department in general.
3. Learners will be given a 30 minutes once-off language test on concord/ subject-verb agreement to write.
4. I would also like to state it that as the researcher, I would be confined by all the principles that govern a research project. Amongst others, the learners' personal information and their results will not be shared with anyone, even the school staff. After my write-up, all the information I collected will be destroyed, however, summary of results would be given to the participants at their own or parents' request.
5. I have attached hereto copies of the Research Ethical Clearance Certificate from the University and the data collection instrument.
6. I should be grateful for your positive cooperation.
7. Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully

---

NM NNDWAMATO  
[STUDENT: 9705128]

**ANNEXURE D: Permission Letter**



**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**  
**VHEMBE DISTRICT**

REF: 14/7/R  
ENG: RAVELE N.P  
TEL: 015 962 1029

CONFIDENTIALITY

NNDWAMATO N.M  
P O BOX 3577  
THOHYANDOU  
0950

|   |
|---|
| DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION<br>VHEMBE DISTRICT<br>2016-06-22<br>PRIVATE BAG X 2250 SIBASA 0970<br>TEL: 015 962 1313/4 FAX: 015 962 6039<br>LIMPOPO PROVINCE |
|---|

20 JUNE 2016

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE  
SELECTED SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT, SOUTH AFRICA**

1. The above matter refers.
2. You are hereby informed that your request for permission to conduct research titled, **"an analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 English First Additional Language learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa"** has been granted.
3. We appreciate your commitment to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation by research subjects.
4. Kindly inform circuit managers and principals of selected schools prior to commencing your data collection.
5. Ensure that your research activities do not disturb teaching and learning in the schools.
6. Wishing you the best in your study.

  
DISTRICT DIRECTOR

2016-06-22  
DATE

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE SELECTED SCHOOLS IN  
VHEMBE DISTRICT, SOUTH AFRICA

Page 1

Thohoyandou Government Building, Old Parliament, Block D, Private Bag X2250, SIBASA, 0970  
Tel: (015) 962 1313 or (015) 962 1331, Fax: (015) 962 6039 or (015) 962 2288

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## ANNEXURE D: Research Consent Form

### Research Consent Form

**Research Topic:**

An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 English First Additional Language learners in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

**Position:**

Lecturer and Student at the University of Venda

**Contact Address:**

PO Box 3577

THOHOYANDOU

0950

082 707 0051

015 962 8013

[ndivhudza.nndwamato@univen.ac.za](mailto:ndivhudza.nndwamato@univen.ac.za)

[ndivhu082@gmail.com](mailto:ndivhu082@gmail.com)

**Please Tick for YES and Cross for NO**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information leaflet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

|                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes                      | No                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. I understand that participation of my child is voluntary and that it could be terminated at any time without giving reasons.

|                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes                      | No                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. I grant permission to my child to take part in the study.

|                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes                      | No                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature