

**INVESTIGATING PAST TENSE ERRORS COMMITTED BY GRADE 10 ENGLISH
FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TSHINANE CIRCUIT, VHEMBE
DISTRICT**

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Takalani Jane Thivhafuni** (Student Number: 9106048), hereby declare that this dissertation submitted for a Masters' Degree (English Language), at the University of Venda, is my original work in design and execution and has not been submitted for any degree at any other university or institution. The dissertation does not contain other people's writing, unless specifically acknowledged and referenced accordingly.

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Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is devoted to my loving parents, Mr N.R. Thivhafuni and Mrs A.N. Thivhafuni, for enabling me to excel academically. To my beloved children, Tshifhiwa, Tshimangadzo and Takalani for their love and emotional support during the writing of this dissertation. Lastly, to my grandsons, Gundo, Anzani and Thompho for allowing me space to focus on the writing of this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at analysing the written past tense errors of irregular verbs committed by Grade 10 English First Additional Language (FAL) learners, in five selected schools in Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. Grade 10 serves as the basis for the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. These learners, hence, are expected to use the irregular verbs correctly since they have been learning English for ten years as a subject, as well as being exposed to it for seven years as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). Using selected Grade 10 English FAL learners in schools under Tshinane Circuit in Vhembe District, the study's objectives were - to identify types of irregular simple past tense errors committed; explain the causes of these errors and discuss strategies for addressing them. The study was buttressed by Robert Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis theory and Pit Corder's Error Analysis Approach. The study used mixed-method research approach and the quantitative data was analysed statistically and presented using graphs and tables while qualitative data was analysed according to themes. The target study population was Grade 10 English FAL learners of Tshinane Circuit in the Vhembe District. A purposive sampling technique was used to select schools, circuits and districts while a simple random procedure was employed to select participants. Data were collected from a questionnaire and essays written by the sampled participants. The study revealed that learners experienced challenges with the simple past verb forms which exhibited - zero-marking, terminal consonants phoneme changes, ablaut or vowel gradation, the suppletion principle as well as the regularisation of irregular verbs. The study concluded that the learners do experience serious challenges in the use of irregular verbs as established through their errors with the verb forms in the simple past tense. It is recommended that learners should be encouraged to frequently practise the use of irregular past tense verbs, in both spoken and written forms.

Keywords: *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis; Error Analysis; inflectional morphology; irregular verbs; past tense forms*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

English as a language is spoken in most parts of the world and is used internationally including in business, politics, science, arts, tourism, economics and education. Competence in English, therefore, is significant. The majority of learners in South Africa study it as a second language (L2), although in some contexts it is regarded as a foreign language in both primary and secondary schools (University of people, 2023) and most English language learners are determined to improve their proficiency in the language. In South Africa, there are eleven official languages and English is one of them. It has also been adopted as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in many schools, although, it is not the home language of the majority of learners, who speak different indigenous languages. Learning a different language is sometimes challenging to learners since the target language may have different aspects in comparison to their native languages. These differences in languages sometimes cause learners to make errors while using the target language. Having a good proficiency in English is considered one of the most essential requirements for further study and acquiring a job in different sectors.

In South African schools, English is taught at either Home Language or First Additional Language (FAL) level. The terms 'Home Language' and 'FAL' designate the proficiency levels at which the language is offered. Learners take English as Home Language if it is the language that was first acquired, or FAL if English is the language learnt in addition to learners' home language. English, however, is taught and learnt, in most South African schools, at the FAL level. For some of the learners, the term 'FAL' may refer to the learning of the L2 or subsequent languages depending on other languages already acquired.

The primary distinguishing aspect of FAL acquisition is the learning of a non-native language after one has acquired one's native language. To assist learners to learn

English, teachers must be able to teach and arouse learners' interest during the lesson in the classroom. For some learners, learning English as L2 is challenging and due to these difficulties encountered, some learners may lose interest easily. Gardner (1985) states that interest is one of the deepest inspirations for learning a language. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has long been acknowledged as one of the major factors influencing English language learning.

By the time learners are exposed to English as FAL, the likelihood is that other linguistic factors and backgrounds may impact different aspects of their learning for example, their written production of the English verbal group, in sentences. Competence in a language, requires learners to be proficient in all the language skills, namely, writing, reading, speaking and listening. Of the four language skills, the writing skill is the most complex aspect with writing and speaking classified as productive skills (Burns & Siegel, 2018.) Writing is an essential part of learning a language – learners are expected to write answers in examinations using paragraphs and create essays as well. For some learners, producing a written task in the L2 is a complicated task, as writing is often perceived as the most difficult language skill to be grasped when compared to the other language skills (Allen & Corder, 1974).

Writing in an L2 learning poses challenges, hence the commission of errors is inevitable. Even those who speak English as a first or home language, do commit errors as writing ability entails lengthy, rigorous and specialized teaching (James, 2013) The writing process is complicated as it demands mental analysis and linguistic production. Learning to write in a foreign language is difficult and to become a good writer requires considerable time and effort. Learners who have the ability and competency in writing English means they can express themselves effectively.

Errors in writing can affect not just the form of a text but the message, hence, the communication as well (James, 1998). Communication, which is the main function of language, is often distorted due to errors. Non-standard formations and inadequate vocabulary items often set the L2 learners apart from native learners of the target language. Not only should learners have an adequate stock of vocabulary to assist and improve their writing quality, but they also must know how to use the words

correctly to assist them in achieving communicative competence. The words form sentences and verbs form one of the main structures of a sentence.

Different lexical items, like verbs may pose difficulties to learners (Ngo & Kaiser, 2020) as they appear in many different forms, which are dependent on the tense and aspect systems in the English language, therefore, it is unlikely to find a foreign language learner not making errors in writing. The verbs are a very significant topic to investigate because they exist in almost all English utterances, in both spoken and written modes. Furthermore, verbs are a basic item of grammar and a sentence in particular, besides the subject, as one can only classify an utterance, a 'sentence' if it has a subject and verb. Errors are to be expected at the initial stages of learning a L2 in all the four skills. Learners, in carrying out various written activities, can only express themselves effectively if they have the ability and competency in writing correct sentences in the English language.

Language learners may commit linguistic errors which adversely affect the structure of the sentences and the intended idea they wish to express. Learners' errors, however, raise awareness with the teacher about the learners' difficulty in their learning and therefore are considered relevant in the learning and teaching process. This is evidenced by Brown (2007) who states that making errors in writing occurs naturally in learning and is viewed as part of cognition. On this basis, learners' errors must be studied systematically and appropriately scrutinised to suggest a relevant remedial approach. Analysing learners' errors, therefore, offers a perception of the nature and types of errors to enable teachers to devise appropriate ways to assist learners to evade them and provide comprehensive knowledge about the process of language learning.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) of 2015, in its language curriculum - as per The National Curriculum Statement (NCS), Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, Senior Phase (Grades 7-9) and Further Education and Training (FET) (Grades 10-12), covers various skills and content. These include - listening and speaking, reading and viewing, writing and presenting as well as language structures

and conventions. In the Senior Phase, language structures, such as regular and irregular verbs should be taught in context; in the FET phase, the focus is also on verb tenses, among them, the simple past tense, for example, 'She **ran** fast and **won** the race'. The curriculum requires that all language structures and conventions should be taught in the context of speaking, reading and writing, and also as part of a systematic grammar programme.

The DBE releases a National Diagnostic Report, yearly, which is a detailed report that serves as a comprehensive analysis of learner performance in the National Senior Certificate examination. The purpose thereof is to provide teachers, subject advisors, curriculum planners and social partners with insight into learners' performance. The 2016 National Diagnostic Report based on the 2016 Grade 12 National Senior Certificate Examination for English FAL indicates that learners performed at 39% on Question 5 which is the language and editing skills section; this was the lowest percentage on all the questions in Paper 1. In addition, a lack of technical and working knowledge of tenses was cited as one of the causes of learners' dismal attainment.

The Grade 10, 2017 Term 2, English results in Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa showed that 270 learners out of 1560 obtained a level 1, which means that they performed between 0 and 29%, showing that they had failed to meet the minimum pass requirements in the subject. These results are a cause for concern because of the significance of English in the education system, in the job market and in the international arena. Being in the third year of secondary education, Grade 10, the assumption is that the learners at this level would show above-basic competence in English. The errors made at this point should, therefore, be viewed as persistent and resistant and calls for a thorough study to assess if the specific objectives set out by the curriculum are being attained.

Learners in the FET phase (Grades 10-12) are required to produce a variety of written texts, such as essays, tests and transactional texts as part of both their formative and summative evaluations. The written texts assess various competencies - cohesion, content knowledge, structure and usage of language - which should be applied correctly to convey the intended meaning. It is therefore, essential that learners

understand and know how to use the structural components, such as verbs, appropriately since every correct English sentence must have a verb (Freeborn, French & Langford, 1913). The production of quality texts is dependent on language competence, which is near unattainable without a thorough knowledge of the grammar of the language, as it plays a role in the processing and mastering of a language. Grammar refers to the rules of correct usage of a language; it deals with aspects, such as - the form of sentences, small units (clauses and phrases) word (noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, preposition, conjunction and interjection), tenses, indications of comparison, among others. In other words, grammar is the study of the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to express meaning.

Mart (2013) defines 'grammar' as a set of rules that play a significant role in language acquisition because it assists learners to join and organize words in order to construct sentences and express their thoughts properly. Knowledge of grammar is undoubtedly a crucial part of language learning not as something separate from communication, but precisely because it enables or facilitates communication. Verbs are one of the key elements in sentences; they are indispensable, for without them, no properly constructed sentence are possible. A sentence expresses an idea, and the verb is the main part that can do that, hence, verbs must be learnt and understood thoroughly by learners.

Verbs are words used to describe an action, state or occurrence, such as *hear*, *go* and *sing* and form the predicate part of a sentence. They indicate actions that took place in the past, taking place at the moment of speaking, and can take place in the coming time. There are two types of verbs: regular and irregular. To produce the past tenses of verbs, (Redmond, Ash, Christopoulos, & Pfaff, 2019) point out that children/learners need to acquire the morphological component of the past tense, and the rules for producing the various forms associated with past tense. This means that learners must know that the past tense is constructed by adding '-ed' to the stem for regular verbs for example, '*talk/talked*'. However, that there are also irregular verbs, which are exceptions to this rule. Thus, produced differently; some verbs, for example, '*take*', '*bring*' and '*buy*' are some of the irregular ones whose behaviour is

inconsistent to this rule. Due to this feature, the acquisition of verbs usually takes place later than that of other word classes (Harris, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2011).

The formation of the simple past tense of regular verbs is usually not a challenge for learners, because they only have to know one rule, which is applied consistently to the other members. Regular verbs are conjugated into the simple past tense by placing the suffix ‘-ed’ to the root stem. Complexity arises with irregular verbs because there are various rules, which can be applied to form their simple past tense. Learners, however, seem not able to select and apply the correct rule to the different types of irregular verbs. The mistake learners often make when trying to apply the rules of the past tense form of irregular verbs is ‘overregularisation’ or ‘overgeneralisation’. This happens when a learner who already knows, that to express the simple past tense, ‘-ed’ has to be added to the base of the verb, applies this rule, incorrectly, to irregular verbs (Matthews & Theakston, 2006).

Additionally, Osakwe (2020) state that learners sometimes use irregular verbs incorrectly. The error in usage stems from the fact that one verb may be used in place of another; these inconsistencies in the usage of the target language could also be responsible for the wrong form of the tenses of irregular verbs. The irregular verbs in the English language form a closed list and do not have one definite rule in the formation of the simple past tense, like the regular verbs (Mourssi, 2013). The simple past tense of ‘sink’ is ‘sank’ and the past tense of ‘sing’ is ‘sang’ but the past tense of ‘cling’ is not ‘clang’, but ‘clung’, and the simple past tense of ‘sting’ is not ‘stang’, but ‘stung’. The simple past tense of bringing is neither ‘brang’ nor ‘brung’, but ‘brought’. This indicates the “dilemma facing learners from the inconsistencies in the formation of the simple past tense form of irregular verbs”. Tiittanen (2015:116) explains that the majority of English irregular verbs undergo one of the following types of changes to the base form to create the past tense form:

- A change of the final consonant to /t/ or /d/ (for example, *sleep/slept, do / did*).
- Both an internal vowel change and the addition of /t/ or /d/ to the end of the verb (for example, *leave/left*).

Errors that emanate from the incorrect production of the simple past tense form of irregular verbs are not only confined to South Africa and other African countries, but to L2 learners all over the world (Fitria, 2020). Nephawe (2019) conducted a study on the use of the simple past tense form of irregular verbs and found that L2 learners usually commit intralingual errors based on their L1 rules.

There are several research findings concerning errors surrounding irregular verbs' simple past tense forms, committed by L2 learners of English from all over the world, but a few are identified and discussed hereunder. A research finding by Mungungu (2010) among Namibian learners revealed that errors of overgeneralization in the inflection of the irregular verb forms were made, resulting in incorrect usage of the italicised verbs in the following sentences:

- *One of the current footballers *shooked* their hips on stage.
- *Players' accommodation bill is footed already and *cutted* a lump sum of money.

Similarly, in a research conducted by Maliwa (2009) and Nzama, (2010) among South African Zulu learners, it was shown that the participants committed errors relating to the regularisation of irregular past tense forms as in the sentences hereunder:

- **They goed to school.* (The correct verb form should be 'went').
- *One boy who was cruel *beated* me. (The correct verb form should be 'beat')

Kang (2010) researched irregular simple past tense verb forms among Korean students and the findings affirmed that irregular verb forms confuse Korean L2 learners because students committed two types of errors, namely, over-regularisation and mis-regularisation errors. In the former case the participants applied the regular past tense suffix forms '-ed' to the irregular verb forms, resulting in wrong forms like '*breaked*' and '*comed*' instead of '*broke*' and '*came*'.

In (2011), Taher conducted a study among students at a Swedish Junior High School regarding texts and the knowledge of grammar; findings revealed that most students had challenges with irregular simple past tense verb forms. In the Uppsala Learner English Corpus (ULEC) papers, "45% of all errors were verb related" (Johansson & Geisler, 2009: 181). Below are examples of the students' verb-related errors:

- (a) *...a mental hospital that has *shutted* down.
- (b) *I *woked* up one day...
- (c) *In the summer of 2007, I *gone* to the USA.

In examples (a) and (b), the students had added an incorrect ending to the verbs, ‘*shut*’ and ‘*wake*’, thus making it an error of inflection. Both verbs are irregular, and they are among the verbs which are most problematic for L2 learners. In example (c), however, the verb is correctly inflected, but the context does not require the use of the past participle form of the verbs. Instead of using simple past tense verb ‘*went*’ the students used the past perfect form of the verb which if correctly formed would also require the auxiliary verb “have” before “gone” to create the present perfect tense. This is an error of tense since the correct form is replaced by the same verb in a different tense form. These are demonstrations that the participants could not select the right tense nor produce the correct form in the sentence.

In Indonesia, English L2 learners experienced challenges in the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense as they inflected irregular verbs like, ‘*put*’, as regular ones, such as in the sentence *‘*Yusuf putted the bag there just now*’ (Rahmi, 2014). The students did not know that the irregular verb *put* has a zero allomorph when used in the simple past tense.

Muriungi, Mukuthuria and Gatavi (2011:88) in their research conducted among Kenyan L2 English learners, found that “students regularised most of the verbs in the simple past tense”, hence, producing these sentences:

- *He *camed* home late. (He came home late).
- *We *putted* our things in bags. (We put our things in bags).
- *He was *cutted* with a panga. (He was cut with a panga).
- *He *writed* a letter. (He wrote a letter).
- *We *feeled* happy and played many games. (We felt happy and played many games).

In the preceding examples, the students added the suffix ‘-ed’ or ‘-d’ to the irregular verbs forms.

The wrong structure of irregular verbs' simple past tense forms, among various English L2 learners in different continents, suggest that L2 learning creates numerous challenges. In this situation, these difficulties require teachers to pay special attention to areas, such as simple past tense forms of irregular verbs.

In a study on irregular verbs, Nasser (2017) discovered that 95% of second-year university students could not form the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs, correctly; the main reason was confusion with tenses and overgeneralisation of grammatical rules. In a study entitled 'Common linguistic errors among Non-English Major Libyan Students Writing', Hamed (2018) established that majority of common errors committed by the L2 learners in their written compositions were associated with verbs and tenses.

The focus of this study was on irregular verbs, which are the oldest in form and they tend to resist change; they are remnants of the old English strong verbs and show a variety of forms in their simple past forms (Bin Abdullah, 2013). Irregular verbs are often very challenging for L2 learners of English because there are various ways to change irregular verbs when being used in the simple past forms. These ways include the zero modification in which there is no suffix nor stem change to the verb, the terminal consonants phoneme changes, vowel gradation and the suppletion principle. This means that most learners attempt to memorise all of the unpredictable changes associated with irregular verbs but fail. In this study, an analysis of errors, in the formation of the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs, which learners commit, during their writing, was undertaken.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

English is used as a medium of instruction in South African schools. It occupies a prestigious prominence as the LoLT for most of the Black learners of South Africa from the fourth grade in primary school to the tertiary level. Learning English as an additional language, however, has many challenges. According to Brown (2006), to master the English language, learners require adequate exposure to fundamental skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing and to know and apply grammar rules correctly, like the formation of the past tense forms of irregular verbs.

Time and resources are devoted to the teaching and learning of English as FAL in South African schools. Notwithstanding these efforts and the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement envisaged to advance the quality of teaching and learning, indications are that many learners still encounter challenges when forming simple past tense forms of irregular verbs. The situation is exacerbated by insufficient exposure to English within the classroom environment. The time allocation for English as a subject is 4 - 5 hours per week, which is minimal for learning the subject at the FAL level as per the CAPS policy document. Learners seldom get to speak and interact with native English speakers and this results in relying on teachers and available Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM). Non-mastery of irregular verbs seems to plague L2 learners of English throughout their studies.

The construction of the simple past tense form of irregular verbs in English can be confusing and problematic for L2 learners because even though there are rules, there are so many exceptions to them. The rules for the formation of the past tense form of many irregular verbs differ from each other, hence, learners usually have to memorise the exceptions to these rules. It is expected that Grade 10 English FAL learners would be able to produce the simple past tense form of irregular verbs correctly since they have had ten years' experience learning English as a subject and have been exposed to seven years of English as the LoLT.

Being in the third year of secondary schooling, the expectation is that learners at this level are reasonably knowledgeable in English. The errors made at this point should be regarded as persistent, therefore, call for a focused study on them. The Grade 10 English FAL level is an appropriate juncture to evaluate if the definite goals set out by the curriculum are being accomplished. It is common for some non-native English language learners to instantly inflect an irregular verb with the regular '-ed' suffix, due to over-generalisation of rules. Producing and using the simple past tense form of irregular verbs correctly matters as it displays a good command of the English language in communication while the opposite shows that there exists a gap in language competence. The correct language usage is likely to lead to good grades for learners, but the presence of tense errors can lead to poor performance not in English but in all other subjects. From this basis, this study focused on assessing Grade 10 learners' competence in the formation of irregular verbs' past tense forms.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to analyse errors committed in the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

1.5 STUDY OBJECTIVES

In this study, the overall objective was to analyse irregular verbs' simple past tense errors committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. To achieve this main objective, the study was guided by the following objectives:

- To identify types of errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.
- To explain the causes of errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.
- To discuss strategies to address errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the types of errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners, in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?
- What are the causes of the errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?

- What are some strategies for addressing the errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is envisaged that the findings of this study can offer thoughtful perceptions regarding the challenges around errors in irregular verbs' formation, in the simple past tense that English FAL learners face. The results of this study can assist Grade 10 English FAL learners to overcome challenges in using irregular verbs in their written tasks. It is, therefore, anticipated that the findings would offer valuable insights to teachers about learners' handling of irregular verbs, thereby, enhancing the quality of teaching English. The recommended strategies to address these errors, it is expected, would enrich teachers' knowledge in the teaching of grammar, especially, the formation of the simple past tense of irregular verbs. Additionally, this study can be beneficial for other researchers to further research in English FAL teaching and learning, specifically, the past tense of irregular verbs.

1.8 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

The following terms are defined in the context of this study:

1.8.1 Ablaut

The interchange of vowels of related word forms, especially in Germanic strong verbs. It refers to a form of irregular verb which consists of a single vowel change, where "one vowel in the present form is changed as these verbs form some of the past tenses with a vowel change" (Kusumawardhani, 2015:32).

1.8.2 Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)

This process entails a study of two linguistic language structures to examine their structural differences and similarities.

1.8.3 English FAL (English First Additional Language)

Refers to the proficiency level at which the second language is offered (National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12, 2012). It is the additional / subsequent language learned after one's home language (DoE, 2015). It is also used, in most South African schools, to identify the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT).

1.8.4 Error

A part of an utterance or a composition that does not follow the normal usage of the language (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). Errors entail something that is wrongly done through “obliviousness, thoughtlessness, or a mistake” (Richards, 1980:92), for example in calculation, judgement, speech, writing and action.

1.8.5 Error analysis (EA)

An analysis of error is a method utilized to identify, classify and interpret unacceptable statements (due to linguistic principles and procedures) uttered by a person learning a foreign language (Crystal, 2006).

1.8.6 Grammar

Grammar is the codified system of a language consisting of components like word classes, ways of assembling them into phrases and sentences (syntax) as well as the expression of concepts, such as polarity, number, tense, and modality, among others. It refers to the whole system and structure of a language, usually, known as ‘syntax’ (Tozzi, Peters, Fingelkurts, Fingelkurts & Perlovsky, 2018).

1.8.7 Inflections

The suffixes associated with particular grammatical word classes such as nouns and verbs which express the properties of the class, for example, the pastness of verbs (Tozzi et al., 2018).

1.8.8 Inflectional Morphology

The study of the processes including affixation and vowel change, which differentiate the systems of how words are formed in certain grammatical categories (Bybee,

2016). It communicates grammatical information, such as number, tense or agreement between the different parts of a sentence.

1.8.9 Irregular verbs

Verbs in the English language that do not follow the system of adding “-d” or “-ed” to the end of the word to form the past tense (Richards & Schmidt, 2013:122). They are a relatively small subset in Modern English that was used in Old English (Peters, 2013). These are verbs that do not follow the normal inflectional patterns of English to form the simple past and/or past participle (DeCapua & DeCapua, 2017).

1.8.10. Language of learning and teaching (LOLT)

The language medium in which learning and teaching, including assessment, take place (Nel & Muller, 2010).

1.8.11 Morphology

The division of linguistics that deals with the forms of words in various applications and formations. It is concerned with the “internal structure of words and their relationship to other words within the concept” (Marks, Labotka, Sun, Nickerson, Zhang, Eggleston, Yu, Uchikoshi, Hoeft & Kovelman, 2023:44). Morphology entails the manner of placing together morphemes to form words (derivational morphology) and how morphemes provide grammatical information (inflectional morphology)

1.8.12 Quintile 1

The division of schools where the ranking is done according to the most economically disadvantaged (poorest) geographical areas (Isaacs, 2020).

1.8.13 Regular verb

A verb that forms the simple past by adding ‘-ed’ or ‘-d’ to the base form, with any necessary spelling changes (DeCapua & DeCapua, 2017:167).

1.8.14 Second Language (L2)

A language learned after the basics of the first language (L1) have been acquired (Dulay et al., 1982).

1.8.15 Suppletion

The introduction of an extraneous form to fill out gaps in a grammatical paradigm (Peters, 2013). The root is substituted by another resulting in the allomorphs showing different phonological similarities. The fundamental morpheme is replaced with a phonologically unconnected form to signify a grammatical contrast (Hemie & Hum, 2012).

1.8.16 Suppletive form

An unpredictable and unrelated form of a word for a particular morphosyntactic realisation, for example, 'go/went' (Kuiper & Allan, 2017)).

1.8.17 Verb

A syntactic class of words that refer to actions, situations, states, attitudes, and mental conditions. Its form changes according to the tense and the person, for example the 3rd person singular adds '-s' / '-es' in the present and the '-ed' inflection in the simple past. In the case of an irregular verb, it may change its form in the past (for example, *bring /brought*), or not change at all (for example, *cut/cut*)

1.8.18 Zero marking

An irregular past tense verb "whose past tense forms are identical to the base form" (Patterson, Lambdon, Horges & McClelland, 2000:709).

1.9 DIVISION OF THE STUDY

Chapters are delineated in the following manner:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 introduces the research and gives a background to the topic being investigated and the nature of the problem. It also outlines the problem statement, objectives, research questions, clarification of terms and concepts, significance, delimitation, ethical considerations and an outline of the chapters of the research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The chapter presents a review of literature regarding types of errors from the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs as discussed by various authors and researchers, theoretical frameworks and strategies that teachers can utilize to address the irregular simple past tense errors.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology. This is done by highlighting the different processes involved in conducting a research; these include, type of research design, selection of participants, data generation and analysis, pilot study as well as ethical principles adhered to.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Chapter 4 presents and interprets the collected data in accordance with the research questions.

CHAPTER 5: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY, SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter summarises the results and concludes the study. Finally, conclusion, recommendations to the various stakeholders as well as suggestions for further research along similar topics were made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter dealt with the review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks that build the fundamental thinking and frameworks behind the study. The psycholinguistic concepts of errors and their analyses were utilised to collect and interpret the errors committed by the participating Grade 10 learners' simple past tense errors. The differences between mistakes and errors were analysed to enhance the analysis of the errors. In addition, significance of errors, procedures of error analysis and sources of errors were described to indicate, comprehensively the complete steps utilised by the researcher.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a detailed analysis of published sources or literature on a particular topic. It is a review of the literature that provides a summary, classification, comparison and evaluation, thereby integrating the literature within a particular field of research. Further, it clarifies how knowledge has evolved within the field, highlighting what has already been done, what is generally accepted, what is emerging and what the current state of thinking is on the topic. The process of conducting a literature review simply means becoming familiar with the current literature, for example, books, journal articles and conference proceedings on a particular topic (Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 2005).

Within research-based contexts, a literature review seeks to identify a research gap and articulates how a particular research project addresses this gap, hence, educate a researcher in the topic area for him/her to understand the topic before shaping an argument or justification (Arshed & Danson, 2015). In this study, the review of literature provided information that was appropriate in understanding and analysing the errors surrounding the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs, among Grade 10 English FAL learners in the selected schools in Tshinane Circuit.

Information collected from various scholars and researchers was used to gain a deeper and comprehensive understanding of errors of simple past forms of irregular verbs among English FAL learners and to answer the research questions of the study.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was underpinned by Robert Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and Stephen Pit Corder's (1967) Error Analysis (EA). A theoretical framework is a "collection of organised facts and principles used to explain and guide the research study" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014:14). The goal of a theoretical framework is to present and explain what theories and models other researchers have already developed. It provides a general or broader set of ideas within which a study is rooted. Through CAH and EA, an attempt was made to explain within a sample of learner language what errors are, how errors are identified, described, explained, and evaluated. In addition, sources responsible for the types of errors found were identified and elucidated.

2.3.1 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS

The CAH hypothesis was developed by Robert Lado in 1957. It entails a study of language pairs in order to identify their structural similarities and dissimilarities (Abdi, Rizi & Tavakoli, 2010). The CAH emphasises the impact of the mother tongue on L2 learning at phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic levels, claiming that the L2 acquisition can be affected by the L1. It has been used in a plethora of L2 Acquisition (SLA) studies over the years as a strategy for of the different levels of language competence in target languages.

Lado claims that elements that are the same with learner's L1 are learnt more easily than those that are not. He emphasises that the difficulties and errors in learning a target language or a foreign language are solely due to mother tongue interference as L2 learners are likely to transfer the structures of their mother tongue to their L2 expressions. If the transfer assists in learners' construction of L2 utterances, it is termed 'positive transfer', however, it is 'negative interference' if the opposite occurs.

CAH is based on the understanding that the development of L2 learner errors can be prevented through the exploiting of relevant teaching materials aimed at reinforcing correct language teaching Abdi et al. (2010). A transfer is viewed as a language learning strategy used by L2 learners to accelerate their language learning. Learners tend to begin learning the L2 by transferring some sounds and meanings (semantic transfer) from their native language to the target language.

Similarly, learners transfer rules and structures from their L1 into the L2 (Abdi et al., 2010). Forms and meanings are also transferred from native language and culture to the target language and culture, therefore, according to Corder (1981), learners carry over the habits of their mother tongue into the L2. In this situation, a contrastive analysis should be conducted between the two different languages to predict the possible development of errors (Ozkayran & Yilmaz, 2020) in the learners' utterances.

In a situation where there are similarities between the L1 and the target language, learners are likely to acquire structures easily, and where there are differences in rules and structures, learners may experience difficulties. A contrastive analysis focuses on a description of L1 and L2 according to their structures and function. Language transfer can either be positive or negative and according to Gass & Schacter, (1989) correct L2 utterances are the result of positive transfer which facilitates language learning, on the other hand, negative transfer yields incorrect outcomes which deviate from the target language.

The training of learners in the acquisition of new phonological, morphological, and syntactic habits was dependent on a systematic comparison and contrast of L1 and L2 (Abdi et al. 2010). According to Richards (1971), the CAH may be most predictive at the level of phonology but least predictive at the syntactic level, hence, many of the common mistakes are syntactic errors in learners' written work.

2.3.1.1 Procedure in contrastive analysis hypothesis

According to Lado's (1957) CAH, the causes of many errors were - inter-lingual transfer, overgeneralization of rules, rules' incomplete application, ignorance of rule

restriction, false concepts' hypothesised, simplification, fossilisation and inadequate learning. The subsequent paragraphs explain these causes of errors:

(a) Inter-lingual transfer

Inter-lingual transfer involves language production from learners' attempts to transfer knowledge from their first language and they occur in the early stages of L2 learning (Nurjanah, 2017). It is traceable to knowledge of the L1 that has a strong negative influence on second language learning. Nephawe (2019) claims that language transfer occurs when the L2 sentences depict interference that is directly aligned with the learners' L1 knowledge. In this process, positive and negative transfers occur; positive transfer occurs when the learners' L1 and L2 both display similar linguistic characteristics while negative transfer leads to the development of errors that hamper L2 learning. During this stage, some learners may commit errors, such as, **Mulalo clean the table last Sunday morning* instead of *Mulalo cleaned the table last Sunday morning*. Many learners often violate the rules of the formation of the past tense in English grammar. According to Ellis (1991), when L2 learners experience difficulties in learning a new language, they transform skills from their mother tongue to the target language.

(b) Intra-lingual transfer error

Intra-lingual transfer error is noticeable when L2 learner is trying to construct sentences. Unlike inter-lingual transfer, it is one of the true causes of errors when someone is learning other languages. It usually happens to learners who have already internalised the rules regarding the use of the target language. This error demonstrates the transformation of structures of the language created by the person who is learning the L2, however, they usually do not show the structure of the mother tongue or the L2 (Richards, 1971). It occurs when L2 learners are trying to form their own hypothesis relating to the target language from a limited experience that is usually obtained from the classroom environment or textbooks (Huang, 2013). Learners may overgeneralise the rules of grammar resulting from a limited contact with the L2, or, when they attempt to apply the rules from limited information.

Intra-lingual interference takes place when the L2 learners experience difficulties from patterns of the structures of a language which has been newly acquired (Scovel, 2001) without predetermined dispositions of how the new patterns may be aligned with the learners' prior knowledge. Kaweera (2013) sees it as a digression in the language being learnt, showing the conflicting which is based on under-development of the L2 knowledge. Intra-lingual transfer develops during the time the L2 learners have not gained the intended understandings and meanings of the structures of the new language, hence, they improvise the rules according to their current knowledge.

Richards (1971) claims that such development of errors is congruent to other target language's forms that are created by the learners, although, they do not depict the structure of the learners' L1, nonetheless, difficulties experienced by the learners of the target language can be reflected. Therefore, the teachers' ineffective explanation, the poor presentation of a structures or words from a course book, faulty internalised and inadequately contextualised patterns of rules might be the causes of errors.

(c) Overgeneralisation

Overgeneralisation of rules involves a situation where grammatical rules are applied in the wrong place. In this situation learners may reject '*teeth*' in favour of "**tooths*" or form verbs such as **goed* and **putted*. In these examples, learners have ignored the grammatical rules involving the formation of the past tense verbs and plural nouns (Denham & Lobeck, 2010), and as a result deviant English language structures are formed. This shows the applying of prior strategies learnt to current situations (Richards, 2013). In this essence, learners have overgeneralised the rules regarding the addition of the ending '-ed' to the stem of all verbs without any consideration of the type of verb.

Learners may disregard some dissimilarities in other speakers' language (Takashima, 2009) by trusting that their speech is understood by the listeners. Sometimes when learners figure that their speech is becoming slow and uncertain when attempting to communicate effectively, they form their own grammatical rules. They violate the boundaries of the language by forming deviant structures based on their L1's evidence and their experience. This usually happens when learners have

limited exposure to the language, have inadequate data and are seeking to find an easy way to reduce their linguistic burden (Wen, 2013). Learners regularise the language and overlook the exception in a bid to reduce the learning burden or make the language structures easy and simple.

(d) Incomplete application of rules

The incomplete application of rules involves a systematic difficulty, usually, regarding the use of grammatical structures, such as tenses or in sentence construction. The incomplete application of rules takes place when a learner is unable to apply features that are required to form acceptable sentence, as in, **He a very funny-looking boy* instead of *He is/was a very funny-looking boy* or **They not written the final test promised by the teacher* instead of *They have not written the final test promised by the teacher*. Based on these examples, the learner has shown lack of knowledge when constructing the past tense forms.

(e) Ignorance of rule restrictions

Ignorance of rule restrictions involves the transfer of knowledge based on the existing rules of the new contexts in a wrong place. It happens when the L1 learners are conscious or have put to memory some rules but not of their restrictions in relation to some grammatical structures, thereby, they ignore such restrictions or use the incorrect equivalence, for example, in the formation of the simple past tenses. Learners may add the ending '-ed' to all verbs when constructing the simple past tenses (Denham & Lobeck, 2010), as in, **He goed to the cinema last year*. In this instance, the learner has added the ending '-ed' to the verb 'go'.

(f) False concepts hypothesised

False concepts hypothesised results when errors are placed under incorrect hypotheses and incorrect rules are formed by learners. These are developmental errors resultant from a defective consideration of the similarities and dissimilarities in the L2, usually from poor gradation of teaching items. In this context, both L2 teachers and learners can commit them. False concept hypothesised involves mistakes made

by learners who may have established the wrong postulations about the target language (Bui Thi, 2010).

Touchie (1986) asserts that false concepts hypothesised may develop from learners' incorrect hypotheses when they cannot differentiate between tenses, for example, between the present perfect continuous and the simple past tense, as in **They have came last year* instead of *They have been coming last year* and *Mary was sleeping* instead of *Mary was asleep*. Touchie (1986) argues that even if learners are taught how to use the simple present tense forms of the verb 'be', they may fail to consider that those forms are also markers that can be used with the continuous tenses. They may make mistakes such as **Learner is absent yesterday*, and **We is busy cleaning*, hoping that the copula 'is' marks both tenses, therefore, poor comprehension of in the grammatical rules might be the source of this error.

(g) Simplification

Simplification takes place when learners select simple forms and constructions instead of the more complex forms and structures or reduce an intricate aspect of grammar to a simpler set of rules. They may reflect a process used when messages are transported from limited language knowledge. It takes place due to learners' limited contact with the target language and their desire to lessen their linguistic burden (Lambani & Nengome, 2017). Learners may form their rules grounded by their limited knowledge attained earlier and then end up with specious utterances, such as **She place food on the table* instead of *She places food on the table*.

(h) Fossilisation

Fossilisation refers to the persistence of errors in one aspect of a learner's language, despite advancement in other areas of language learning. For example, a learner's grammatical development would appear to have fossilised at a particular level, thereby, showing, for instance, frequent errors in both tenses and punctuation; this pattern then becomes uninterrupted and a characteristic of the learner's speech. According to Nghikembua (2014), fossilization emerges from the effect of the

linguistic system of the L1, incorrect teaching and training as well as translating the L1 into the L2.

During this language situation, learners' sojourn from learning the language from the belief that they have gained enough grammatical structures that can be used to communicate effectively and eventually create their own syntax in contexts that might not be proper for such utterances (Selinker, 1972). Also, fossilisation occurs when the learners notice that their error does not interrupt the fulfilment of their communication intent or requirements at any level (Littlewood, 1984). It is a stage that is short of success (Gass & Schacter, 1989).

During fossilisation, the L2 learners undergo no further development in the language. It is also characterised by ineffective conscious efforts to make some changes which, however, may be transient and minor. Fossilisation can occur even after extended exposure (Spada & Lightbrown, 1993) to the target language and often with people with long exposure to the language (Brown, 1994).

(i) Inadequate learning

Inadequate learning results from under-differentiation and incomplete learning. An example of inadequate learning can be the omission of the third person singular '-s' in the simple present tense, for example, **She decide to marry an educated woman* instead of *She decides to marry an educated woman* or the addition of 's' to the third person plural, for example, **They enjoys watching horror movies on Saturday nights* instead of *They enjoy watching horror movies on Saturday nights*. Also, it can result in the addition of the suffix '-ed' in the past tense, as in **He putted the textbooks on the table yesterday* instead of *He put the textbooks on the table yesterday*.

2.3.1.2 Benefits of CAH in L2 learning

CAH entails the understanding of languages as increasingly imperative in a multilingual and multicultural society and success in L2 learning is viewed through the filter of the L1 wherein its rules are matched with that of the L2 (Richards, 1971). This

entails that studying CAH clarifies interference in L2 learning. The purpose of CAH, therefore, is to assist in the classification, prediction and elimination of errors.

Abdi et al. (2010) postulate that CAH can be beneficial for teachers in the design of appropriate teaching and learning materials and engaging learners in exercises to become competent users of the target language, through relevant and meaningful classroom activities. Teachers can also assess the contents of textbooks by paying attention to the structure of the texts beyond the sentence level, and by analysing utterances in their regular pattern, in different situations. CAH helps classroom practitioners to pay attention to what needs to be taught (content) and the applicable methodology to deliver the content. Using CAH, teachers can predict the level of difficulties in a foreign language to avoid using a high degree of difficulties along with a high degree of occurrences in the same text.

When learning the L2, learners already know their L1, which they are likely to bring with them into the new learning situation. The learner's L1 has a role to play in the teaching of the L2, so, the psychological foundation of CAH is transfer theory, that is, regarding the L1 as the prior learning and the L2 for the subsequent learning (Abdi et al., 2010) the CAH backs the notion that learners' errors are attributable to mother language interference and that teaching material developed should centre on the differences between the native language and the target language to facilitate the new learning.

The CAH acknowledges the relationship that exists between the L1 and L2 which can predict problematic areas for learners in advance to mitigate L2 learning challenges (Pongsiriwet, 2001). Teachers were, therefore, urged to spend more time on structures of English that were most likely to be negatively impacted by the L1 transfer or interference.

2.3.1.3 *Limitations of the CAH*

Opponents of CAH argue that learners' errors cannot be solely attributable to L1 interference and that there could be other factors that may include, but are not limited to, psychological and pedagogical aspects. The transfer is considered only one of

many possible causes of learners' errors, however, new developments in research revealed that L2 learners use simple structures “that are very similar across learners from a variety of backgrounds, even if their respective L1 are different from each other and different from the target languages” (Spada & Lightbrown, 1993) critics of CAH found that sometimes over-predicted errors were not visible in L2 learners' language production and under-predicted errors are obvious.

Errors were not solely because of interference but could be traced to learners' intra-lingual system in language acquisition. It was further observed that learners from different linguistic backgrounds demonstrated the same acquisition patterns suggesting that there was an equally important process of creative construction, besides any L2 habit formation (Abdi et al., 2010) reports the following as limitations of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis:

- Teachers are more concerned with finding out the challenges faced by language learners in the classroom setting rather than predetermined predictions, which are at times incorrect;
- CAH does not explicitly provide a formal way of indicating aspects of the two languages to be compared;
- CAH cannot account for everything within its domain since, for example, it cannot formally indicate which differences can lead to difficulties and which cannot. Moreover, recent studies have revealed that CAH is most predictive at the phonological level and least predictive at the syntactic level because no language has been adequately compared yet to another language, and what is predicted as a difficulty by the CAH is not always so in practice.

Predicting difficulty was equated with predicting L2 learners' errors and although difficulty does not necessarily lead to produced errors, if a learner is aware of those difficulties and controls them, such a learner may progress well in the learning of another language. It seems that CAH ignores the learner's active role in the acquisition of L2 (Zaki, 2015).

In this study, the researcher utilised the CAH to figure out the differences and similarities between the L1 and the L2 of the learners that can assist in an

understanding of the L2 errors. Applying the CAH enables a comprehensive systemic description of both languages, by using the following steps outlined by Abdi et al. (2010). Selection – entails selecting the two languages - the L1 and the L2 and further selecting linguistic structures to be compared and contrasted.

- Description – involves describing the selected linguistic structures focusing on the differences between the two selected languages.
- Comparison – necessitates comparing selected structures with each other for form and meaning.
- Prediction – this is done by predicting the difficulty through the contrast of selected structures.
- Verification – during this stage, the researcher observes first-hand if the predictions given are true or not.

2.3.2 Error analysis approach (EA)

EA entails observation, analysis and classification of the deviations of the L2 rules and exposure systems of the learners (Brown, 2006). Crystal (1987) argues that these steps can be used in the identification, classification and interpretation of unacceptable forms of the language formed by a foreign-language learner.

According to Gass and Selinker (2001), errors are 'red flags' providing proof of the learner's knowledge of the L2. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) adds that the EA approach is the study and exploration of the errors made by L2 learners. Further, the EA approach is an essential area of Applied Linguistics to be employed to address errors in L2 learning.

The EA approach can be regarded as an activity to identify, describe, interpret, evaluate and prevent the errors made by learners. It is an activity to reveal errors committed by learners both in written and spoken forms. It is a basic instrument in language teaching with the purpose to transform teachers' points of view and methodology for correcting and bridging learners' gaps in language learning. It is a technique that can be employed by both researchers and teachers which encompasses collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the

sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their impact.

During the EA approach errors committed by learners are explored, thereby, giving teachers insights into new ways of language teaching by providing feedback on the errors made by learners. The analysis helps teachers to know the strength and shortcomings of the learners in connection with the target language, thereby, lessening the errors and improving their capabilities in learning the target language. An EA approach gives advantages to both teachers and learners as the process enhances the language learning process as it identifies and records the errors appearing in learner language and explains their causes.

The focus in the EA approach is on errors that are systematic infringements of patterns in the input of the learners. It is an attempt to explain the sources of learners' errors that could not be predicted by CAH or Behaviourist Theory and makes the field of Applied Linguistics congruent with the theoretical opinions on linguistic and psycholinguistic errors generated by L2 learners (Dulay et al., 1982). As all learners are prone to making mistakes (Corder, 1981), the EA approach helps teachers assess learners' language learning progress, hence, it is deemed a relevant tool for information gathering.

In this study, the EA approach was used to analyse the simple past tense forms of irregular verb errors that learners make while learning the target language, English FAL. EA approach, as a theoretical framework for this study, was the foundation upon which the study is anchored. The researcher was interested in finding out the types of the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs' errors and their sources.

2.3.2.1 Errors and mistakes

In the psycholinguistic field, a distinction is made between 'errors' and 'mistakes'. Errors serve as an indication that learners are testing suppositions about the linguistic system of the target language (Corder, 1967). This is the reason that Corder (1981) contends that the language learners' system can be linguistically described, thereby uncovering the learners' provisional competence, and the only way this system can

be accessed is through learners' errors. Applied linguists, such as Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972) recognise that foreign or L2 learners create a mental grammar of the target language which typically demonstrates itself in the errors they commit.

The mistake is a deviant linguistic composition that results from various factors, for instance, a wrong word choice (Corder, 1981). Mistakes can be self-corrected by a user and are usually accidental and performance based. An error, on the other hand, occurs because of the learner's inadequate knowledge of the appropriate structure of the target language; it is an indication of linguistic incompetence, according to Corder cited in Ellis (1994); second language learning is essentially a process characterised by mistakes.

In learning a language, learners do not only make mistakes but errors too and they should benefit from appropriate and meaningful feedback of them (Brown, 2006). When people learn an L2, it takes time to develop an indigenous-like mastery over the target language. Instead, language learning is a gradual process of internalising the rules of the target language and during such a process, a learner cannot acquire the target language without making errors.

Linguists and language teachers, hence, have devised a variety of approaches and methods for the study of learners' errors and ways of curbing them. Corder (1967) associates errors with breakdowns in competence and mistakes as 'crashes' in performance. Gass and Selinker (2001) are of the view that **mistakes** are similar to slips of the tongue whereas **errors** are systematic. Learners are likely to recognise mistakes and do self-correction, while errors are not recognisable as a wrong form, which implies that they often arise repetitively in learners' output despite efforts at external correction.

2.3.2.2 *Significance of errors*

Corder (1967), a great contributor to the EA approach indicates that the L2 learning process involves a scrutiny of errors that are committed. An EA approach bears a resemblance to a methodological study of how the mother tongue is acquired; it makes provision to assess the extent of the linguistic development of a learner and

also presents signals as to his/her learning process. The approach operates from the basis that learners' errors are unavoidable in the learning process, although, they are also necessary to check learner-language development. Corder (1981) claims that learners' errors provide evidence of the language structures learnt and strategies employed in their usage. The analysis of errors made by learners is viewed as an inevitable part of teaching and learning. Examining errors is essential for the learning process because it is through the commission of errors that learners learn, therefore, EA elevates the status of errors as being crucial in the language-learning process.

It is through errors committed, according to Ellis (1994) that a teacher gains insight into how much of the language the learner has acquired and the way forward. Ellis (2010:183) offers some reasons for an analysis of L2 errors as follows:

- The prominence of errors as an essential aspect of learner language;
- The kind of learners' language challenges are brought to the fore and this information is crucial for teachers to mediate learning;
- Errors are necessary for learners to learn to take the initiative to correct them on their own.

For learners and teachers, it is relevant to learn from errors in the development of language skills. Teachers are responsible for the development of learners' English language development; thus, it is imperative to inform learners about the types of errors made, how to deal with them and provide corrective and meaningful feedback and EA provides a methodology to undertake this process.

This study's findings provided insights into how errors can be utilised to improve teaching and learning. Learners try to curb errors, whereas teachers are likely to highlight them and adapt their teaching practice to bridge the gaps identified. The L2 learners are inclined to have challenges with the rules of the target language and teachers need to come up with relevant approaches to ameliorate them. The researcher concurs that errors play a crucial role in language teaching and learning. Teaching a language demands a lot from teachers who should devise innovative strategic interventions to make learning a language a logical and structured process for learners, therefore, this demand served as a motivation for this study.

2.3.2.3 Procedure in EA research

EA approach is an orderly process and involves adherence to a systematic and sequential procedure. Ellis (1994) suggests steps in an EA activity which are outlined next in the discussions.

- Collection of a sample of learner language

The first step is to collect a sample of learners' language. Even though this is usually done with written data, oral data can also be collected. In this study collection of data for the analysis was through a written content-based questionnaire and an essay to elicit data relevant to answering the research questions. The advantage of written data is that the researcher can go back to the data to elicit information several times with ease and it is also economical. With oral data a researcher needs specialised devices to record a sample of learner language.

- The identification of errors

Before identifying an error, it is necessary to establish what an error is and also to institute a method of how to distinguish such. A distinction also needs to be made between errors and mistakes.

As explained earlier, an error occurs when learners use the language wrongly due to a lack of knowledge. Errors are results of obvious deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, while mistakes occur when learners are unable to utilise structures they have learnt. Corder (1967) contends that errors need to be clarified whether overt or covert. An overt error is easy to identify because there is a clear deviation in structure, for example, '*She runned to the shop*'. On the other hand, a covert error occurs in utterances that are seemingly well-formed, but which do not mean what the learner intended them to mean. The focus of the study was on the overt errors as those are the ones learners in Grade 10 mainly commit. All errors of the simple past form of irregular verbs were identified using a standard grammar resource book, for example, *Platinum English First Additional Language, Learner's*

Book, Grade 10. An error was only identified once, even if it appeared several times, particularly, in the sampled essays.

- Description of errors

The first step in the description of errors is to differentiate errors from mistakes; in other words, what makes a word / phrase an error or a mistake. It should be stated what kind of errors are to be analysed, for example, errors from the simple past forms of irregular verbs.

Mohammed and Abdalhusse (2015: 23). categorise errors as follows:

- Omission: absence of a unit of word or complete word that is supposed to appear in a well-formed sentence as in *'they * reading'*.
- Addition: presence of structures that must not appear in the language, for example, *'He dranked coffee'*.
- Misinformation: use of the wrong structure of the language as in *'The dog eated the chicken'*.
- Misordering: incorrect positioning of a morpheme/s in a sentence such as, *'Where he is going?'*

The description of errors helps to indicate to learners how much they have digressed from the target language and for a more systematic and logical analysis. In this study, the description of errors was solely of the simple past forms of irregular verbs, which were then thoroughly described. In this situation, irregular verb past forms errors is likely to fall under the following categories: errors of omission, errors of addition and errors of misinformation.

- Explanation of errors

The fundamental objectives of EA are to identify and explain errors. The explanation of errors has a component of supposition since one has no direct access to learners' thoughts. Errors can be attributable to various sources, such as native language interference, intralingual errors and non-adherence to appropriate communication strategies (Selinker, 1972). There may be multiple causes of error, meaning that an

error may be caused by multiple deviations, and induced errors might not be easily explained. Some learners use a variety of communication strategies to convey meanings and some of the used forms are incorrect and difficult to explain.

In explaining the sources of simple past forms of irregular verb errors, the likelihood was that most errors were attributable to intralingual transfer, wherein learners had generalised the rules of what they had learnt, and the context of learning which sometimes happen when a teacher gives distorted clarification and flawed arrangement of a language structure in teaching material. One result of this is errors in the simple past tense of irregular verbs for which methodological intervention may be recommended to address them.

- Evaluation of error

Evaluation of error implies an assessment of the effect that the error has had on the utterance. The process assesses the seriousness, intelligibility or acceptability of an error. Errors are usually ranked according to their severity.

2.3.2.4 Sources of error

Learners are likely to commit a variety of errors when learning a language. There are various sources to which the errors are attributable. Brown (2006) identifies some sources of error as inter-lingual transfer, intralingual transfer and context of learning. The interlingual transfer is mainly a source of errors with beginner learners of L2 when they transfer aspects from the L1 to L2. Intralingual transfer causes errors when learners apply rules they have learnt to other contexts where they are not applicable. The context of learning becomes a source of error when, for example, a teacher gives a misleading explanation and incorrect presentation of a language structure. Another possible factor that is responsible for errors made by a L2 learner is the level of exposure to the target language through the variety of sources, such as media and the home environment among others (George, 2015).

Interlingual errors occur due to the mother tongue's interference; this is referred to as negative transfer. Intralingual errors, also known as developmental errors, occur frequently, during the learning process of the target language. These errors occur as

a result of deficiencies in the knowledge of rules, or ignorance of exceptions to rules. James (1998) states that intralingual errors happen because of learning strategy-based errors. EA assumes that most learner errors are due to making faulty inferences about the new language. Errors may demonstrate overgeneralisation and incomplete application of rules as factors causing challenges with learning the new language. Errors of development occur due to limited exposure and experience with the L2 being learnt (Richards, 1971).

Nordquist (2020) views overgeneralisation as the application of a grammatical rule in inappropriate contexts. It is the application of previously learnt strategies in new contexts, inappropriately. This process of learning a grammatical rule and applying it without exception is called 'overgeneralisation of rules' (Denham & Lobeck, 2010). The expanding of the context of use of some structures may trigger errors. A learner is likely to come up with an incorrect form based on other structures in the rest of the sentence. The extension of the use of a form to an inappropriate context leads to inaccuracies, although, it is often a part of the natural process in the use of grammatical rules. An extension of the context of use of a grammatical form may result in it being over-utilised; this is what happens when "learners incorrectly inflect irregular verbs to fit regular patterns" (Richards, 1971:10).

- Ignorance of rule restrictions entails the application of rules to contexts where they are not required.
- Incomplete application of rules happens when there is a breakdown in the use a fully developed structure.
- A false concept hypothesis becomes evident when there is a failure to fully comprehend a distinction in the target language.

There are many sources of errors in language learning. Ellis and Tomlinson (1980:8) cite the following as sources of errors: "poor teaching of a language item, a mistranslation from the target language to the mother tongue, a false assumption based on limited knowledge of the target language, such as overgeneralisation of irregular verbs, exposure to common errors at schools, at homes and from the mass media, attempting untaught items and using those items which have been learnt but easily forgotten as a result of infrequent use".

According to Mohammed and Abdalhusse (2015) errors are classified into three broad categories:

- Errors of development - are the same with L1 acquisition. They are errors that occur as a natural part of the learning process.
- Errors of interference- they occur between L1 and L2. These kinds of errors result from mother tongue interference. They are also known as transfer errors.
- Unique errors are neither developmental nor interference. These are errors that are committed by individual learners which cannot be attributable either to developmental or interference errors.

2.3.2.5 Benefits of the EA approach

The EA approach presumes learning difficulties are exposed through errors committed. During the process of EA, one error could be caused by multiple sources and not just from the negative transfer of aspects of the native language. Brown (1994) acknowledges that through the EA approach, not all errors are attributable to the mother tongue and that CAH could make faulty assertions because learners from different language backgrounds tend to make similar errors in learning. The EA concept succeeded in elevating errors from complete inappropriateness to an object of research, curriculum guide and pointer to the learning phase (Ellis, 1994). In this situation, Khansir (2012:102) lists the following as benefits of the EA approach as it would be assisting in the:

- Formulation of remedial actions to mediate learning;
- Arranging of the syllabus sequentially from simple to complex language items in classrooms and textbooks;
- Crafting of proposals on strategies for L2 learning.

One of the advantages of the EA approach, for the learners, is that it shows learners aspects that are difficult for them. It also helps learners to recognise the source of the error and strategies to apply to self-correct. It is also advantageous for teachers' self-reflection. For teachers, it is necessary to evaluate their classroom practices and strive to enhance their methodologies in teaching English, therefore, knowledge and

understanding of the causes of errors assist in their eradication and the design of appropriate learning and teaching support materials (Nephawe, 2019).

Knowing the common types of errors is a crucial step to inform the teachers where to direct their efforts regarding the most problematic areas students face while producing the target language. It also assists the teachers to devise teaching strategies that might minimise learners' errors. EA is beneficial mainly because it is purposed to unearth that which the learner is familiar with, close gaps in the target language and assist the teacher to provide the relevant input. It derives data from learner productions, both spoken and written forms.

This study examined some of the errors of simple past forms of irregular verbs, from which both learners and teachers are likely to derive a benefit. From this study's results, the majority of teachers may put more effort into teaching past forms of irregular verbs. In this regard, learners are likely to correct some errors through meaningful feedback from teachers and practising their usage in context.

2.3.2.6 Shortcomings of the EA approach

Some linguists and researchers who are critical of the EA approach view it as flawed because its only source of data is derived from learner utterances or written work, (Gass & Schachter, 1974), hence, cannot account for the concept of avoidance. The main criticism against EA is its potential to misanalyse language learners' barriers because the approach ignores some L2 features (Gass & Schachter 1974; Rustipa, 2011). Some learners may avoid specific items of the target language for fear of making errors. They are likely to apply only correct language aspects that they have already mastered. Therefore, in using EA to evaluate learners' work would not provide a true picture.

The opponents of the EA approach cite its focus on errors only, at the expense of what the learner does right, as its main shortfall. There is a lack of consistency in the use of concepts, such as slips, errors and mistakes among researchers wherein some use errors and mistakes interchangeably. Baffling, incompatible and incomplete

explanations of errors and redundant classifications may confuse teachers who should use the information to mediate language learning (Mahmoud, 2015).

The fascination only with errors made, may tend to overshadow what the learner has mastered in the target language. Certain errors do not impede communication, that is, the reader or listener can still understand the utterance despite the error. In essay writing, learners may shy away from using structures that they are not certain about. With EA, teachers are likely to spend more time correcting learners than acknowledging learning that has taken place.

Identifying the errors committed is not always that easy since many of them require awareness of the learners' intentions, therefore, classifying errors and finding the psycholinguistic reasons behind errors pose a serious challenge. Avoidance cannot be revealed as an error (Zaki, 2015). This study, using the CA and EA approach solely focused on errors in the usage of simple past tense forms of irregular verb at the expense of any other language errors that learners may have committed, particularly, those by the Grade 10 English FAL learners. A distinction was made between mistakes and errors. In this regard, the data was collected from selected learners' essays and questionnaires distributed; the data shed light on the types of errors committed by them.

2.3.2.7 Research findings on irregular verb EA

Research on the EA approach has been done on distinctive stages and topics. Committing of errors that emanate from the incorrect production of the simple past tense form of irregular verbs are not only confined to South Africa and other African countries' learners but to L2 learners all over the world.

There are several research findings concerning errors surrounding irregular verbs' simple past tense forms committed by L2 learners of English across the globe and these are identified and discussed hereunder. The errors learners often make when trying to use the simple past tense form of irregular verbs, seem to arise primarily from overgeneralization. It occurs when the learner inflects an irregular verb with the suffix '-ed' not taking into account the different forms of these verbs. This error is

common to L2 learners regardless of their L1. This intralingual error is usually the result of learners using rules from their L1.

A research by Mungungu (2010:20) that investigated using an Error Analysis approach, on the writing of ESL Namibian learners, found that “overgeneralisation errors are caused during the inflection of the irregular verb forms”, consequently, the following incorrect forms of the italicised verbs were noticed:

- *One of the current footballers *shooked* their hips on stage.
- *Players’ accommodation bill is footed already and *cutted* a lump sum of money.

Similarly, a research conducted by Maliwa (2009) titled ‘*Error fossilisation in the written English of Xhosa-speaking learners in the Further Education and Training (FET) Band*’ revealed that students experienced challenges with using verbs, therefore, by implication, learners do not know how to use the correct tense and may encounter some problem with subject-verb agreement. A study conducted by Nzama (2010: 71) regarding the errors committed by IsiZulu speaking learners of English in selected schools’ around Kwazulu Natal, established that “participants committed errors of regularisation of irregular past tense forms” as in the sentences hereunder:

- *She *tryed* her best. (The correct verb should be ‘*tried*’)
- *One boy who was cruel *beated* me. (The correct verb form should be ‘*beat*’)

Kang’s (2010) research - *English Attrition in Korean-English Bilingual Children* - about irregular simple past tense verb forms among Korean returnee children, affirmed that irregular verb forms confuse Korean L2 learners because the former do not conform to the rules, thereby, the students committed two types of errors, namely, overregularisation and mis-regularisation errors. In the former case, the participants applied the regular past tense suffix forms *-ed* to the irregular verb forms, resulting in wrong forms like ‘*breaked*’. The following utterances were examples:

- *Mommy *goed* to the store. (Mommy went to the store)
- *Mommy *wented* to the store. (Mommy went to the store)

The findings from Swedish Junior High School students' texts and their grammar knowledge by Taher (2011) reveal that the most frequent errors committed were on irregular simple past tense verb forms. In the Uppsala Learner English Corpus papers, "45% of errors were related to verbs" (Johansson & Geisler, 2009: 181). Some examples of the students' errors are:

- (a) *'...a mental hospital that has *shutted* down' - instead of '...a mental hospital that has *shut* down'
- (b) * 'I *woked* up one day...' - instead of 'I *woke* up one day...'
- (c) * 'In the summer of 2007 I *gone* to the USA' - instead of 'In the summer of 2007 I *went* to the USA'

As indicated in examples (a) and (b), the students wrongly inflected the verbs, '*shut*' and '*wake*'. These verbs are irregular and are some of the most problematic verbs for L2 learners. In (c) the context does not require the use of the past participle form of the verb. The student used the past perfect form instead of the simple past tense form; that resulted in an error. This is a demonstration that the participants could not select the right tense nor produce the correct form of the verb in the sentences.

In a case study of Saudi learners' English grammar speaking errors by Alahmadi (2014:85) it was found that "learners made errors in using the correct form of the tense of the verb", for example, *'Last year I had Diploma and *come* here to complete a degree' instead of 'Last year I had Diploma and *came* here to complete a degree'. The learner was unable to use the verb tenses consistently. Rahmi (2014) found that Indonesian English L2 learners experienced challenges in connection with the formation of the simple past tense form of irregular verbs as they regularly inflected the irregular verb '*put*' such as in *'Yusuf *putted* the bag there just now'. The students were supposed to know that the irregular verb '*put*' has a zero-allomorph meaning that the verb does not require any modification.

Muriungi, Mukuthuria & Gatavi (2011:85) in their research conducted among Kenyan L2 English learners, found that students regularised most of the verbs, hence, producing these sentences:

- *He *camed* home late. (He came home late.)

- *We *putted* our things in bags. (We put our things in bags).
- *He was *cutted* with a panga. (He was cut with a panga).
- *He *writed* a letter. (He wrote a letter).
- *We *feeled* happy and played many games. (We felt happy and played many games).

The addition of the suffix '-ed' or '-d' to irregular verbs is inaccurate. The findings of the wrong usage of the irregular verbs' simple past forms among various learners in different continents suggest that L2 learning creates, usually, certain challenges which require teachers to pay special attention to them

In a case study, from an EA among Kimeru learners of English in Imenti South Sub-County, George (2015) found that verb errors had the greatest occurrence with 35.6% of the total number of irregular verb errors related to overgeneralisation. Learner performance with irregular verbs revealed that learners had challenges with the formation of the simple past tense of irregular verbs. Muriungi et al. (2011:85), claim that some of the errors are as follows:

- *Ngina's watch *costed* a lot of money*. (Ngina's watch *cost* a lot of money).
- *I *forgeted* how much it was worth*. (I *forgot* how much it was worth).
- *Mr Ochieng' *haved* a new car before he got promoted*. (Mr Ochieng' *had* a new car before he got promoted).
- *What was *meaned* by that word?*. (What was *meant* by that word?)
- *Mrs. Muli *knowed* the problem*. (Mrs. Muli *knew* the problem).
- *The bus *leaved* very early in the morning on Friday*. (The bus *left* very early in the morning on Friday).
- *Ruth *sitted* for her exam in 2013*. (Ruth *sat* for her exam in 2013).

Learners tend to construct deviant forms of the verbal group. For example, *I *caughted* the ball instead of I 'caught' the ball and *Peter *didn't came* yesterday instead of Peter *did not come* yesterday. These errors committed are a result of the fact that 'catch' and 'come' are irregular verbs and the learners overgeneralized the rules for regular verbs when indicating the simple past tense.

Atmaca (2016) in an EA study - *Turkish EFL Learners: A Case Study* - found that errors committed were due to overgeneralization of the rules regular verbs to apply to the irregular verb forms as well (intralingual) and the difficulty of the target language structure. For example, *'I *wear*ed trousers and sweater last weekend' instead of 'I *wore* trousers and sweater last weekend'. The participant wanted to describe past events and used the incorrect simple past form of the verb – '*wear*ed' instead of '*wore*'. The suffix '-ed' was added to an irregular verb and this resulted in an error of overgeneralisation.

In a study on irregular verbs, Nasser (2017) found that 95% of second-year university students indicated that they could not use the irregular verbs in the simple past tense correctly due to confusion of tenses and overgeneralisation of grammatical rules. In a study entitled '*Common Linguistic Errors among Non-English Major Libyan Students Writing*', Hamed (2018) discovered that the highest number of errors found in the participants' written compositions were related to tenses.

Tulldahl and Steinvall (2004) claims that noticed that learners make flawed assumptions concerning the rules of the target language and made errors in the process of language learning. In addition, in a study by Khansir (2012), it was found that it is common for the L2 learner of English to be very basic in their use of the grammar system in the English language.

2.4 SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gass and Schachter (1974) had reservations about EA to present an accurate picture of L2 learners' level of competence as the concept cannot account for avoidance. Schachter (ibid, p. 105) considered it as "an error in error analysis". CAH was defined and the following aspects were discussed: its purpose, assumptions, procedure, implications on L2 acquisition and limitations. The EA approach as a theoretical framework was defined and the procedures that are adhered to in the analysis were explained. The benefits and shortfalls of the theoretical framework, and research findings on the EA processes with irregular verbs in the simple past tense were deliberated upon.

2.5 CONCEPT OF GRAMMAR

The word 'grammar' has been explained in various ways by various individuals. To a layman, it means the precision or inaccuracy of the language spoken or written. For a language learner, it means a logical and lexicon arrangement of sentences. It is a system of meaningful constructions and arrangements that are regulated by specific practical limitations or rules (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Furthermore, grammar entails an organisation of guidelines central to the standard composition and connection of words in a sentence (Brown, 2006).

It should be considered as a system governed by rules of form, meaning, and use (Larsen-Freeman 2001). In other words, not only does it denote an account of the rules controlling sentence structures, but it is also an indication of the connotations that these structures express as well as the occasions and reasons they are used. Grammar is the analysis of words and the circumstances in which words function in unison; a covert power that directs users to put words together into sentences. It includes analysis of all the different meanings that can be deduced within sentences (Crystal, 2006).

Linguists view grammar as a combination of morphology, syntax, phonology and semantics (Dalil & Harriz 2013). Grammar refers to the manner of word usage, classification, and organisation to form comprehensible written or spoken communication (Sinsheimer & Herring, 2016). Grammar is an arrangement of rules and exemptions to those rules to show configurations' meaning through phonology, syntax and morphology (Eunson, 2020). Syntax deals with the design or order of words in sentences, as well as the rules regarding how words can alter their structure to relate with other words to communicate meaning, more effectively; morphology involves the shape or nature of words.

To be able to be proficient in a language, it is important for one to understand its grammar - a crucial feature in language learning. Grammar is essential to generate communication that is grammatically applicable at the sentence and text levels. Debata (2013) theorises that language users are consciously or unconsciously aware of the grammar of the language. Grammar is a system made up of many interrelated

parts that ensure correctness and meaning, and knowledge of grammar enhances a person's ability to fluently write and speak a language. Therefore, it is the mental system of rules and categories that allows humans to form and interpret the words and sentences of their language in communication.

Grammar is like a living entity that evolves and undergoes a great deal of change, over time. Nordquist (2020) explains that the grammar of a language includes fundamental axioms such as verb tenses, articles and adjectives, among others; language cannot operate in the absence of grammar. The role of grammar describes how a language is used, provides rules for correct usage and for the generation of a limitless number of constructions in a language.

The comprehension of grammar assists learners in the rectification of slips and effective communication. Grammar is a reliable field of reference when language conventions diminish, thus, grammar is crucial for learners to understand (Debata, 2013). It is only through a thorough understanding of the use of grammar that learners can achieve their ultimate goal of competence in language. It helps speakers or writers to communicate more clearly and with style too.

People, therefore, require grammar to communicate effectively as it is paramount in the speaking, listening, writing and reading processes. Grammar assists in constructing the presenter's or author's intended meaning clearer, in communication; it is the instrument through which complicated ideas can be conveyed. Grammar can be considered a prerequisite factor for effective communication as it facilitates the production of correct expressions in different modes (Dalil, 2013).

2.6 TENSES

Tenses can be classified as the part that enables one to frame meaningful sentences. In English, verbs are only indicated for tense and number and most verbs, regular ones, usually demonstrate their simple past form by the addition of 'ed' as a suffix, for example, '*played*', '*stopped*' (Almor, 2002). The concept of English tenses is pivotal in establishing effective communication. Verb tenses tell how an action relates to the flow of time; thus, tenses show a connection between verbs and time of the

action they describe (Richards and Schmidt, 2013). In other words, tenses articulate the relationship between speech time and another interval of interest as claimed by Michaelis, 2021).

Tense contextualises an action's setting in a period. Verb tenses can be difficult to learn in a foreign language setting, since people's mother tongues may denote tenses differently. Verb forms indicate the different tenses with which they are intended. The state and time of a verb is indicated by its tenses; hence, the time of the action determines the state or tense of the verb to be used. Tenses have a paramount role in any language, for example, they signify the time an action happens - the past, the present or the future. Tenses are an essential part of the English Language because ideas can only be accurately expressed through the right form of tenses.

English has three major tenses – the past, present, and future tenses. Each of these tenses explains the time an event took place. The tense of a verb may be expressed by inflectional morphology. An English sentence must have a verb; therefore, learners should master verbs in the process of sentence construction and communication (Crystal, 2006)

In the English language, the verb is the word class that has various forms, which change in relation to situations, tenses, dispositions and aspects through the use of several inflectional morphemes and derivational affixes. Verbs are words that describe the actions or states of being and function as the root of the predicate, which is required (along with a subject) to form a complete sentence. Every sentence, therefore, must include at least one verb.

Verbs include action words like, run, walk, write, or sing, as well as words describing states of being, such as be, seem, feel, or sound (Sinsheimer & Herring, 2016). For regular verbs, the simple past tense is formed by the addition of '*-ed*' or '*-d*' (*walked*, *cooked*, *climbed*) but irregular English verbs mark the past tense inflection in various ways, for example, with a change in the vowel of the verb as in '*sang*', '*wrote*', among others, (Wang, Harper & Stolcke, 2003). Some English irregular verbs have the simple past and the past participle spelled like the present tense. Regular verbs do not experience considerable modifications between tenses (Yusuf, 2017). Tense,

sometimes, can be marked by altering the spelling of a verb. Learners are expected to have a good grasp of tenses to communicate proficiently in both spoken and written modes. In ordinary communication, actions are time-bound, in that they have both a starting and a stopping point. The simple past tense indicates that an activity or situation began and ended at a particular time in the past. Hurford (1994) and Tamara (2007), explain that the past tense of a verb is a form that typically shows that an action or state of affairs conveyed by the verb has already happened, hence, the simple past tense can be utilised only in situations related to the past. Verbs in the simple past tense can stand alone without helping verbs. The past reference of the text can also be shown using various adverbials of time pointing to the past and adverbial modifiers of time.

Verbs change form to show the time the action happened. One classification of verbs is mainly into two groups - regular and irregular verbs. Regular forms can be productively generated by a rule, just like phrases and sentences. They are relatively easy to master as the past form is achieved by placing the ending ‘-ed’ to the base form of the verbs. Linguistically, the term ‘regular’ is the classification of verbs that can be morphophonemically predicted because they have the same additional morphemes and sounds to form the past, whereas the term ‘irregular’ is the categorisation of those verbs that are morphophonemically unpredictable. Verbs are words with a grammatical feature like ‘past tense’ integrated into their lexical records.

The most frequently used verbs are the irregular ones, although they are only 3% of all the verbs; this is very challenging for L2 learners because of the complexities of their predictable transformation into the past tense (Bell et al., 2015). The focus of this study is on the past tense forms of irregular verbs.

2.7 SIMPLE PAST TENSE DEBATE

The simple past tense has consistently been the focus of discussions on the description of language processing. The past tense is of academic significance because it encompasses two extremely different classes of words, although both perform the same function in a sentence. Regular inflection applies to many verbs whereas irregular inflection applies in unpredictable ways to some verbs. Pinker and

Ullman (2002) hold the view that irregular forms of verbs must be stored in memory, whereas regular forms can be generated by a rule that the suffixes ‘-ed’ or ‘-d’ must be added to the base.

Some linguists and psycholinguists embrace the view that supports a dual mechanism account, also referred to as the Words and Rules (WR) model, which states that different processes apply to regularly inflected and irregularly inflected verbs. It asserts that these two groups of verbs are processed differently: regulars by a morphological rule that adds the suffix to a verb stem, and irregulars by distinctive forms based on individual grammatical rules.

The regular past tenses are rule-based whereas irregular past tenses are stored in the lexicon. Miozzo (2003) asserts that different parts of the brain may sustain the processing of these verbs. There are also dissenting views in favour of a single mechanism (SM) model. It states that regular and irregular verbs are processed using a similar mental system: a pattern-associated memory where there are no rules, only a network of links between simple processing units (McClelland & Patterson, 2002).

Marshall and Van der Lely (2012) indicate that irrespective of the acquisition model being used, the majority of researchers concur that irregular past tense forms have to be learnt through memorisation. When learners are unable to retrieve an irregular form, they tend to apply one of two erroneous forms, namely, over-regularisation - verb + ‘-ed’ or a null-marked form. The persistence of both null-marked and over-regularised forms has been shown to be due, in part, to the verb’s phonology (Matthews & Theakston 2006).

2.8 REGULAR VERBS AND IRREGULAR VERBS

In English, verb forms are divided into two kinds, namely, regular and irregular. The distinction between regular and irregular verbs is a straightforward one. Orthographically, regular verbs are those verbs that use the inflectional markers ‘-d’ or ‘-ed’ to form the past. They do not experience considerable modifications while changing forms between tenses. Morphophonemically, these verbs are said to be predictable because they always change to the same form with the same additional

sounds. Irregular verbs, however, undertake substantial changes when changing forms between tenses. The changed forms of these verbs are often orthographically distinct from the base (Al Arief, 2016).

The changes in irregular verbs are categorised as an inflectional process with various markers for the different tenses. For example, a regular verb uses suffixation of ‘-ed’/’-d’ or /-t/, to designate a change in tense such as *laugh/laughed*, *smile/smiled*, *vaccinate/vaccinated*, *build/built*, etc., in modern English. The conjugation of the verbs between regular and irregular is different. Changing the regular verbs from their present into past tense forms generally requires the addition of the suffix ‘-ed’ or ‘-d’.

Regarding the irregular verbs, there are no specific rules to change them into past forms, hence, the learners have to memorize all of the unpredictable changes. For example, to form a past form of the regular verb ‘*walk*’ learners just add ‘-ed’ at the end of the word and it becomes ‘*walked*’ but for an irregular verb such as ‘*say*’, it becomes ‘*said*’ in the past tense.

Most verbs are regular verbs, which means that ‘-d’ or ‘-ed’ can be added to their base form to conjugate both the past simple tense and past participle forms (Sinsheimer & Herring, 2016). The simple past tense of most verbs ends in ‘-d’ or ‘-ed’ and they are regular verbs, for example, ‘We *visited* our uncle last week’ wherein the suffix ‘-ed’ has been added to the base of the verb, ‘*visit*’.

In contrast to regular verbs, the behaviour of irregular verbs is unpredictable, due to this, the acquisition of irregular forms necessitates the acquisition of a variety of rules. With irregular verbs, the transformation process cannot be inferred by simple rules; this impacts how they are learned and stored since learners need to employ some form of pattern-association process (Marslen-Wilson & Tyler, 1998). Irregular verbs mark the past tense forms in distinctive ways with a wide variety of inflectional endings. This implies that the spelling of irregular verbs can also be problematic to L2 learners.

Almost all irregular verbs change from the base form, in response to different tenses but there are those whose form remains unchanged even with different tenses, such as *'cut/cut'*, *'hurt/hurt'*, *'put/put'* which have the same form in their principal parts for most tenses. Rahmi (2014) explains that it is difficult to predict the past and past participle forms of irregular verbs from their base form as irregular verbs do not adhere to a distinct or predictable pattern, and they are usually completely different from one another. The result of various historical sound changes has left certain verbs following individualised patterns. Unfortunately, there is no uniform way of regulating how to conjugate irregular verbs — each must be learned individually (Sinsheimer & Herring, 2016).

The concept of 'irregular' refers to verbs that do not manifest the characteristic *'-ed/-d'* inflection to signal the past tenses of regular verbs as stipulated by Azar (1999) and Kang (2010). Irregular verbs do not form their past tense and past participles according to the rules used with regular verbs. An irregular verb is a traditional reference to a type of verb in the Germanic languages in which a change in the stem vowel indicates the past tense, e.g., *sing/sang*, *drive/drove*; these are a relatively small subset of verbs in Modern English that were used in Old English.

The past tense of irregular verbs sometimes involves a change in the stem vowel, for example, *sing – sang/know – knew* or the change is accomplished by the affixation of either *'-d'* for example *'sold'*, or the voiced consonants *'t'* for example, *'lost'*, *'crept'* and *'felt'* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2010). Some verbs have a vowel change but add a *'-t'* rather than *'-ed'* or *'-d'* as in *'keep/kept'*, *'think/thought'*, *'sleep/slept'*, *'teach/taught'*. Unlike regular verbs, irregular verbs cause errors because learners may not be sure about the correct past and past participle forms. For example, learners may confuse the different tenses and write: *'I drunk tea'* for *'I drank tea'*.

Some irregular verbs follow similar patterns, such as *ring/rang*, *spring/sprang* but learners may not have this knowledge and be able to do the transformation with absolute accuracy. Learners are likely to try several hypotheses before they can handle the past tense of irregular verbs, confidently. Lambani & Maluleke (2019), declare that full mastery of irregular past tense forms of irregular verbs is seldom achieved because they do not conform to specific rules.

2.8.1 Auxiliary verbs and irregular verbs

Auxiliary verbs are verbs that are used to express various moods and mental attitudes (Murphy, 1998). DeCapua and DeCapua (2013) further states that they are used mainly with main verbs to give grammatical information and to add extra meaning to a sentence. They require lexical verbs to make sense. There are two types of auxiliary verbs, namely, primary and modal auxiliary verbs. Both change forms in the past tense and their spelling may completely change. Their conjugation is unpredictable as illustrated in the following table:

Table 2.1 Auxilairy verbs

Primary auxiliary verbs	Present tense form	Past tense form
	do	did
	have	had
	be	Was/were
Modal auxiliary verbs	can	Could
	may	might
	shall	should
	will	would

Auxiliary verbs are used to form negatives, questions and some tenses. For example: *'They did not write a test'* – the presence of *'did'* in the sentence impacts the main verb *'write'* and as such it cannot be conjugated to its past form of *'wrote'*. *'Did she win a medal?'* – the auxiliary verb was used to form a question. English FAL learners, in Grade 10 must internalise transformations that take place when auxiliary verbs are used in sentences.

2.8.2 Inflectional morphology

Inflectional morphology is the study of the procedures including affixation and vowel change, which distinguish the systems of how words are formed in certain grammatical classifications (Bybee & Slobin,1982). Inflectional morphology communicates grammatical information, such as number, tense, agreement or case.

It is a reference to the section of morphology that is involved in the indication of grammatical categories. The tense on a verb is regarded as inflectional morphology.

For regular English verbs, the past tense is spelled with an ‘-ed’ / ‘-d’, (*played, looked, baked*) but there are also many irregular English verbs where the tense inflection is marked with a change in the vowel of the verb (*drove, bought, rang*). Inflection is the way a word form is changed to reflect tense and plurality, among others and is governed by regular, predictable rules known as ‘regular inflection’.

There are, however, occasions in which the manner a word is inflected does not adhere to any rules of the English verbal system and these are known as ‘irregular inflections’. For example, the past tense of ‘go’ is ‘went’ rather than ‘goed’, as regular inflection would predict, and its past participle is ‘gone’. In transforming regular verbs, most verbs add the ending ‘-d’ or ‘-ed’ to their base form to create both the past tense and the past participle verbs. Rules and spellings are consistent and predictable, for example, *bake/baked/baked, wash/washed/washed*. The conjugation of irregular verbs is challenging to the L2 learners because they do not have specific rules to be followed to form the past tense and past participle. Dalil (2015) reiterates that learners should memorize how to spell forms for each irregular verb, individually.

As alluded to earlier, for regular verbs, the past tense inflections are rule-governed whereas irregular verbs’ past tense inflections do not follow any given predictable system, therefore, there are various ways of forming irregular verbs’ past tense (Lambani & Maluleke, 2019). According to Nofifah (2011), there are three main types of irregular verbs - verbs in which all the three principal parts are identical, verbs in which two parts are identical, and verbs in which all three parts are different.

In the discussion hereunder, verbs are grouped according to how the past and past participle forms differ from the base form; irregular verbs, therefore, fall into different groups. When forming the past tense, it is imperative to recognise the morphological processes entailed. This study focused on four irregular verbs’ past tense categories which seem to cause uncertainty amongst English FAL learners. These verbs can be conjugated in different ways, such as - suffixation or by changing vowels and consonants in the base stem.

(a) Zero marking

Zero-marking is a type of irregular verbs' past tense forms in English, where the signal of a specific grammatical function is through the non-existence of a morpheme (Sinnemäki, 2010) such as a prefix, infix or suffix. Zero-markings apply to irregular verbs that show no suffix or stem change and identifiable as verbs with inflectionless changes, whether used in the present, past or past participle forms. Patterson et al., (2001) explain that 'no-change' past tense verbs, or verbs which in their past tense forms are the same as their present tense forms, usually end with the sounds '-t' or '-d', like in '*hurt*', and are connected to the past tense morphemes '-t' and '-d' in English.

These are irregular verbs that use the same form for the present, past and past participle, that is, the entire three principal parts (the base, the past form, and the past participle) are identical. In other words, the root of these verbs ends in sounds associated with the past tense '-t' and '-d' (Bybee & Slobin, 1982). In contrast, there are regular past tense verbs that end with '-t' and '-d' but utilise the extra allomorph '-ed' (*lift/lifted, wait/waited, mend/mended, pound/pounded*).

Table: 2.2 Zero-marking

Base	Simple past	Past participle
cut	cut	cut
Hurt	hurt	hurt
Bid	bid	bid
hit	hit	hit
Put	put	put

(b) Ablaut

Ablaut refers to the replacement of one stem vowel with another, thus, showing a consistent alteration of use or meaning and vowel permutation. Some irregular verbs show changes to the stem vowels to express the past tense. The change of base vowels in structures of a word or related words exhibit changes in tense and meaning.

Ablaut is the usual exchange in the internal phonological form of a vowel that is corresponding with a change in grammatical function or combination.

The ablaut principle is a methodical interchange of vowels in similar root form or affix; or in the associated roots or affixes especially in the Indo-European languages that are generally paralleled by divergences in use or meaning (as in *drink, drank, drunk*). Ablaut in morphology refers to a change in the stem vowel of a verb to indicate a change in tense, usually from past form to past participle. It is familiar in Germanic and is still evident in strong verbs in both German and English ((Boyé, 2006)). According to Kusumawardhani (2015), ablaut is defined as a change in a vowel that produces extra meaning. Most irregular verbs use the conjugation process known as ablaut. In this form of transformation, the stem of the word changes to mark the tense, hence, ablaut is a change in vowel quality to mark grammatical contrasts, for example, irregular verbs' past tenses in the English language:

- 'sing' becomes 'sang', not 'singed'.

Often, just changing a vowel in the stem would make a difference. In some cases, a double vowel is changed to a single, for example, 'meet' becomes 'met', and 'shoot' becomes 'shot'. These irregular verbs undertake vowel change internally for the past tense form and the past participle form of verbs in the English language. These monosyllabic verbs with a variety of stem vowels simply change them to mark their past tense forms (Peters, 2013),

Table: 2.3 Ablaut

Base	Simple Past	Past Participle
Give	gave	Given
Swim	swam	Swum
Get	got	Got
Drive	drove	Driven
Do]]	did	Done
Run	ran	Run

(c) Terminal consonant phonemes' changes

Some irregular verbs use '-t' to mark the past. These are monosyllabic stems ending in '-nd' or '-d' where the '-d' is replaced. Terminal consonant phoneme changes are more complicated phonological changes involving vowel and terminal consonants phoneme (Patterson, et al, 2001). In this category, the English language verbs form the past tense through putting a final '-t'. In some cases, this involves altering the base vowel from '-i' to '-e'.

The transformation of irregular verbs into the past tense through a change in the terminal consonant phoneme usually gives rise to a past-tense form with either a final /t/ or a final /d/, approximating the phonological transformations related to the regular verbs' '-ed' for the indication of the past-tense. The final /t/ and the final /d/ items might be thought of as representatives of the type of transition between regular verbs that add a final /t/ or /d/ and the 'true' irregular verbs, for example, those verbs requiring unpredictable vowel changes (Patterson, et al, 2001).

Table: 2.4 Terminal consonant phoneme changes

Base	Simple Past	Past Participle
Spend	spent	spent
Build	built	Built
Keep	kept	Kept
Think	thought	thought
Sell	sold	Sold

(d) Suppletion

Suppletion denotes a trend whereby regular grammatical relations are encoded by random formal patterns (Boyé, 2006). It involves placing one main stem with another thereby causing a morpheme allomorph that has no phonological similarities to other allomorphs (Helmie & Hum, 2012). Suppletion in morphology is a form in a paradigm that originally comes from a different source, for example, there is no relationship between 'go' and 'went'. The past tense form 'went' in English is not formally related

to the verb 'go' (Boyé, 2006). An entirely different morpheme is used to replace and show grammatical contrast with another morpheme.

- 'be' becomes 'is' and 'are' to show contrasts of subject

It is the use of two or more phonetically unrelated roots for different forms of the same word, such as 'be' and its suppletive past form 'was/were.' Suppletion, therefore, entails the word forms of the same morphemes with phonologically different stems. It is the use of one word as an inflected form of another word when the two words are not related (Lambani & Maluleke 2019).

It shows that a gap in a concept was filled by a structure from a different paradigm. It is one of the irregular verbs' past tense forms that English FAL learners find very challenging due to the dramatic changes that take place in the words. Suppletion in English include the forms of the verb 'be' 'am', 'is', 'are', 'was', 'were', 'been', the present and past tense forms of the verb 'go', 'went'. These verb forms, instead of changing a suffix or a vowel, the whole word changes, therefore, second-language learners have to know exactly which past tense form of the irregular verb they should use to replace the present tense form (Nephawe, 2019).

Morphological changes may involve a change in the root as well as adding an affix, sometimes in an unpredictated manner, as in 'tell-told'. Besides alterations in which the root is identifiable are the suppletive alterations such as 'go-went', wherein the root of the alternating lexeme is subject to complete transfiguration. It takes place when the syntax takes a form of a lexeme that is morphologically or structurally unpredictable, for example, 'go' has the suppletive form 'went' for its past tense (Algeo & Pyles, 2005). The irregular verb 'be' includes a mix of dialectical forms.

Alongside the base form 'be' the forms 'am, is, are' begin with vowels and the past tense forms thereof 'was/ were' begins with a consonant 'w'. Some irregular verbs display suppletion because the relationship between the changes signifying the original morpheme is phonologically illogical. It is debatable that there is a single influencing representation in the rules from which 'go' and 'went' are derived (Katamba, 2005). The standard for the verb 'be' is characterized by suppletion. 'Am',

'are', 'is', 'was', 'were', and 'be' have completely distinctive forms, and they are not predictable based on the patterns of other verbs correctly use of English.

Hurford (1994) asserts that some irregular verbs experience an individualised morphological process and that there is no phonetic similarity between the base, the forms of the simple past and the past participle. Suppletion is an occurrence by which the addition of a semantic aspect or grammatical function is expressed by a totally or partially different morpheme that has little or no phonological connection with the base or stem form (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011).

Peters (2013) considers suppletion as the introduction of an extraneous form to fill out gaps in a grammatical paradigm. It entails the replacement of one or more parts of verbs with suppletive forms, borrowed from another lexeme or alternative dialects – the occurrence of phonemically unrelated allomorphs of the same morpheme.

Some L2 learners tend to overregularise suppletion without knowing that a whole root word, like 'go' is completely replaceable by a different stem /went/ historically formed "wend" (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011) to effect a permanent change in the word's form. This poses challenges to learners of English as the root morpheme must be substituted by phonologically distinct forms showing structural inconsistencies. Suppletion, therefore, results in a completely different new allomorph.

Table 2.5 Suppletion principle

Base	Simple Past	Past participle
Go	Went	Gone
Be	Was/were	Been
Do	Did	Did
Have	Had	Had
Make	Made	Made

2.10 TYPES OF ERRORS

English FAL learners are likely to make a variety of errors when learning a language. Some of the errors according to Gass and Selinker (2001) are the following:

- Gross errors wherein a general rule is interrupted and results in the creation of many other errors.
- Delicate errors – a learner breaks an individual rule and it does not lead to the generation of other errors.
- Breakdown errors – they are capable of causing a breakdown in communication.
- Non-breakdown errors – the breakdown of the rules but these do not interfere with communication.
- Critical errors – cause other errors to be made in the same context.
- Persistent errors – they are consistent despite remedial attention.
- Transient errors – do not persist for a long time.

Errors in the past tense form of irregular verbs may fall in any of the above types depending on the context in which the error occurred.

2.11 SOURCES OF ERROR

There is a multiplicity of causes of errors in language learning. Metu (2014) posits that developmental errors, at times, arise due to overgeneralization - errors caused by learning a rule, yet, have not mastered the limitations thereof. Sometimes a learner can erroneously start to regularise the past tense form of irregular verbs, as could be seen in '*they comed*' instead of '*they came*'. Regular English verbs are inflected into the past tense with the '-ed' / '-d' suffix, whereas irregular verbs do not have a fixed form and do not change regularly. There is, therefore, a need to memorise the various unpredictable changes in irregular verbs, such as '*go/went/gone*'.

English FAL Learners in Grade 10 may make mistakes in using irregular verbs due to the following reasons: they may deliberately or unintentionally have learnt a faulty form of a particular verb or guessed the form because they do not know it. Errors attributable to overgeneralisation manifest themselves due to the non-conformity of irregular verbs to specific rules.

Overgeneralisation occurs when learners are in the process of figuring out grammatical rules of the L2 and applying them in a general manner. In that context,

certain language forms are expanded to situations in which they do not apply. Overgeneralization of language structures causes errors in language learning. It is the presentation of an inappropriate verb form associated with a regular verb to an irregular verb during speaking or writing. This is also observable in children learning their native language (James, 1998).

In the language-learning process, learners may broaden the use of regular grammatical patterns to irregular words, such as the use of '*cutted*' for '*cut*', or '*drinked*' for '*drank*'. Cowan (2008) states that overgeneralisation happens when a learner applies a grammar rule indiscriminately to forms of the English language where it should not be applied; this is also known as regularisation. It implies ignoring exceptions to rules and applying them indiscriminately, for example, *'Yesterday he *cutted* the cake' instead of 'Yesterday he *cut* the cake'. Here, the learner applied the incorrect rule to the irregular verb by adding the suffix '*-ed*' to the verb and committed an error.

2.12 IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST TENSE ERRORS - TEACHERS' STRATEGIES

There are some strategies that teachers can employ to assist learners to learn the past tense forms of irregular verbs. They are discussed here.

The research findings by Hamed (2018) have suggested some strategies, which can be of great help to improve students' writing skills. Direct corrective feedback on errors committed is necessary and helpful. In the direct corrective feedback, the teacher provides learners with the correct form by writing it above or near the incorrect one.

According to Ellis (2009), direct corrective feedback is vital in fostering the acquisition of specific grammatical features. Explicit instructions on the errors identified in the students' composition can assist them to overcome these difficulties. In these instructions, the teacher either explains the rules to the learners or directs the learners to find the rules by looking at linguistic examples exemplified in other sentences (Cowan, 2008).

It has been shown that explicit instruction yields better and longer-lasting learning than implicit instruction (Norris & Ortega, 2000). When introducing the past simple tense of irregular verbs, teachers need to give examples of irregular verbs, in sentences, in the present simple first, for example, *'I have lunch at one o'clock'*. The sentence should then be changed to past simple: *'I had lunch at one o'clock'*. It is often a common norm that the teacher may write sentences on the board or a flipchart. Alternatively, learners should be given more examples of sentences with irregular verbs and they write each verb in its past form.

Table 2.6 Simple and Present tense

Simple present tense	Simple past tense
I speak to a friend	I spoke to a friend.
We go to the movies.	We went to the movies.
My friend eats popcorn.	My friend ate popcorn.
I drink soda.	I drank soda.

Learners should be taught to understand that the past form is the same for all persons, singular and plural. The teacher can go around the class and make statements requiring learners to change from the present simple into the past simple, for example:

- Teacher: I drink tea for breakfast.
- Learners: You drank tea for breakfast

To help learners study these verbs, they should be given worksheets. Learners should be taught that the best way to learn which verbs are regular and irregular and to remember the past form of irregular verbs is through lots of practice and not necessarily, memorisation. To practise the simple past of verbs, learners might be asked to write a narrative essay for homework or as a class activity in which such a learner is expected to use the forms of verbs in the different tenses, appropriately.

Learners can also give a presentation on something that happened in the past. It is crucial to ensure that learners practise the simple past in context, and not by

memorizing lists of verbs. Teachers can do some remedial teaching based on learner errors. A remedial programme is a specially designed alternative teaching strategy based on a needs-analysis carried out by observing learners' deviated language behaviour aimed at correcting it.

2.13 IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST TENSE ERRORS - LEARNERS' STRATEGIES

2.13.1 Group common irregular verbs together

Irregular verbs do not follow any rules, which is what makes them so hard to remember, although, some irregular verbs follow a similar *pattern* (Jaeger, Lockwood, Kemmerer, Van Valin, Murphy and Khalak, 1996). Instead of learning irregular verbs in alphabetical order, learners can try putting them in similar groups.

- Verbs that remain the same in the present, the past and the past participle, for example, *cost* and *set*.
- Verbs that are the same in the past forms, but not the present, for example, *breed, bred* and *shoot, shot*.
- Verbs that end in *-en* in the past participle, for example, *speak, spoken* and *wake, woken*.

2.13.2 Learn all new vocabulary with its tense forms

Learners can make learning irregular verbs easier for themselves by learning all their aspects right from the beginning. Every time a learner learns a new verb, it is recommended to learn formation of its different tense forms as well.

2.13.3 Memorise 10 most common irregular verbs first

Not all irregular verbs are frequently used. Instead of going through the list in alphabetical order, learners may focus on the common irregular verbs first. They can start with some of the very common irregular verbs and list its simple present and past tenses form (Nielsen, 1985), then the past participle:

1. **Say**, said, said

2. **Go**, went, gone
3. **Come**, came, come
4. **Know**, knew, known
5. **Get**, got, gotten
6. **Give**, gave, given
7. **Become**, became, become
8. **Find**, found, found
9. **Think**, thought, thought

10. **See**, saw, seen

Learners need to know the irregular verbs' past tense forms and use them in everyday conversation and writing.

2.13.4 Turn memorising into a game

Using online games can make learning the forms and uses of irregular verbs, fun and easy (Mahmoud & Tanni, 2014). Learners can even make their own games with index cards - they write the irregular verbs and their past or past participle (or both) on separate index cards and then turn all the cards over with their backs up, pick up the cards again and explain the information on them.

2.13.5 Learn in sentences

Sometimes it might be easier to remember words when they are part of a sentence or a phrase. Learners should use words by putting them into sentences, and that can also assist them in learning the correct usage. Learners need to be creative and challenging in coming up with their sentences.

2.13.6 Learn with songs

Another great way to give the words more meaning is through using music. Learners can find many songs for remembering irregular verbs on YouTube or create their own.

2.13.7 Leave lists where you can see them

Sometimes just memorising is the best way to go. To make this easier, learners may divide the verbs into groups and write them on papers and leave them at spots where they can see them throughout the day. Frequently looking at the list just a few minutes a day can be enough to remember them (Wang et al., 2011). It is, therefore, suggested that teachers must use distinct and innovative treatment of errors. The teaching of grammar should be contextualized because language is context-sensitive and should involve some sort of controlled practice followed by some meaningful communicative activities where the learners have to produce expanded outputs using the target structures.

2.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature review was divided into two sections, which are the theoretical framework and related studies on irregular verbs. Under the theoretical framework, the CAH and the EA theories which focus on the errors made by learners were defined and discussed. The procedures for CAH and EA were also elaborated as well as their benefits and shortcomings.

The chapter further discussed a conceptual framework, the following were discussed: the simple past tense, irregular verbs, types of irregular verbs, sources of error and strategies to address the irregular simple past tense errors by teachers and learners respectively. Findings by other researchers on the past form of irregular verbs were reviewed. From these findings, the researcher was able to conclude that learners do make errors in the past tense form of irregular verbs.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, a research design, methodology and procedures used during data collection with the rationale for the choices made are examined. During the discussions, the design, sampling techniques, data collection, analysis procedures, presentation and interpretation were explained as well as the ethical considerations followed in the study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the general approach that a researcher prefers when incorporating the various elements of the study consistently and logically, thereby ensuring that it addresses the research problem efficiently and effectively. It includes the outline for data collection, measurement, and analysis. In this regard, the research design is supposed to be viewed as the "glue" by the linguists, that binds all the components together in a research project. It is a template of the projected research study shedding light on the way the execution of the research project (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005)

The design indicates how all parts of the research study function together to answer the research questions. In addition, Singleton and Straits (2012) state that a research design consists of plans for gathering, processing and interpreting the observations intended to provide some resolution to the research problem. Kumar (2014) claims that a research design is a procedural plan adopted by the researcher to answer questions in a valid, objective, accurate and economic way. A research is purposefully designed to enable effective and logical address of a research problem.

A research design involves a plan for addressing at least four aspects: which questions to ask, which data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyse and interpret the collected data. The design refers to sets of arrangements from which

researchers can choose one suitable method for their research purposes (De Vos et al., 2005)

A research design comprises of the most adequate procedures to be performed in testing a particular hypothesis under given conditions (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006). It is the whole process of preparing and carrying out a research project; it is a mapping strategy. In this essence, it is essentially a statement of the object of the inquiry and the strategies for collecting the evidence, analysing the evidence and reporting the findings.

A research design deals with the entire process to achieve results. It is a well-designed approach wherein particular research methods and procedures are interconnected to obtain dependable and valid body of data for empirically grounded analyses, conclusions and theory formulation. It gives the researcher a well-organised structure and guides the methods, and decisions and sets the foundation for convincing analysis and interpretation. Bless, et al. (2006) view the research design as *an* operations to be performed and to test a specific hypothesis under a given condition.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) claim that a research design outlines the processes involved in conducting a study. In other words, the research design indicates the general plan, how the research is set up, what happens to the subject, and what the methods of data collection will be. It is a plan, structure and strategy of an investigation aimed at obtaining answers to research questions or problems. Research designs can be grouped into three major categories: quantitative, qualitative and mixed method.

Akhtar, Shah, Rafiq and Khan, (2016) asserts that a research design is a conceptual framework within which research is conducted, therefore it is the blueprint for data collection, measurement and data analysis. It is a basic framework for any research study without which the research can be directionless. The importance of research design cannot be overestimated as it results in valid and reliable results. Akhtar et al. (2016:152) adds that a research design should be able to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What is the study about and, what type of data is required?
- What is the purpose of study?
- What are the sources of needed data?
- What should be the place or area of the study?
- What time, approximately, is required for the study?
- What should be the number of materials or number of cases for the study?
- What type of sampling should be used?
- What method of data collection would be appropriate?
- How can be data be analysed?
- What should be the approximate expenditure?
- What should be the specific nature of the study?

The purpose of a research design principally is to clearly outline a plan for generating realistic evidence that can be used to tackle the basic questions of the research. In the current study, the researcher used a quantitative approach and descriptive non-experimental research design. McMillan & Schumacher (2010) state that quantitative research approach highlights fairness in quantifying and describing phenomena. In this situation, quantitative research increases objectivity by using numbers, statistics and structure.

Non-experimental designs explain and analyse the relationship between different phenomena without any alteration of the condition. A study using a descriptive design gives a summary of an existing phenomenon by using numbers to characterise individuals or groups.

Klopper (2008) defines research methodology as the total set of means that scientists use to obtain logical knowledge. There are mainly three approaches to conducting research: qualitative methods, quantitative methods and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) research methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem as it focuses on how a research is to be carried out. It details the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena.

Additionally, Creswell (2014) claims that research methodology is a systematic approach to give guidance on how an investigation is conducted. It deals with the

description and analytic methods, bringing insights on their limitations and advantages. This study used mixed methods as data collection and analysis as the procedures involved both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.3.1 Quantitative research method

A quantitative research operates from a post positivist paradigm, dealing with quantifying and analysing variables to obtain results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). It includes the use and assessment of statistical data using explicit procedures and it deals with research studies that employ numerical examinations to reach their findings. The collection of data involves quantifying and subjecting data to mathematical techniques to confirm or disprove a theory.

Creswell (2014) adds that quantitative research utilises approaches of investigation and collection of data on prearranged instruments that produce statistical results. Its purpose is to test hypotheses and to look at cause and effect relationships between specific variables to make projections. It is a research process based on quantities (Goundar, 2012). The quantitative research makes inquiries on broad tendencies affecting research populations with an explicit focus on numbers.

It is more objective rather than subjective. In the context of this study, it offers the researcher an opportunity to collect data including biographical and others obtained from instruments like, questionnaires. For this study, therefore, the researcher employed a quantitative research method to collect biographical information and content-related responses from the participants.

3.3.2 Qualitative research method

Creswell (2014) explains that the qualitative research method entails working from an interpretive paradigm, to understand and interpret social interactions but studies smaller selected sample participants. It is non-numerical, descriptive, applies to reason and uses words because it is concerned with the qualitative aspect to understand a phenomenon. With qualitative research the researcher relies on data generation through strategies like observations and interviews. Qualitative research

generates new hypotheses and theories from the data collected (Marczyk, et al., 2005) as it uses narratives which enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.3.3 Mixed methods

In acknowledging that all research methods are prone to drawbacks, researchers believe that advantages innate in any single method could defuse the biases of other methods (Creswell, 2014). Also, he asserts that the mixed methods research approach offers the researcher an opportunity to collect, analyse and decode quantitative and qualitative data. Marczyk et al. (2005) add that a mixed method study entails the simultaneous collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. In this way, triangulating is possible, which is a way of finding convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods to address any biases.

In a mixed-method (MM) research design, qualitative and quantitative approaches are applied in the formulation of questions and selection of appropriate research methods, data collection and analysis techniques. With mixed methods, elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches are combined to ensure extensiveness and intensity of understanding and authentication of the data. This study employed the mixed method approach as the quantitative aspect identified and quantified errors while the qualitative approach explained the causes of errors in participants' essays.

3.4 RESEARCH SETTING

A research setting is the physical, social, cultural site or experimental context in which the researcher conducts a study (Brooks & King, 2014). It is the location where data collection takes place because the environment where data is collected has significant consequences for the design, hence, an accurate description of the setting is crucial as the results and interpretation depend on it. The study was conducted among five selected secondary schools at Tshinane Circuit, South Africa.

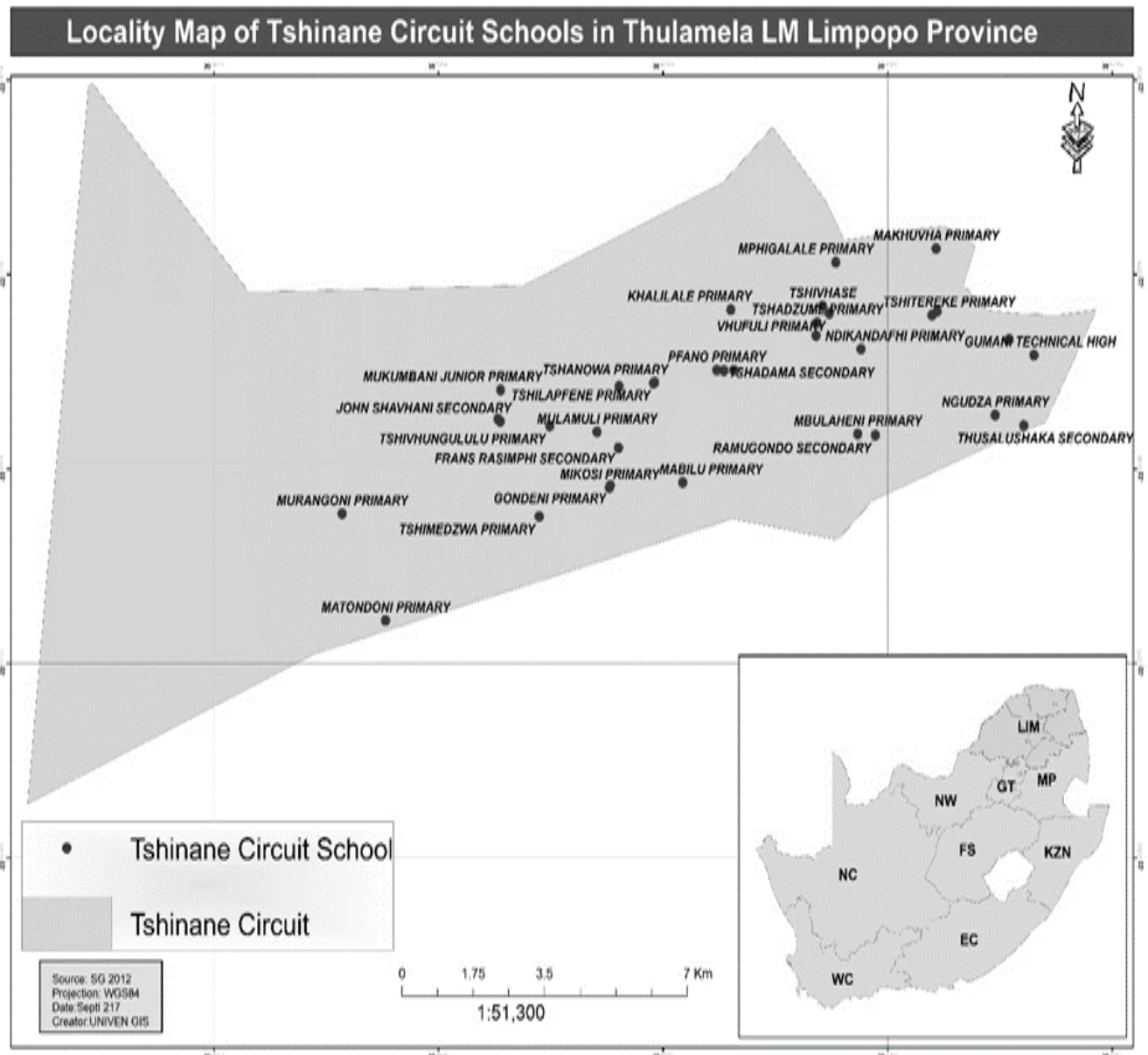


Figure 3.1: Source: GIS Resource Centre, University of Venda

3.5 RESEARCH POPULATION

Seaberg (1988) states that a research population is a total set from which the individuals or units of the study are chosen. t Population has relevance to a sampling frame. It is the totality of persons, events, organisational units, case records or other sampling units that entail the research problem (McBurney, 2001). Bless et al. (2006) explain that it is the element focused upon through the results obtained through testing and generalization of the results. Creswell (2014) views a population as a

group of individuals with similar and binding characteristics which are of interest to the researcher.

The research population for this study was made up of 757 Grade 10 English FAL learners from five selected secondary schools at Tshinane Circuit, South Africa. This study focused on Grade 10 English FAL participants because the grade is considered the foundation of the FET phase which culminates in Grade 12.

The participants are a homogeneous group who speak Tshivenda as their home language and study English as FAL, therefore, their exposure to English beyond the classroom is minimal, however, they have been exposed to English learning for seven years. Being in the third year of secondary school, the assumption is that the participants are fairly competent in English grammar as stipulated by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grade R-12 (2014).

3.6 SAMPLING AND SAMPLE

Sampling is the process of selecting a few from a bigger group as the basis for estimating the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation, or outcome regarding the bigger group. It is considering a segment of a population to be tested as a true representative of the whole population. To be effective and plausible, a reasonable section of the population should be treated in such a way that a reliable generalisation of the findings is achieved by maximising precision estimates within a given sample size to avoid bias.

In selecting a sample, the researcher should always try to achieve maximum precision estimates within a given sample size and should avoid bias in the selection of the sample. Seaberg (1988) recommends that in most cases a 10% sample should be sufficient for controlling for sampling error, however, differences of opinion exist regarding the minimum number of participants that should be involved in an investigation. Specifically, Salkind (2010) reiterate that an appropriate sample size is necessary for any research because too small a sample size is not a good representative of the population.

Kumar (2014) suggests that findings based upon large samples have more certainty than those based on smaller ones. He further states that as a rule, the larger the sample size, the more accurate the findings. In this study, the researcher has gone beyond the 10% recommended range and opted for a 13% of the entire population, which is 100 participants from the research population of 757. The justification for the sample size is that more (100) participants would endorse the research findings.

Various sampling methods can be employed in a study. These include purposive sampling, random/probability sampling, non-random/probability sampling designs, and mixed- sampling, however, this study implemented purposive and random sampling.

This study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of the unit analysis which conforms to the determined criteria. Purposive sampling is an example of non-probability sampling which follows the judgment and ideas of the researchers in looking for a 'representative' sample, or researchers may even explicitly seek for diversity (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016).

In the purposive sampling method, researchers select the samples based purely on the researcher's knowledge. Kumar (2014) explicates that purposive sampling's primary consideration is the researcher's judgement as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling was selected because it was based on the researcher's interest and that it occurs in the participants' natural setting while random sampling involves offering an equal opportunity for all to participate in the study.

This study used random sampling as a technique to sample the participants. According to Kumar (2014), random sampling or probability sampling implies that each element in the study population has an equivalent possibility of being selection into the sample. A randomly selected subset of a population is referred to as a simple random sample. In this sampling method, each element of the research population has the same likelihood of being chosen. One of the exceptional attributes of this method is that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). It is one of the simplest forms of selecting participants

from the population under study. An unprejudiced random sample is central to reaching unbiased conclusions as the researcher threw pieces of papers for learners to choose from.

A probability technique is a sampling procedure in which the sample is chosen based on precise mathematical parameters whereby every member of the population stands a chance to be included (Noordzij, Tripepi, Dekker, Zoccali, Tanck & Jager, 2010). Most sampling methods strive to choose elements in a way that ensures a representative sample while ensuring that each unit / person has the same chance of being included.

In this study, the selection of the province, district, circuit, and secondary schools was purposively based on the quintile, namely, a situation where schools are ranked according to the most economically disadvantaged (poorest) geographical areas *vi-a-vis* those in quintile 5 based on the most economically advantaged geographical areas (wealthiest). In this regard, the choice of purposive sampling was based on the researcher's knowledge of the study population; the researcher, therefore, purposively selected five secondary schools at Tshinane Circuit, South Africa.

3.7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Research instruments are tactics used to collect data. They are measurement instruments intended to attain data on a topic from research participants. According to Singh (2006), the research tools are administered on the sample for data collection purposes. Research instruments, such as questionnaires, interviews, document analyses, personal observations, interviews, and many other techniques are appropriate for collecting quantitative and qualitative evidence. For this study, the researcher used a questionnaire and document analysis to collect data.

3.7.1 A questionnaire is a written document listing a series of questions about the problem under study, to which the investigator requires answers. Harlacher (2016) notes a questionnaire as a set of questions administered to individuals to gather valuable information. This study used questionnaires because they enable a wider

geographical coverage crucial for greater validity of the results through accessing a large and more representative sample.

A questionnaire is usually easy to complete and does not require a lot of time. The validity of questionnaire data is dependent on the motivation of the participants to provide the information asked for. A research questionnaire may have a mixture of close-ended and the data collected can be both qualitative and quantitative. In addition, Singh (2006) states that another advantage of a questionnaire is that it allows extensive coverage due to a wider audience at the least possible expense in monetary terms and effort.

The questionnaire was constructed as a data collection instrument to gather quantitative data and was divided into sections. The researcher used the open-ended questions to collect biographical information in Section A to gain insight into the participants. Section B of the questionnaire had twenty (20) items and the task here was for participants to write the simple past tense form of underlined verbs in sentences. Participants' projected answers could be indicated in provided spaces under each particular theme. This has been a further sample from all the entire participants that were randomly sampled. As regard random sampling, all who wrote the task (20 participants) were further sampled in such a manner that 4 best performing learners per school were engaged.

The researcher also requested 20 copies of essays titled 'COVID-19 has been a challenge to rural schools' written by sampled participants for 25 minutes for about 1 page in the classroom and marked by the researcher to gather information on their use of irregular verbs written by sampled participants to gather information on their use of irregular verbs. Each school contributed at least 5 written essays. The rationale for using an essay as a data collection instrument was that participants were used to being assessed during formative and summative evaluation through essays to check their understanding of concepts of interest to the current research. The researcher used Guba (1981), Lincoln (2008) and Shenton (2004) to address the issue of trustworthiness including credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

3.8 VALIDITY

Gay and Salaman (1992) states that validity refers to the extent to which a test assesses what it is supposed to assess. In other words, a valid instrument means that the instrument can measure what it is supposed to do. Validity is the degree to which all the evidence points to the intended interpretation of the test scores for the proposed purposes (Creswell, 2014).

A study is considered valid when the research design addresses specific research questions and the conclusions of the study show a relationship between the questions posed and the results obtained. Furthermore, validity was achieved as the research design addressed specific research questions and the conclusions showed a relationship between the questions posed and the results obtained in a quantitative research approach.

3.9 RELIABILITY

For Johnson and Christensen (2008) reliability refers to the consistency or stability of a set of test scores, while Goundar (2012) mentions that reliability focuses on the quality of a measurement procedure that provides repeatability and accuracy. In other words, reliability is concerned with the consistency of a measurement. In this study, questionnaires and essay questions were framed or structured in a way that even if participants had to complete the questionnaires again or rewrite the essay topic, the results could be the same or consistent.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics is an integral aspect of research that needs to remain at the forefront of the study. Ethical considerations are principles that the researcher must apply to ensure the integrity of the study. The following ethical considerations, as stated by Bless et al. (2000), were observed: informed consent and voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, getting approval as well as non-fabrication or falsification of data when reporting results so as to be honest and truthful. When collecting data, the researcher

also did not infringe on participants' privacy and ensured that they were not physically or psychologically harmed.

3.10.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Bryman and Bell (2007:65) state that the “principle of informed consent encompasses researchers providing adequate information and guarantees to participants about the research”. Informed consent is the major ethical issue in conducting research. It implies that a person knowingly and voluntarily gives consent to participate in a research study. Informed consent declares that a participant must grant their unequivocal consent to participate in the study after fully comprehending what is required of them in the study. The researcher requested permission from the Department of Education, principals of the sampled schools, participants' parents or guardians of those younger than 18 years.

The participants over the age of 18 and guardians of minors were given an information leaflet and informed consent forms inviting them to participate in the research. This was done to allow them to either accept or decline the request. The participants were told that their participation to the research was voluntary because they could withdraw from the study whenever they deemed it necessary and that there would be no remuneration whatsoever. They were made to sign the consent forms indicating their voluntary participation.

3.10.2 No harm to participants

Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:209) caution that bearing in mind the “possibility of emotional and physical harm during a study”, any procedures should lessen the risk, with the participants being fully informed of all the risks if there are any. The nature of the current study was such that the level of risk and potential to cause harm to the participants was minimal or non-existent as the study is about the past forms of irregular verbs. Participants were not exposed to circumstances that may result in unwarranted humiliation, trauma or reduction in self-confidence.

3.10.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

In this research, it was made clear to the participants, during the briefing session, that the research aimed to collect data that would provide evidence of participants' handling of verbs and their names or any other personal details are not required. This ensured participants were anonymous by giving them codes to distinguish them when collecting and recording data as well as to protect the names of the schools.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focussed on the research design, description of the research setting, research population, sample and sampling techniques used, data collection procedures and details of the questionnaire and the essay which would provide the information. Ethical considerations were adhered to in ensuring protection of the participants and validity and reliability as quality assurance measures. The subsequent chapter focuses on data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The current chapter deals with presentation, analysis and interpretation of data collected using a questionnaire for quantitative approach and essays for the qualitative contribution. The researcher employed both tables and figures for presenting, analysing and interpreting the data. The investigation into selected learners' simple past tense errors of irregular verbs, the causes of the errors and the strategies to address them are comprehensively presented, analysed and interpreted in this chapter.

The participants were Grade 10 English FAL learners from five selected schools in Tshinane Circuit, South Africa. A questionnaire was used to collect biographical data and to elicit responses on participants' knowledge about past tense forms of irregular verbs. Additionally, a composition was used to collect data about past tense errors of irregular verbs committed by the participants.

The purpose of the data collected was to assist in conducting the research titled: *Investigating Simple Past Tense Errors Committed by Grade 10 English First Additional Language Learners in Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.*

This research was guided by the following questions:

- What are the types of errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners, in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?
- What are the causes of the errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?

What are some strategies for addressing the errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?

4.2 SECTION A: PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL DATA (QUANTITATIVE)

Participants' biographical information was captured from the five selected secondary schools in Tshinane Circuit, South Africa.

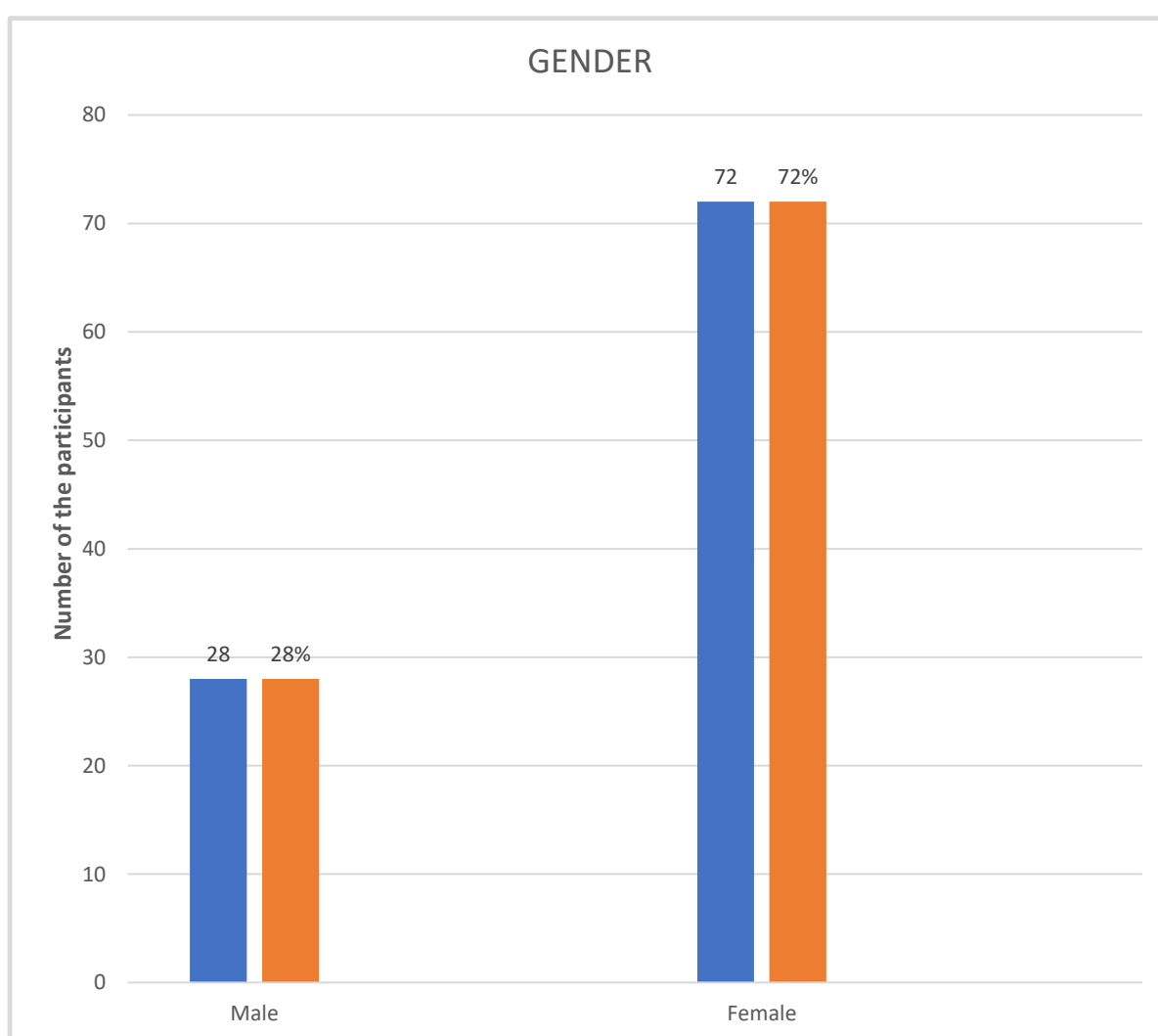


Figure 4.1 Participants by gender (n=100)

Figure 4.1 indicates the gender of participants. It indicates that the majority (72) amounting to 72% of the participants were females while 28 males accounting for

28% of the sample. The overall number of participants was 100. The majority of the participants were females because they out-numbered males in the selected schools. Random sampling yielded the above findings in Figure 4.1. It is important to indicate some basic socio-demographic information about the participants of the study since this information could have influenced the results even if these variables were not the object of the current study. The five selected schools catered for both male and female participants (mixed gender schools).

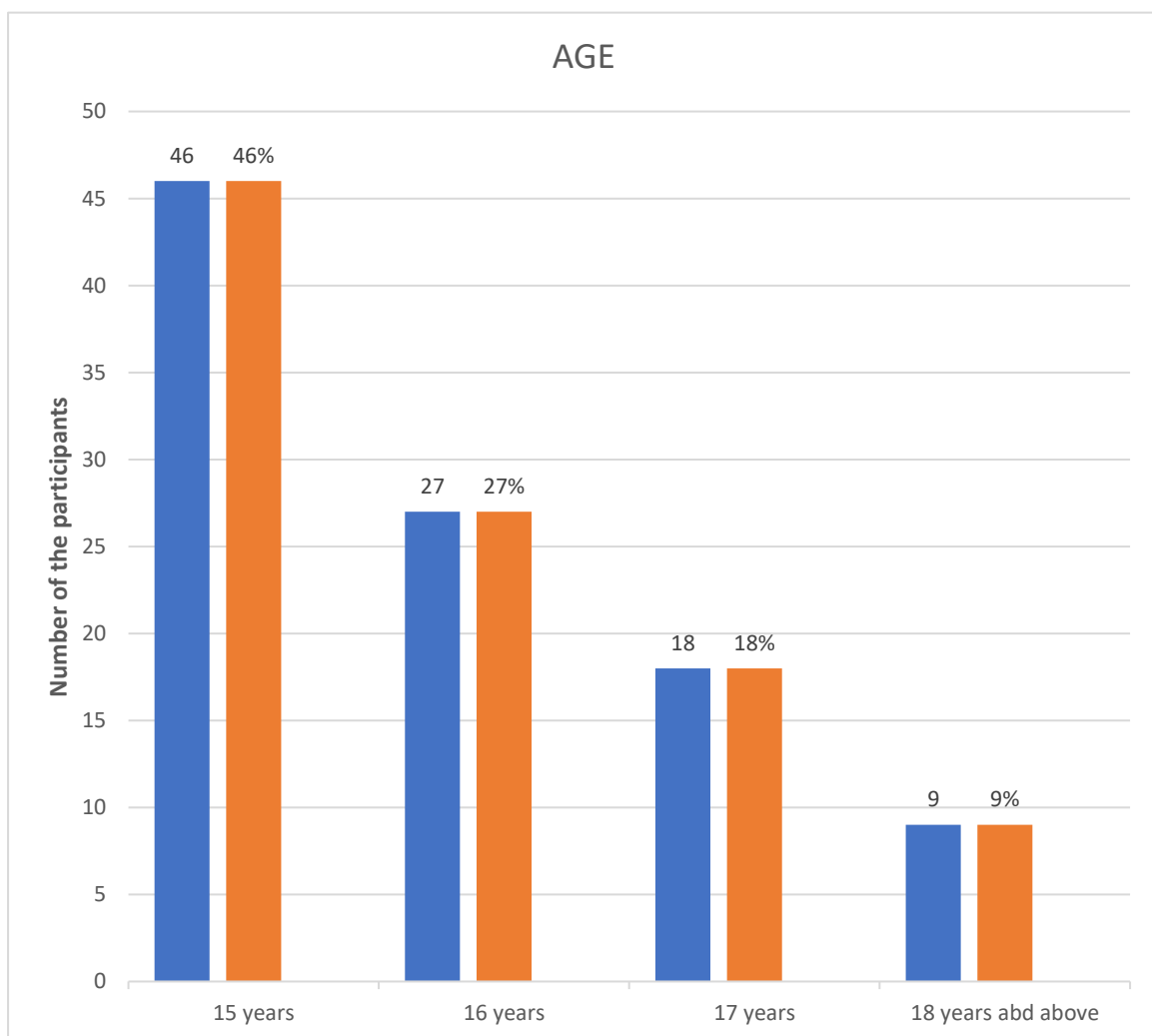


Figure 4.2 Participants by age (n=100)

The graph reveals the ages of the participants. Most (46) of the participants, accounting for 46%, of the sample were aged 15 years. Those aged 16 were 27 accounting for 27%, followed by those who were aged 18 amounting to 18%. Besides, those who were 17 years accounted for 9%. All the participants were of school-going

age, however, those who were aged 17, 18 and above who are still in Grade 10 might have started school late or possibly repeated some grades on the way.

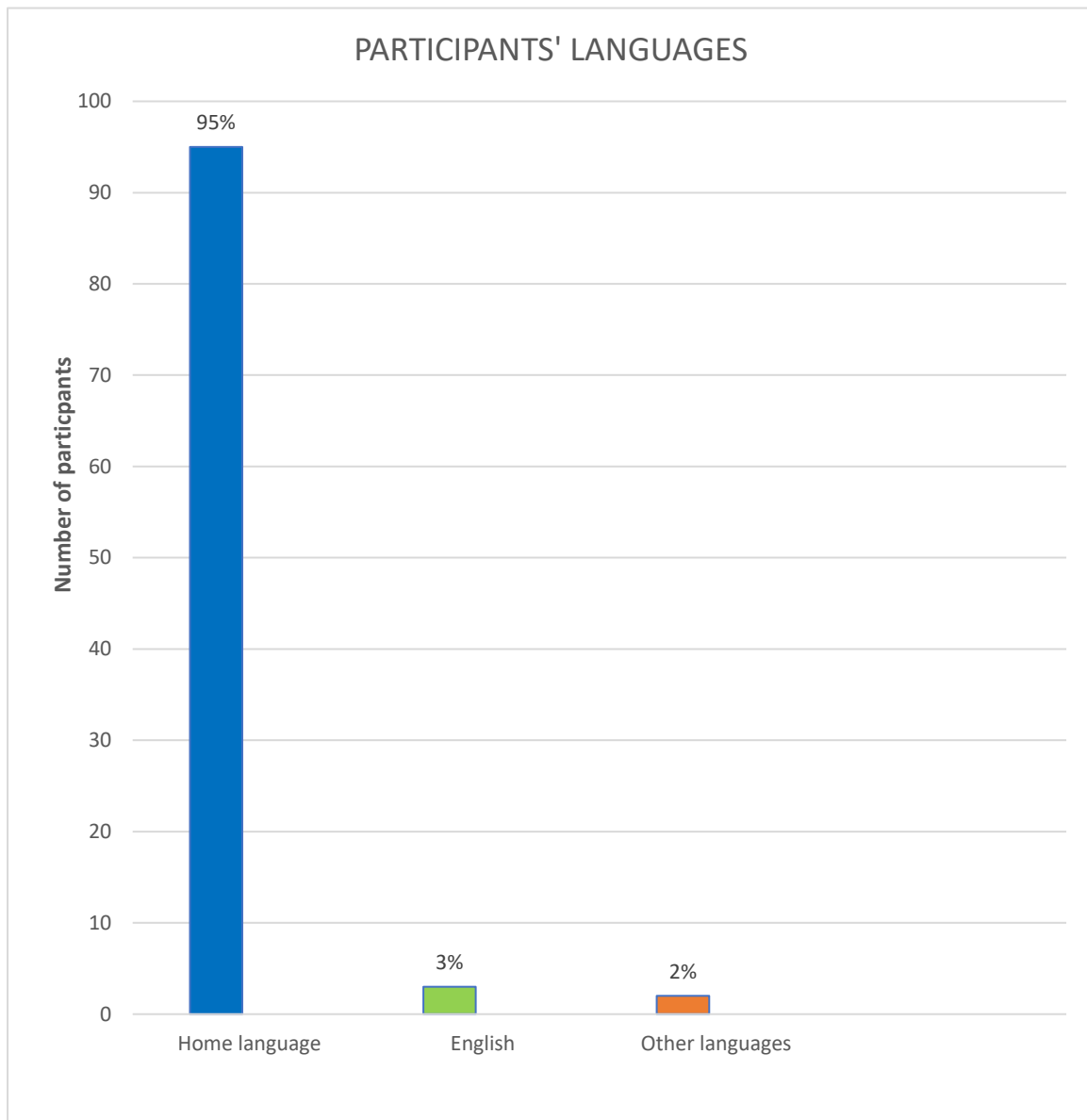


Figure 4.3. Participants' Home language (n=100).

The graph shows the Home Language of the participants. Most participants (95%) reported that their Home Language was Tshivenda, and 3% could speak English as FAL at their homes while 2% spoke other languages. The graph reveals that the majority of the participants were Tshivenda speakers. In South Africa, English is one of the 11 official languages. The English language is used as a medium of instruction at schools. This is the situation even though it is not the Home Language of most of

the participants, who could speak different indigenous languages. The participants, therefore, were likely to have limited proficiency and exposure to English outside the classroom setting. They might have been translating directly from their home language into English and this likely have resulted in their construction of ungrammatical sentences. The English language might have posed a barrier during teaching and assessment.

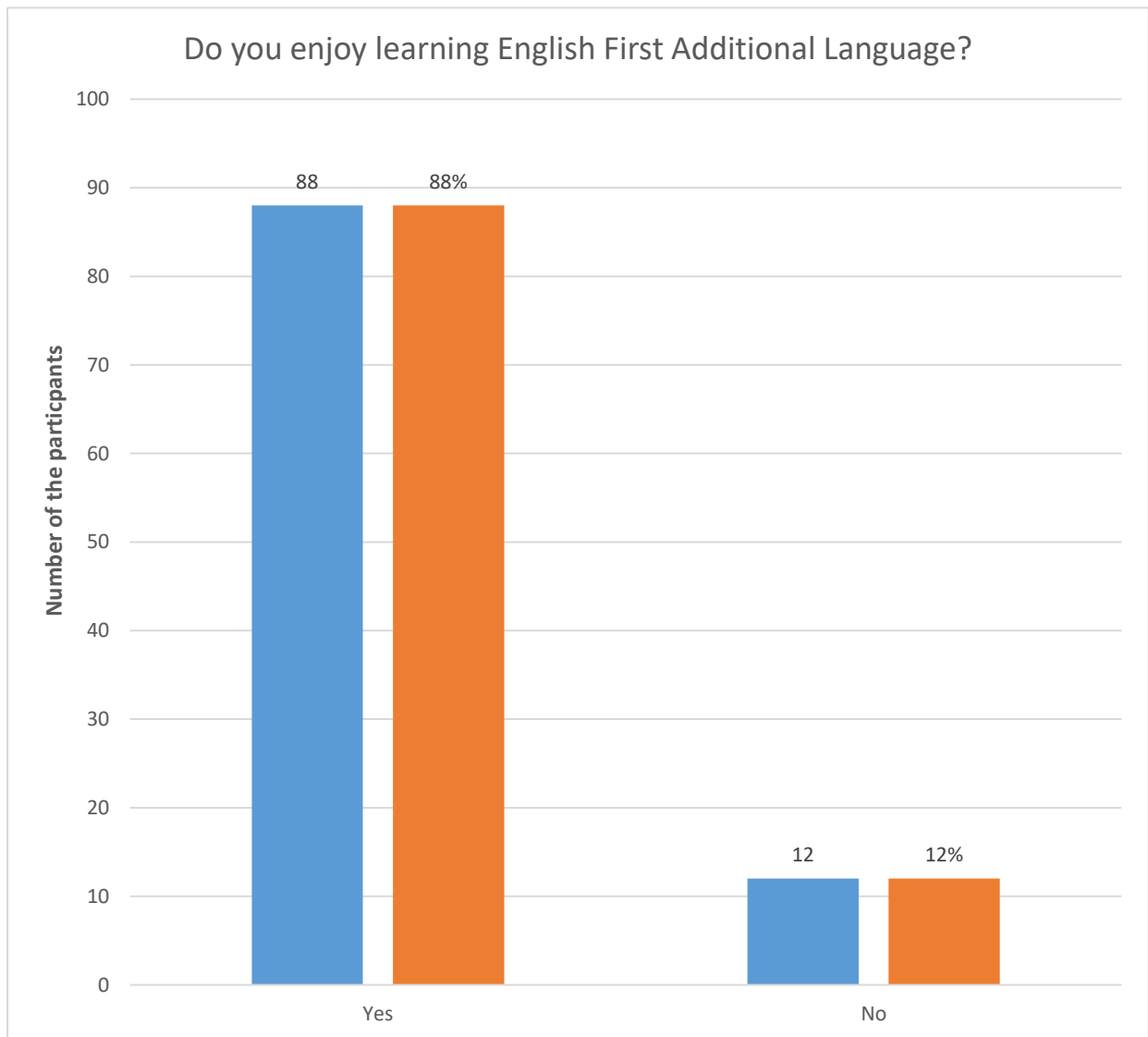


Figure 4.4. Participants' interest in learning English FAL (n=100)

The graph reveals that 88% of the participants enjoyed learning English FAL whereas 20% stated the opposite. The fact that the majority of participants enjoyed learning the language does not imply that they would not strive to master it. Participants'

interest and attitude in a subject influence their attitude towards it, hence, 20% of the participants who indicated that they did not enjoy learning English FAL were likely to fare badly in the subject.

Participants' interest is one of the strongest motivations for learning the language. Motivation had long been identified as one of the factors affecting English language learning (Gardner, 1985), it was, therefore, necessary for teachers to arouse participants' interest by making the lessons meaningful and enjoyable.

4.3 SECTION B: CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS (QUANTITATIVE)

In this section, the researcher focused on errors committed by the participants regarding the use of the suppletion principle, ablaut/vowel gradation principle, terminal consonants phoneme changes and zero-marking. The participants had to select the correct answer.

4.3.1 Suppletion principle

In this sub-section, the question is an error committed by the participants in line with the 'suppletion principle'.

Question 1: *She goes/ went to town with her friends yesterday.*

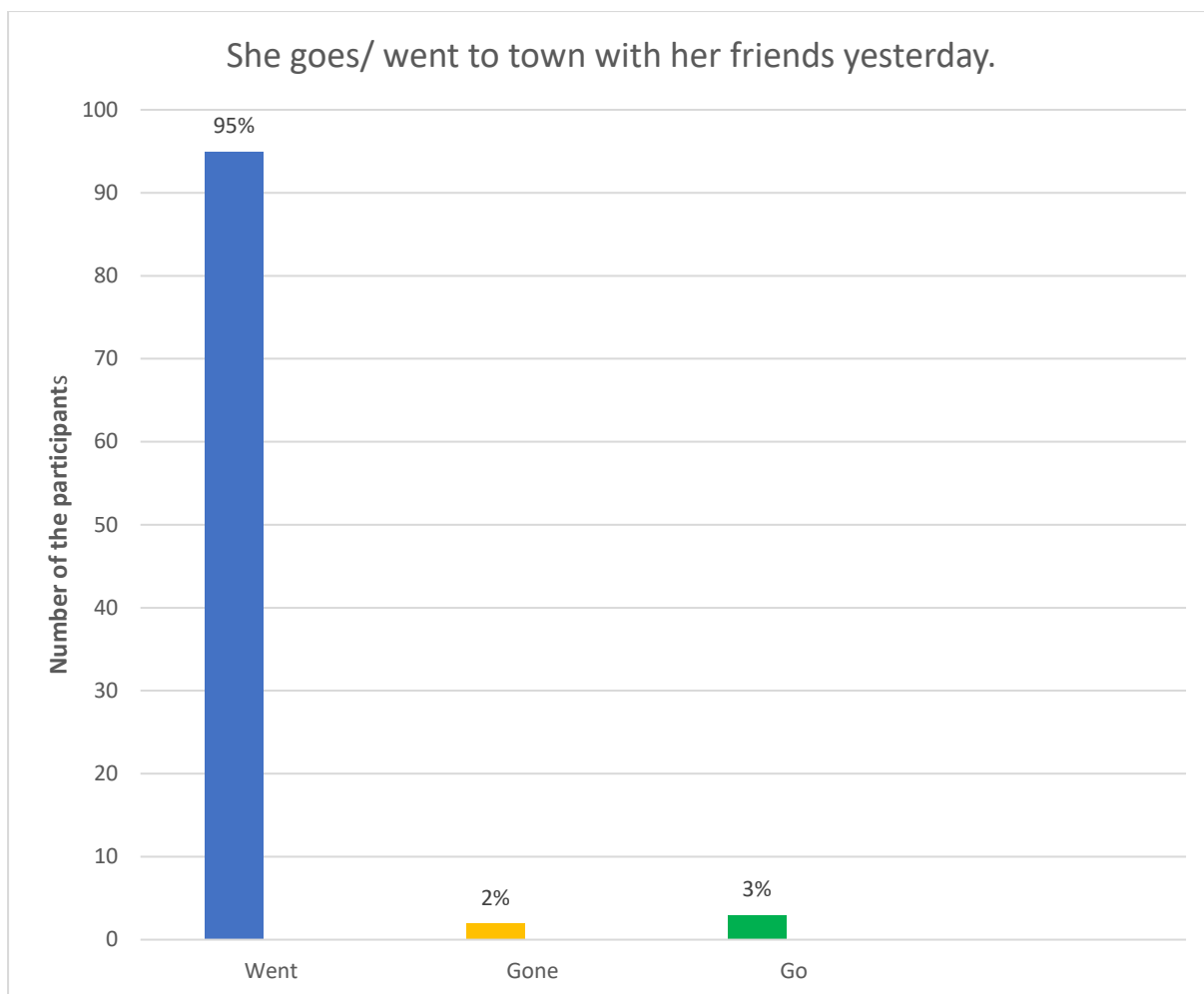


Figure 4.5. Suppletion principle

Figure 4.5 shows that 95% of the participants managed to indicate the correct form of the past tense of “goes” which is ‘went’. The majority of participants, as indicated, have mastered the use of the suppletion principle. This principle entails a semantic aspect or grammatical function expressed by a totally or partially different morpheme that has little or no phonological connection with the base form as stated by Aronoff and Fudeman (2011). The participants seem to have internalised the rules regarding the use of the suppletion principle because they could change from the present tense to the past tense form of the verb. The participants have understood the transformation that takes place, wherein the base form is replaced by a completely unrelated morpheme. Most students used the correct form...From the answers, 2% of participants wrote the incorrect past form; only 1 participant wrote ‘gone’ which is the past participle of the verb ‘goes’ although the majority of them used the correct form. However, the study by Taher (2011) found that the verb ‘gone’ was usually incorrectly

used, when the context required the use of the past tense verbs. The error could be due to confusing the past tense form with the past participle form, however, 3% of the participants wrote the sentence without any change.

4.3.2 Ablaut/vowel gradation

This sub-section presents and discusses errors committed in six different sentences regarding the participants' use of vowel gradation.

Question 2: *The Artist draws/drew/drow a beautiful picture last year.*

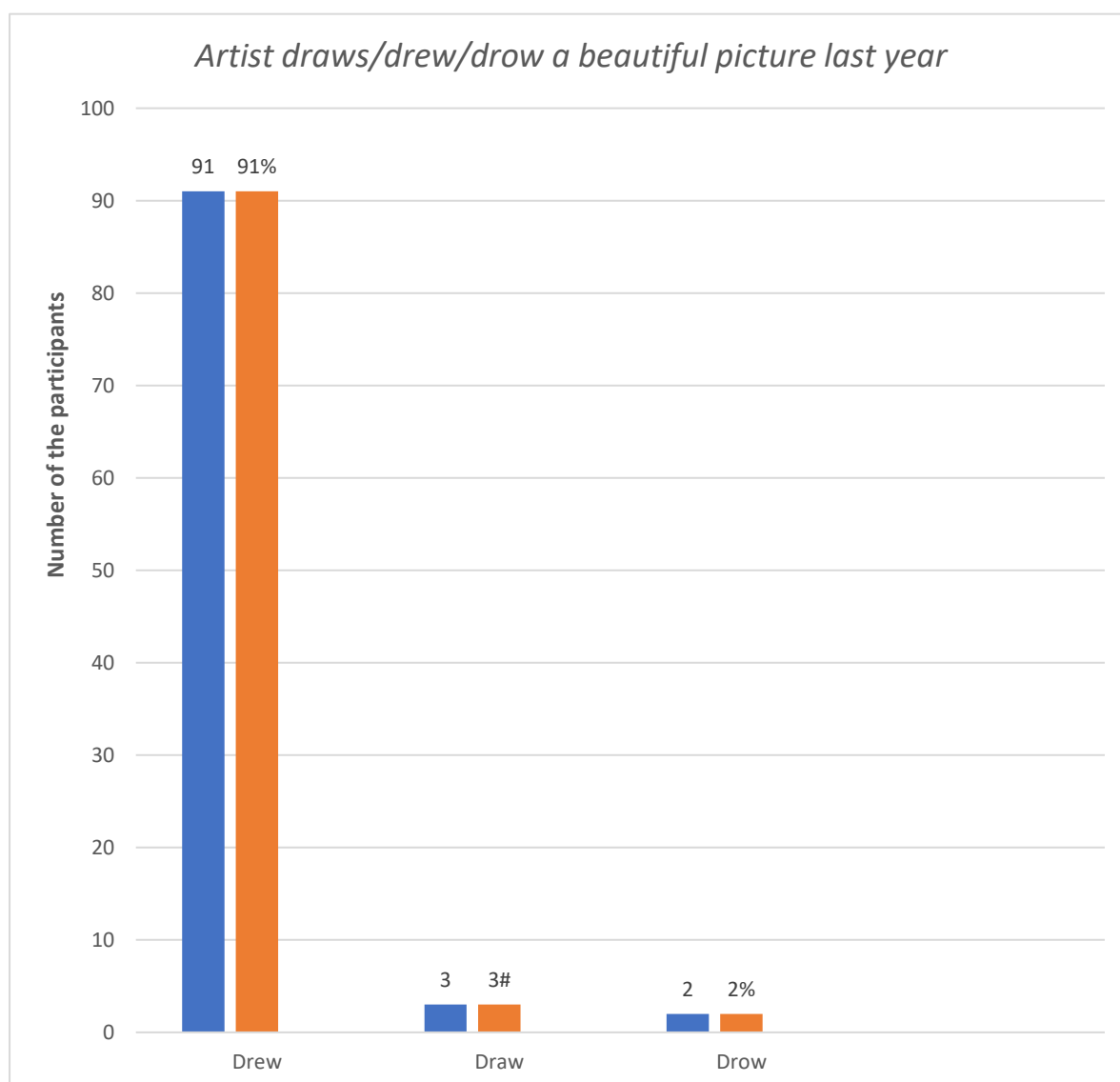


Figure 4.6.(a) Ablaut/vowel gradation

The graph above reveals that 93% of the participants gave the correct past tense of the word 'draw' which is 'drew'. The majority of the participants seemed to be aware of the vowel change that takes place in the formation of the past tense of this irregular verb, a process known as ablaut or vowel gradation. This finding is consistent with Lambani and Maluleke (2019) who in their study found that 95% of the participants were able to deal with a single vowel change.

It is concerning that 7% of the participants were unaware of the process because they wrote the incorrect responses 'draw' without any change in form; and it was its present form. Perhaps, the participants were confused by the rule that when singular verbs are used in the simple present form, the suffix '-s' is added to the verb, such as 'draws'. The remaining 3% of learners who wrote 'drow' as the past tense of 'draw' could have been due to disregarding the rule that deals with the correct formation of the past tense form of the verbs. In this situation, the participants overgeneralised the rules concerning the past tense verb formation and used the non-existent word 'drow' in their attempt to change the verb from simple present to the simple past tense form. The finding is in line with Lambani and Maluleke (2019) who suggest that learners experience difficulties in the use of simple past tense form of verbs.

Question 3: *They eat/ate/eaten delicious food last night.*

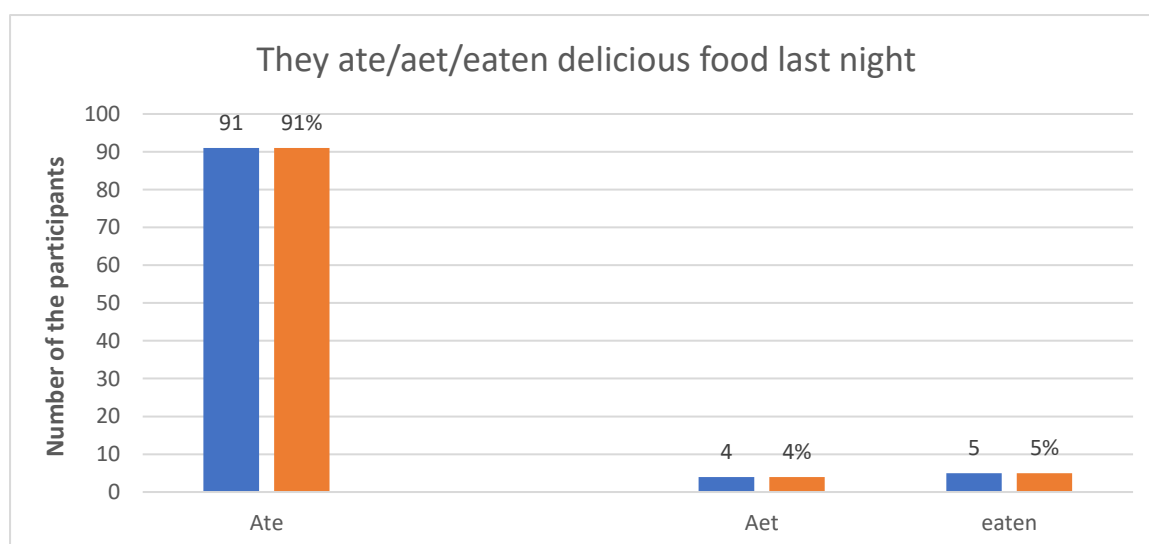


Figure 4.6. (b) Ablaut/vowel gradation

The graph indicates that majority of the participants, 91%, got the correct form of the past tense of the verb 'eat' which is 'ate'. The majority of the participants understood the ablaut principle which, according to Peters (2013), refers to verbs that undergo internal vowel change when used in the simple past, when a sound change indicates inflection. In the case of the base form 'eat', the same vowels are found in its simple past form 'ate' but with a change in positions. There were 9% of the participants who wrote incorrect past forms - 4% wrote 'aet' which may be attributable to how the word is pronounced, and 5% wrote the past participle of the verb 'eat' which is 'eaten'. The context required the use of a simple past tense verb and not the past perfect tense. The identified error could be attributable to confusing the simple past tense with the past perfect tense.

Question 4: *Her friend rang rung/rong/ rings the doorbell that morning.*

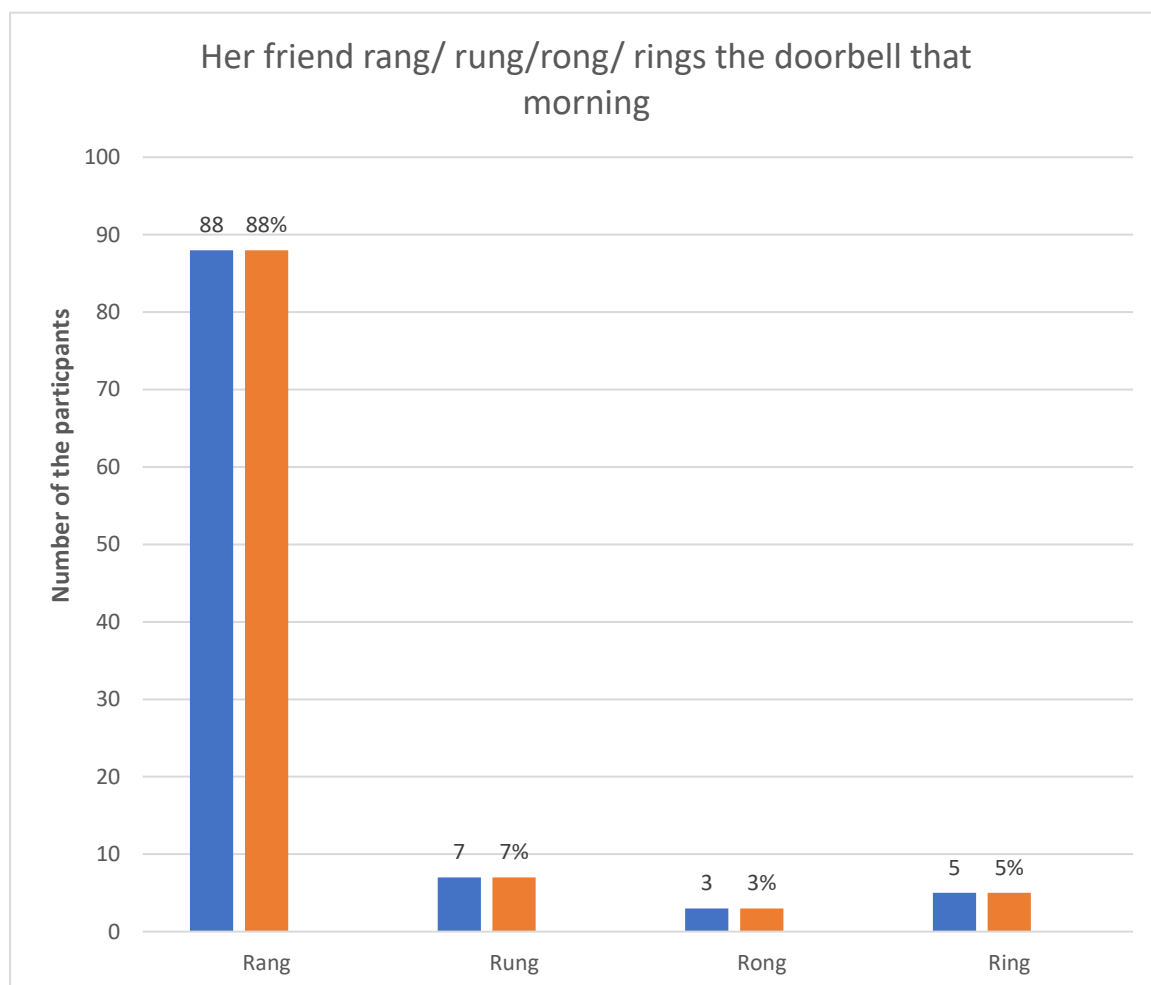


Figure 4.6 (c) Ablaut/vowel gradation

The majority of participants, 88%, gave the correct simple past form of the verb *'rings'* which is *'rang'*. Participants correctly substituted the base vowel with the, short /ɪ/ in *'rings'* with /æ/ in *'rang'*. The type of inflectional process is referred to as an 'ablaut', since a single vowel change took place. The participants (12%) wrote the incorrect past forms. The graph reveals that 6% of participants indicated *'rung'* which is the past participle form of *'rings'*, hence, was wrongly used in this instance.

This suggests that there was a confusion about the simple past tense and past perfect tense. 2% of participants wrote *'rong'* as the past form of *'rings'* which is incorrect and may be attributable to carelessness. The 4% of learners wrote *'ring'* as the simple past form of *'rings'* which is incorrect and so was the zero-marking principle because they did not know that there is no change in the form of word. The findings are congruent with Tulldahl (2015) who found that participants make faulty inferences about the rules of a target language.

Question 5: *After receiving the present I write/wrote/written her a 'thank you' note.*

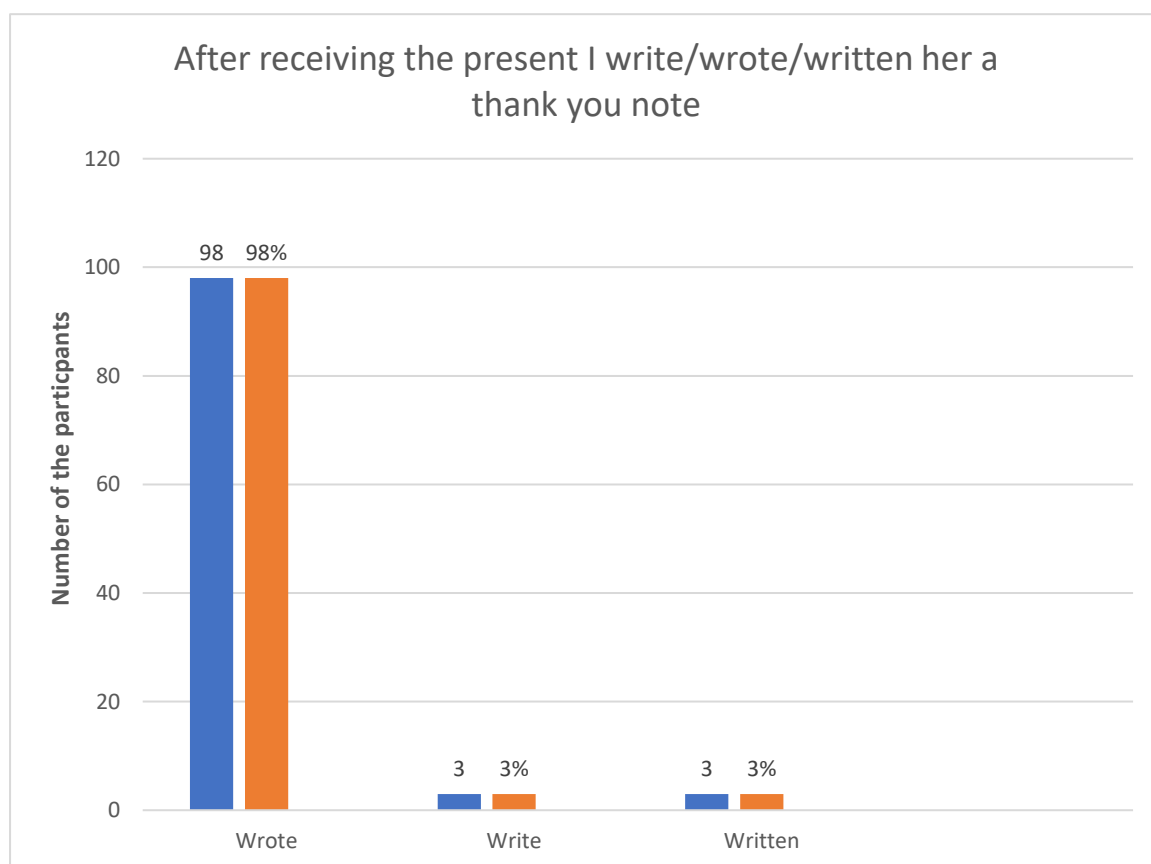


Figure 4.6 (d): Ablaut/vowel gradation

The majority of participants, 98%, wrote the correct past form of the verb 'write', which is 'wrote'. The participants showed knowledge in this sentence of the ablaut principle concerning the changes that should take place; a single vowel change, where one vowel is in the present form took place. To form the simple past tense with a vowel change, the vowel /i/ in 'write' changed to /o/ in 'wrote'. The phenomenon of substitution of the base vowel by another vowel took place in the formation of the simple past tense forms from simple present.

The past tense 'wrote' is a commonly used word in English and participants used it correctly. Overall, 2% of the participants wrote incorrect responses. 1% of the participants wrote the verb in its present form without any change and this is incorrect. The participant confused zero marking with the ablaut principle. The form 'written', which is the past participle of the verb 'write' and was wrongly indicated as the simple past form by 1% of the participants. The participant has committed an error in the formation of the simple past tense because in the simple past form the verb is replaced by another form of the verb (Taher, 2011).

Question 6: *He digs/dug/digged/dag a hole at the back of the house.*

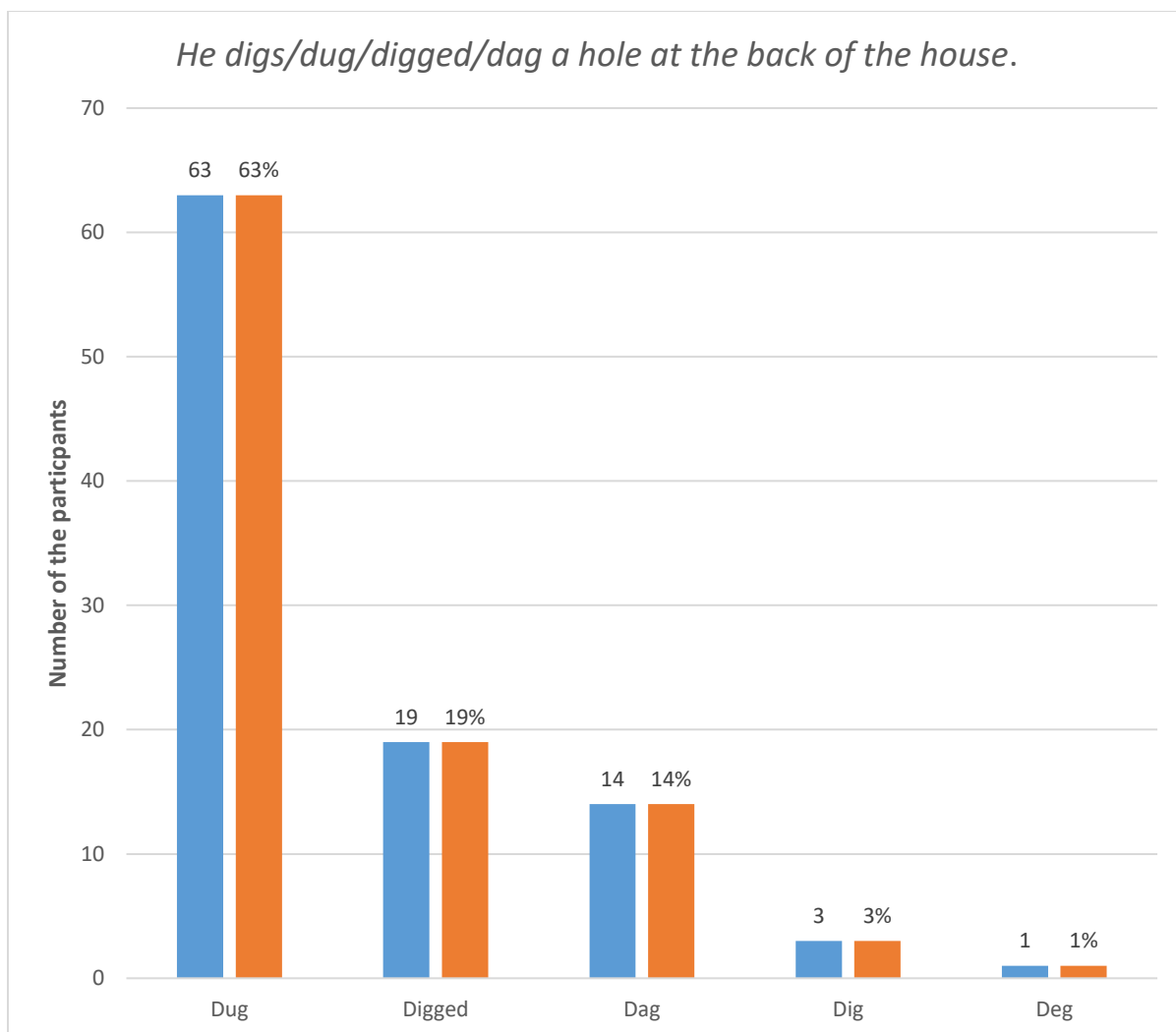


Figure 4.6 (e): Ablaut/vowel gradation

In Figure 4.6 (e), 63% of the participants wrote the correct form of the simple past form of the verb 'digs' which is 'dug' while 37% gave incorrect responses. Of those who gave the wrong answers, 19% indicated 'digged' as the past form of 'digs'. This error is attributable to overregularisation, which, according to Cowan (2008), occurs when a learner applies a grammar rule to forms that do not take it. One learner extended the rule of formation of the past form of regular verbs to irregular verbs. 14% of participants indicated 'dag' as the past form of 'digs', which is incorrect. The source of this error could be attributed to mis-regularisation, which is the selection of the wrong form of irregular verbs' past tense form, resulting in deviant forms. 3% of participants wrote 'dig' as the past form of 'digs' which is wrong; they have used the

ablaut principle incorrectly. Additionally, 1% wrote the incorrect form ‘deg’ due to a false concept hypothesised.

Question 7: *Jim steal/stole/stealed/stoles from other learners in class last week.*

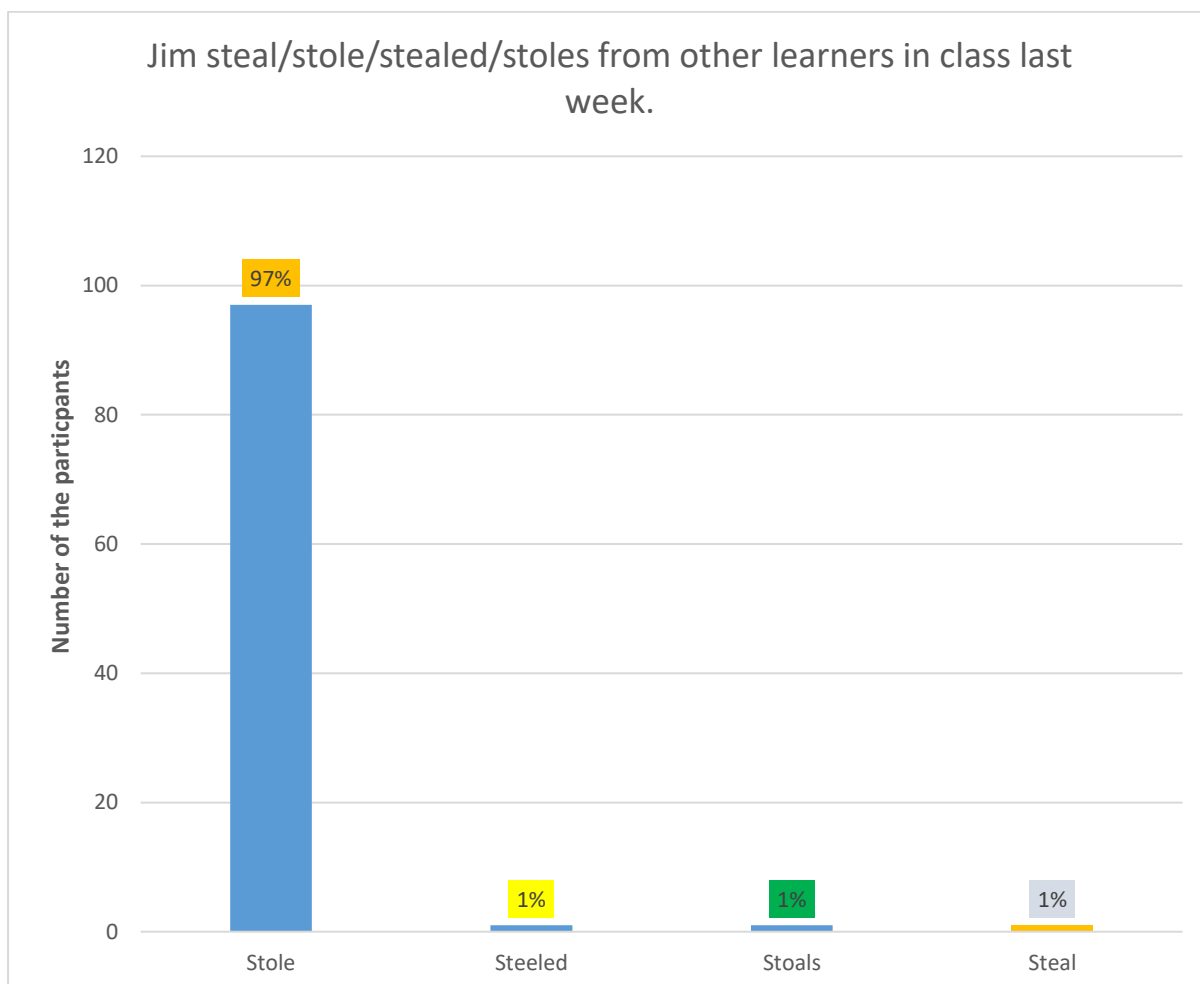


Figure 4.6 (f): Ablaut/vowel gradation

The graph reveals that in the simple past tense the word ‘steals’ which is ‘stole’ was correctly written by 97% of the participants, while 1% each wrote “steeled”, “stoals” and “steal”. Almost all the participants got the correct form of this irregular verb in the simple past tense. They were competent in the conjugation of the simple past tense form. Also, it is believed that constant exposure to the L2 lexicon is necessary for internalising grammatical structures.

The inflectional morphology is referred to as ‘ablaut’ which comprises a single vowel change, where one vowel in the simple present form is changed in the simple past

tense Lambani and Maluleke (2019). The 1% who wrote ‘steeled’ as the past tense form of ‘steal’ showed lack of knowledge of this rule as the learner regularised an irregular verb was by adding the suffix ‘-ed’. ‘Stoals’ was incorrect, and one may assume that the learner committed this error due to the phonology of the word ‘stole’ and further added an ‘-s’. ‘Steal’ as the past tense form of ‘steal’ suggests zero marking although in this instance it was incorrect. Few participants were still challenged with the basic structures of the language.

Question 8: *They sell/sold fish at a low price this morning.*

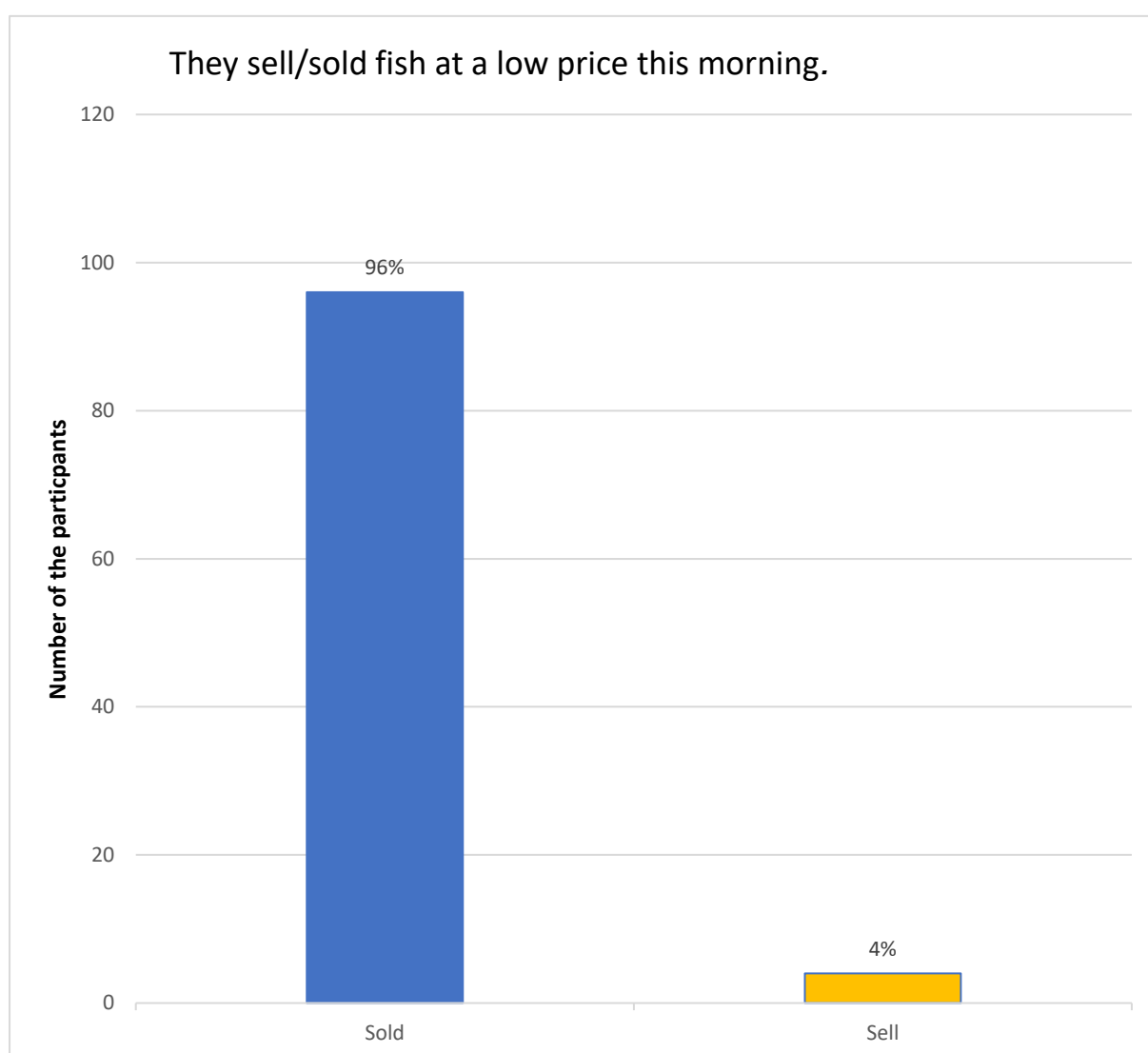


Figure 4.6 (g): Ablaut/vowel gradation

Figure 4.3.2.(g) reveals that 96% of the participants wrote the correct spelling of the past tense of 'sell', which is 'sold' whereas 4% wrote the word 'sell' without effecting any changes on the base form. The participants show knowledge in forming the simple past tense using the irregular verb, 'sell'. The verb in the simple past tense is formed by placing a final '-d' and changing the base form vowel /e/ to /-o/.

Al Arief (2016) affirms that some past tense forms of irregular verbs are often orthographically distinct from the base. Irregular verb 'sold' are frequently used in English, hence, participants might have been exposed to this verb. The inflectional morphology that takes place with this verb is that terminal consonants phoneme changes which also involves phonological changes. The 4% of the participants who got this sentence wrong seemed to have confused the zero marking with terminal consonant phoneme change because they did not effect any changes on the base form of the verb.

4.3.3 Terminal consonants' phoneme changes

This sub-section presents and discusses errors committed in seven different sentences regarding the participants' use of terminal consonants' phoneme changes.

Question 9: *He teaches/taught me valuable lessons last month.*

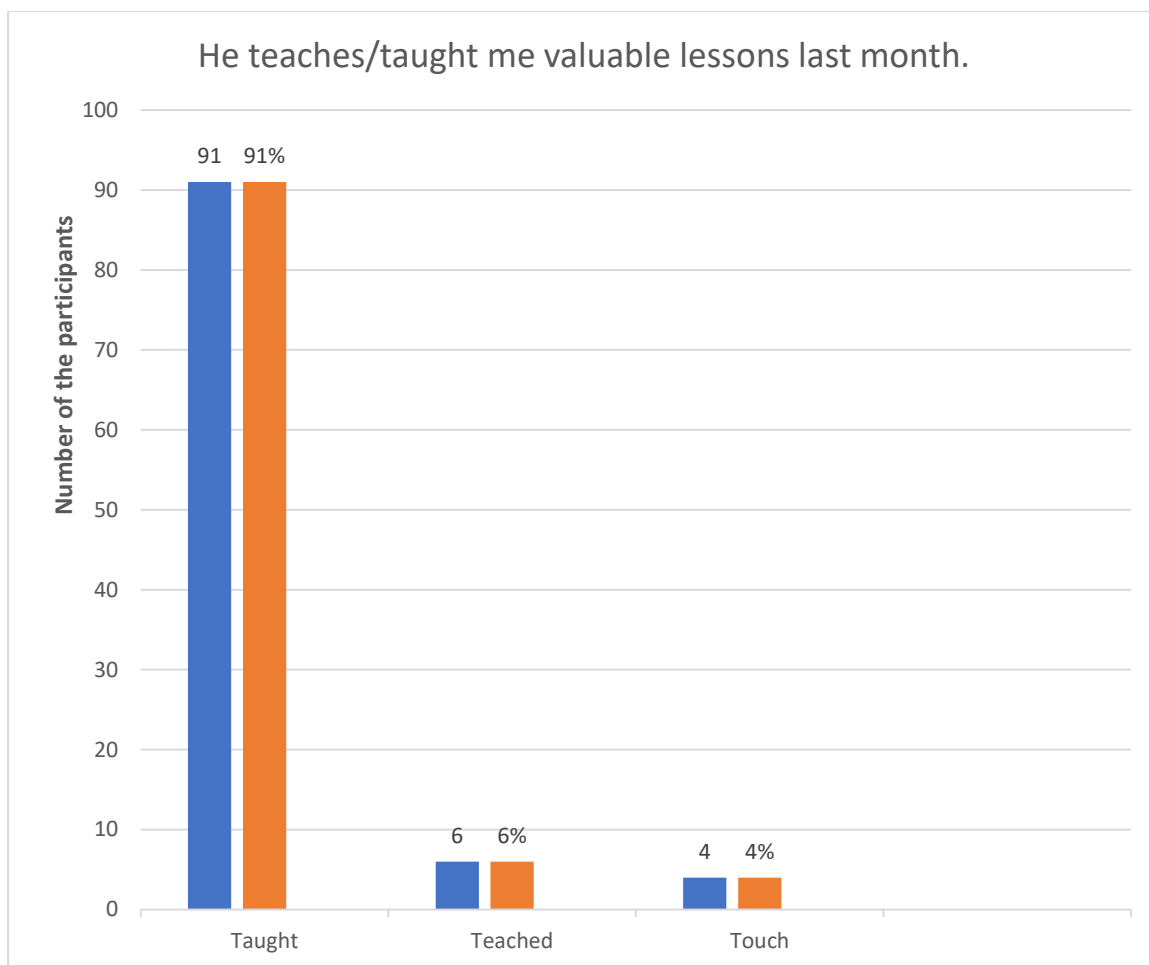


Figure 4.7(a) Terminal consonants' phoneme changes

The graph above reveals that 91% of participants indicated the correct form of the simple past form of *teaches* which is *taught*. Participants understood the vowel change that happens from */-e/* to */-aw/* and the final consonant *-t*. 7% of participants wrote incorrect responses of these 6% wrote *teached* as the past form of *teaches*.

The error may be attributed to overregularisation which, according to Cowan (2008), occurs when a learner applies a general grammar rule to verbs to which the rule does not apply. In this case, a learner extends the rule on the formation of the simple past form of regular verbs to irregular verbs. Participants added the suffix *-ed* to an irregular verb. 1% of participants wrote *touch* which has no relation with the base form *teaches*.

Question 10: *We swept/ sweep/ swept our class before our lessons today*

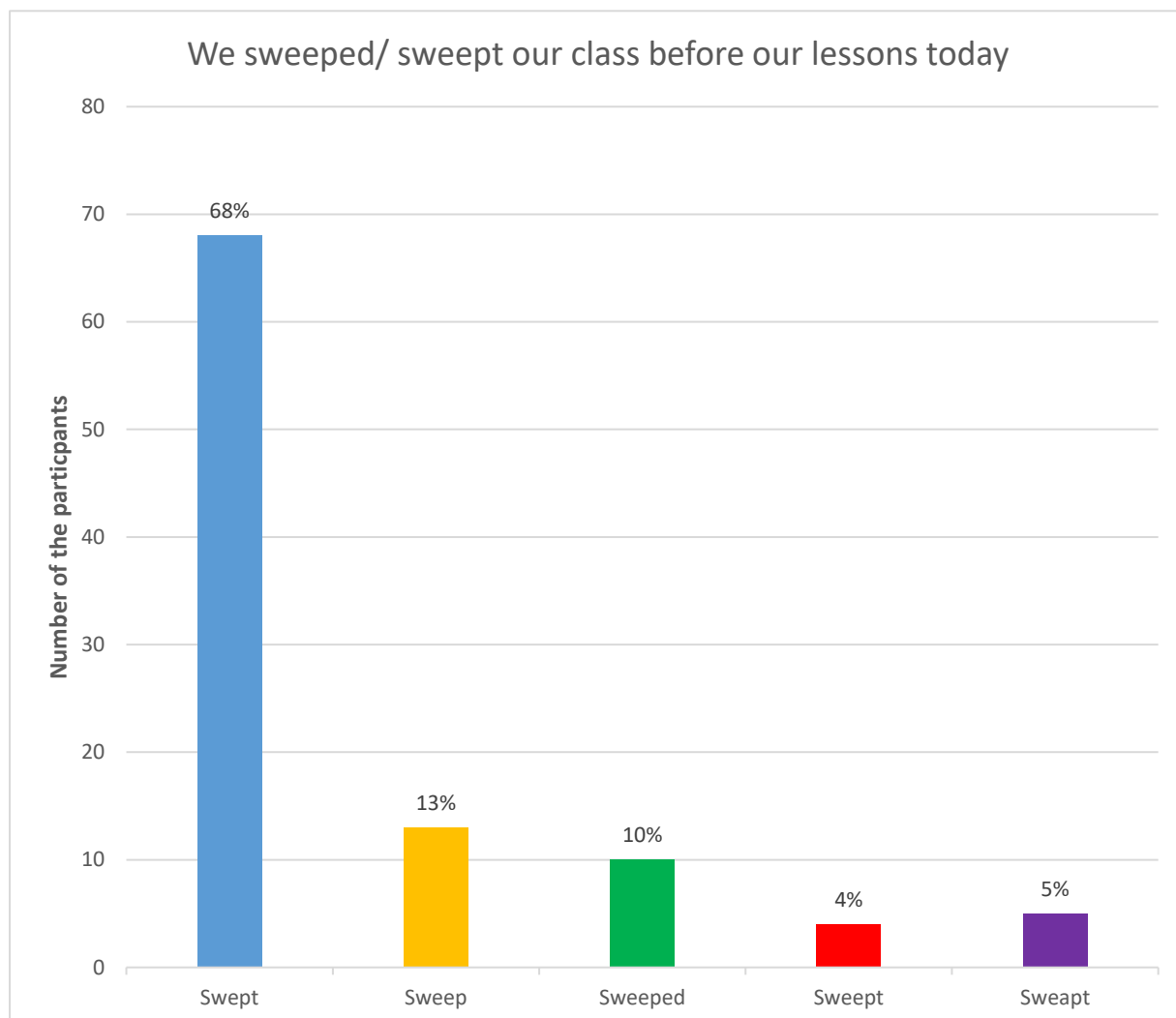


Figure 4.7 (b): Terminal consonants' phoneme changes

Figure 4.2.3.3 gives the results of the responses by participants on the simple past tense of the word 'sweep'. 68% of the participants got the correct simple past form of the verb 'sweep' which is 'swept'. This indicates that majority of the participants were knowledgeable about terminal consonants' phoneme changes that take place when the verb is transformed into the simple past tense. These findings are in line with the assertions by DeCapua and DeCapua (2017) that some vowel change takes place when the simple past form ends with a '-t', however, some participants did not realise that some irregular verbs, which end in '-d' and '-ed', in some instances, must change to the terminal consonant phoneme '-t'.

The long vowel ‘/e/’ becomes a short ‘/e/’ in the case of the verb ‘sweep’. The results show that 32% of the participants gave a variety of incorrect responses; 13% wrote ‘sweep’ as the past form of ‘sweep’ which is incorrect and implies that participants did not effect any change on the base form of the verb. 10% wrote ‘sweaped’ which is incorrect because the suffix ‘-ed’ was added to an irregular verb and this is attributable to overregularisation of the grammar rules. 4% wrote ‘sweept’ wherein an extra vowel was unnecessarily added and 5% wrote ‘sweapt’; these words were incorrectly spelt. The error could be attributable to how the simple past form of the verb is pronounced, for since ‘sweep’ is a commonly used word, the assumption was that all participants would be able to use it accurately. Some participants, however, had been unable to internalise irregular verbs simple past tense’s morphological inflection.

Question 11: *In the movie they knelt/ kneeled/kneal/kneid/knelt/kneel down before eating*

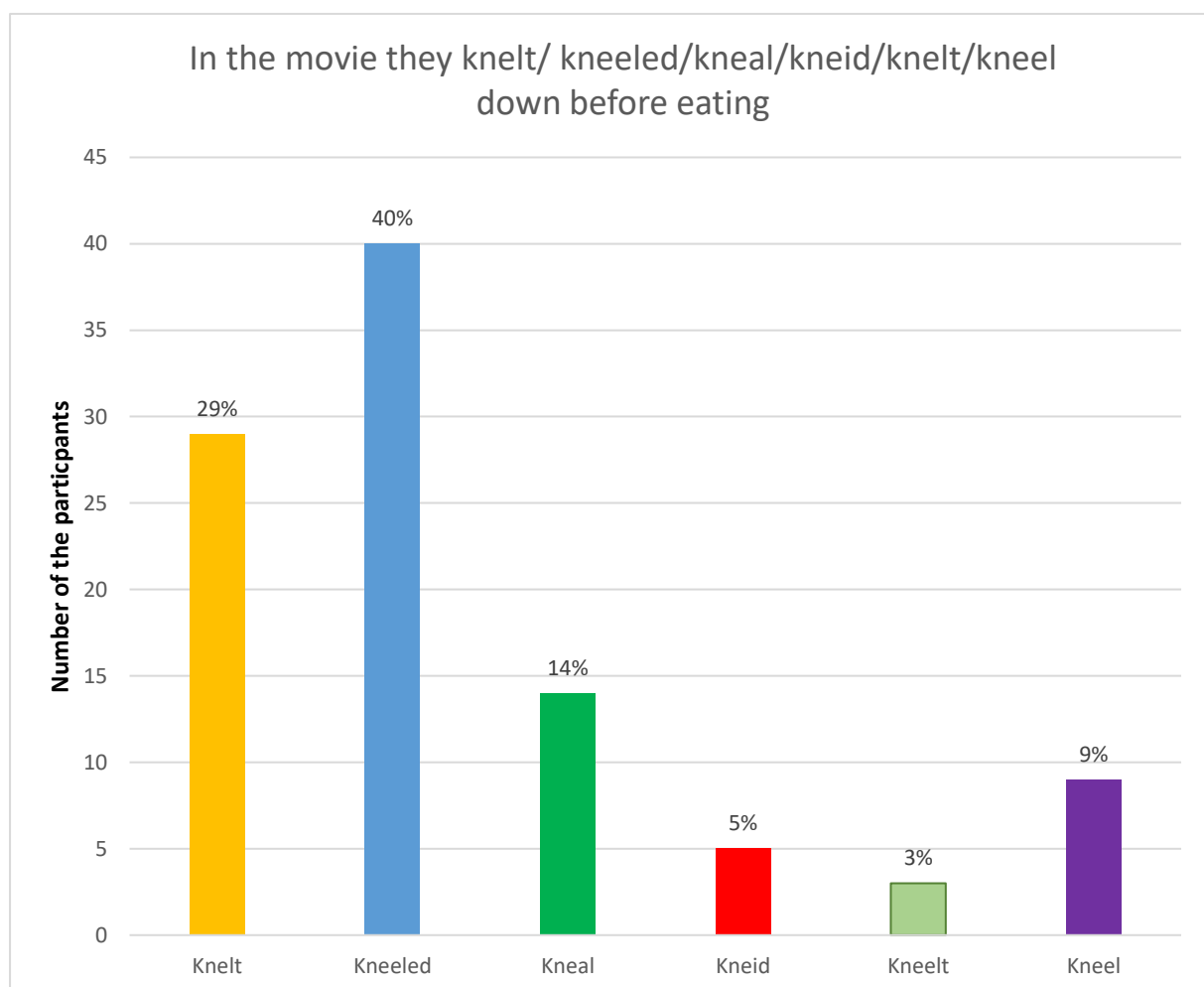


Figure 4.7 (c) Terminal consonants' phoneme changes

The graph depicts that only 29% of the participants got the correct form of 'kneel' which is 'kneelt', whereas the majority (40%) of the participants, 40% wrote 'kneeled' - this indicates that participants added the suffix '-ed' to regularise an irregular verb, hence, the cause of the error is overgeneralisation. Additionally, 14% wrote *kneal*, 5% wrote *kneid*, 3% wrote *kneelt* while 9% wrote *kneel*. The finding is consistent with Mungungu (2010) who found that errors of overgeneralisation can be caused by the inflection of irregular verbs.

Participants affected vowel substitution incorrectly. Some 3% of participants wrote 'kneelt' exhibiting an error of addition as an extra vowel '/e/' was inserted where it was not necessary. 9% of the participants wrote 'kneel', thus, not give its correct simple past form. The majority of participants had a challenge with conjugating the simple past form of 'kneel', thereby, confirming the findings by Rahmi (2014) that English L2 learners experience difficulties in the formation of the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs.

Question 12: The *fisherman catch/caught a lot of fish in the dam last week.*

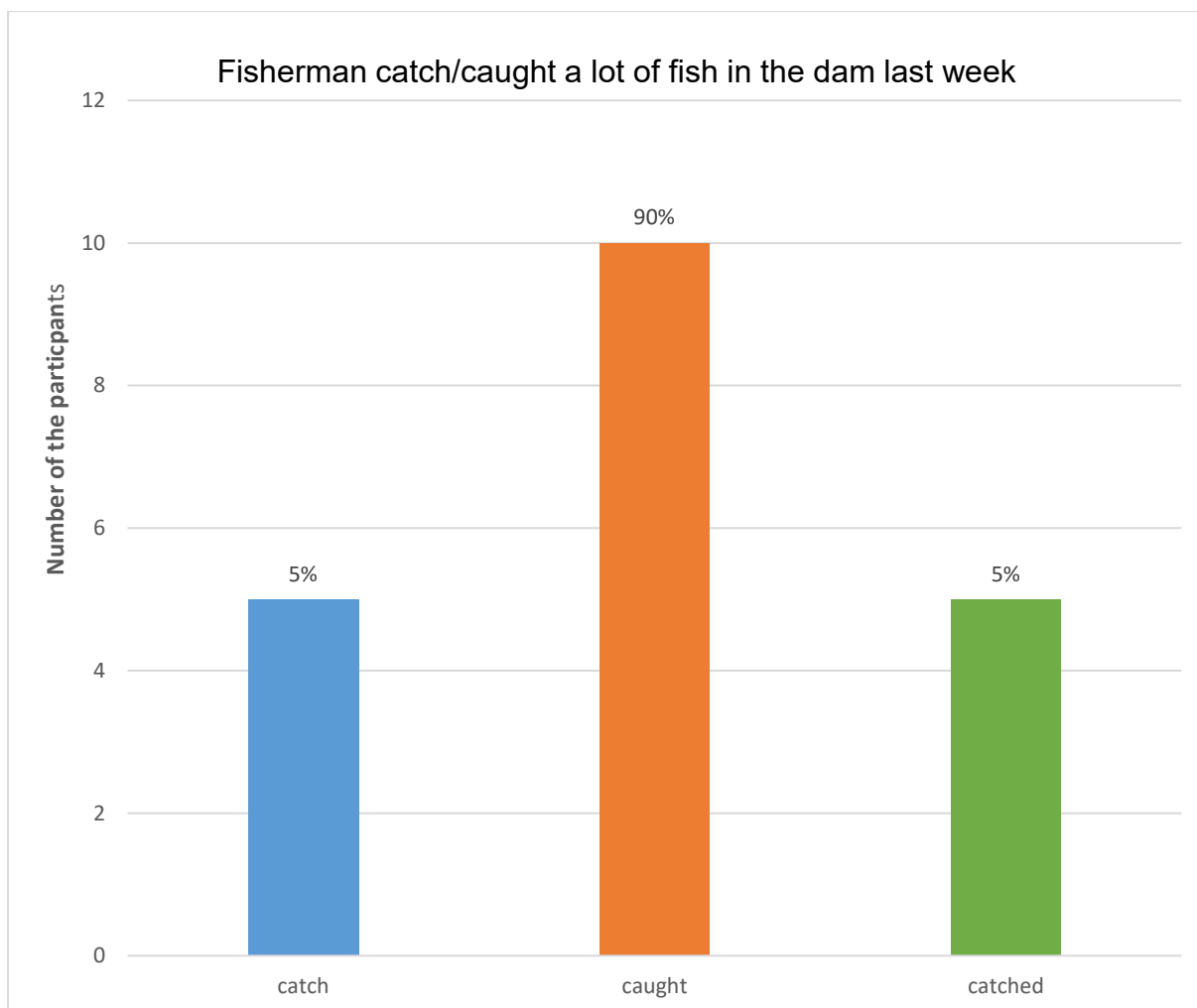


Figure 4.7 (d): Terminal consonants' phoneme changes

The above graph reveals that 90% of the participants managed to write the correct simple past tense form of the base 'catch' which is 'caught'. The changes that took place in the formation of this word, include phonological alterations in the vowels and terminal consonants phoneme changes; 10% of the participants had no knowledge therefore did not get the correct form; 5% wrote 'catch' as the simple past tense form of 'catch' which implies that the verb is zero marked, which is incorrect.

Some participants might have guessed the simple past tense form of the base form; 5% of the participants wrote 'caughted' as the simple past tense form of 'catch', which is incorrect. George (2015) found that irregular verb errors could be associated with overgeneralisation. Learners are likely to fall back on internalised language structures as a compensation strategy when they are faced with unfamiliar words.

Question 13: *Jane leaves/leaved/left early this morning*

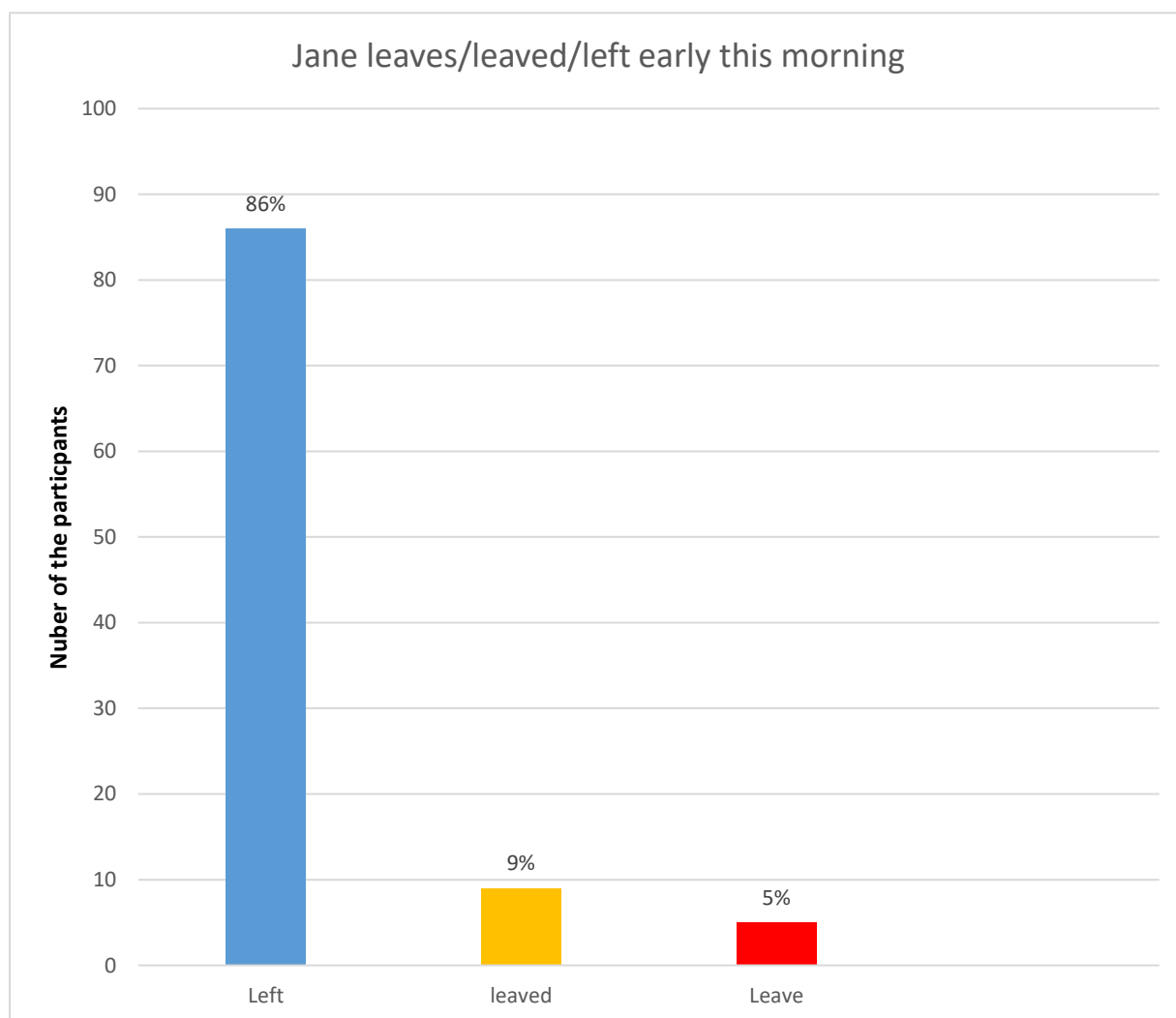


Figure 4.7 (e): Terminal consonants phoneme changes

In the graph above, 86% of the participants wrote the correct simple past tense form of the word 'leaves' which is 'left' whereas 14% gave incorrect responses; 9% wrote 'leaved' and 5% wrote 'leave'. The majority of participants had knowledge and understood the changes that take place in consonants and terminal consonant phoneme changes which include phonological changes and the adding of the suffix '-t'. The simple past form 'left' is commonly used just like most irregular verbs as most learners are exposed to using the verb in narratives and everyday communication. The word 'leaved' indicates that participants added the suffix '-ed' to the verb 'leave', thereby, regularising an irregular verb. The source of error was the overgeneralisation of a grammar rule. Most irregular verbs are used regularly, however, some

participants have failed to achieve full mastery of irregular verbs due to their lack of predictability as stated by Lambani and Maluleke (2019).

Question 14: *She seeks/seeked/sought advice from her friends while in class.*

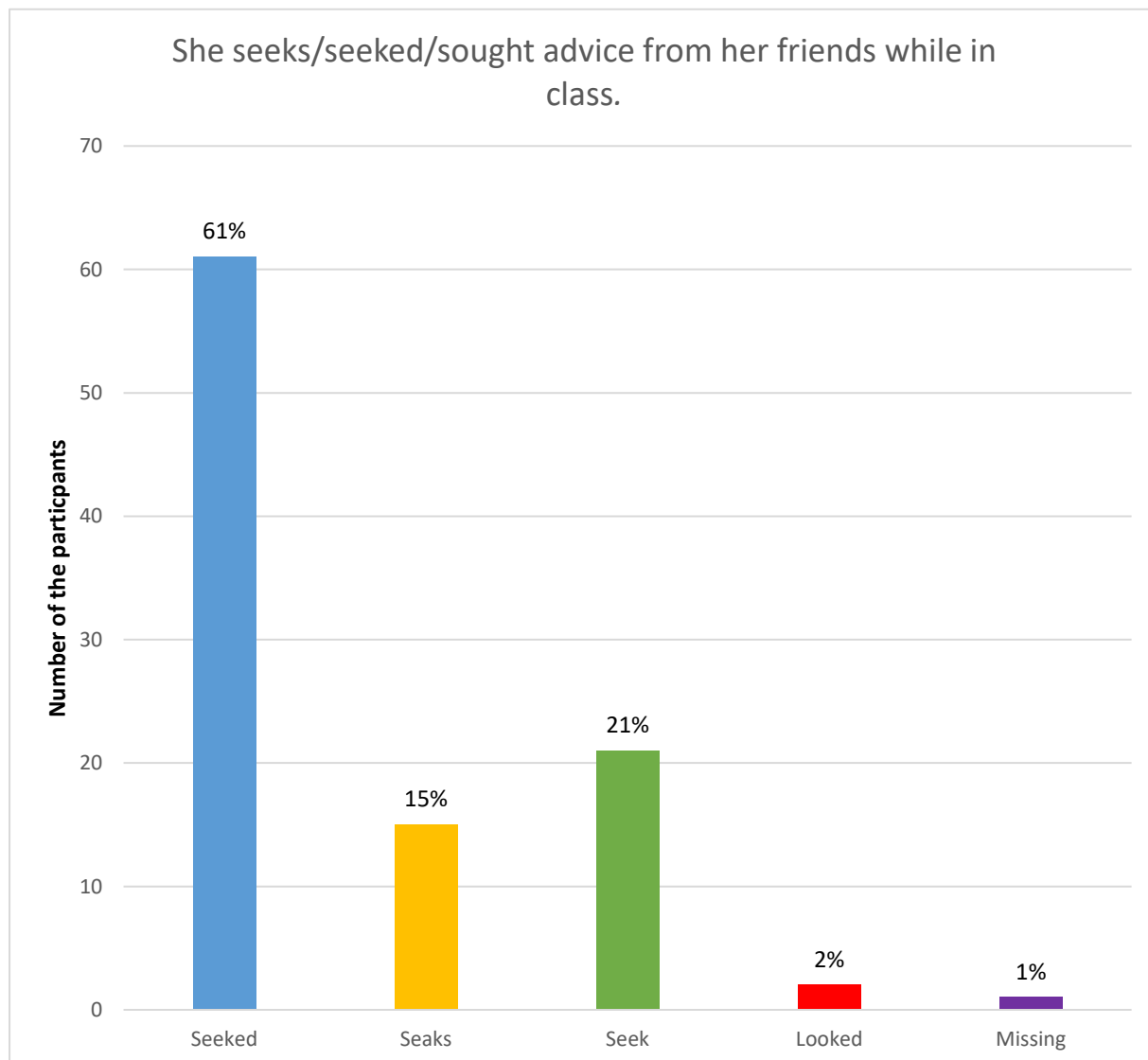


Figure 4.7 (f): Terminal consonants' phoneme changes

The simple past tense form of the word “seeks” was incorrectly written by 100% of the sample; 61% wrote ‘seeked’; 15% wrote ‘seaks’; 21% wrote ‘seek’; 2% wrote ‘looked’ and 1% did not respond to this particular question. The correct past tense form is ‘sought’. All the participants did not have knowledge about the word, and they all came up with incorrect responses. Terminal consonant phoneme change which

involves phonological changes and the terminal consonant ‘-t’ proved challenging to these participants. The findings are confirmed by Nasser (2017) who found that participants were unable to use the irregular past tense forms correctly due to confusion of tenses and overgeneralisation of grammatical rules.

4.3.4 Zero-marking

This sub-section discusses errors committed in five different sentences regarding the participants’ use of zero-marking.

Question 15: *They put/putted their books in their bags on Wednesday.*

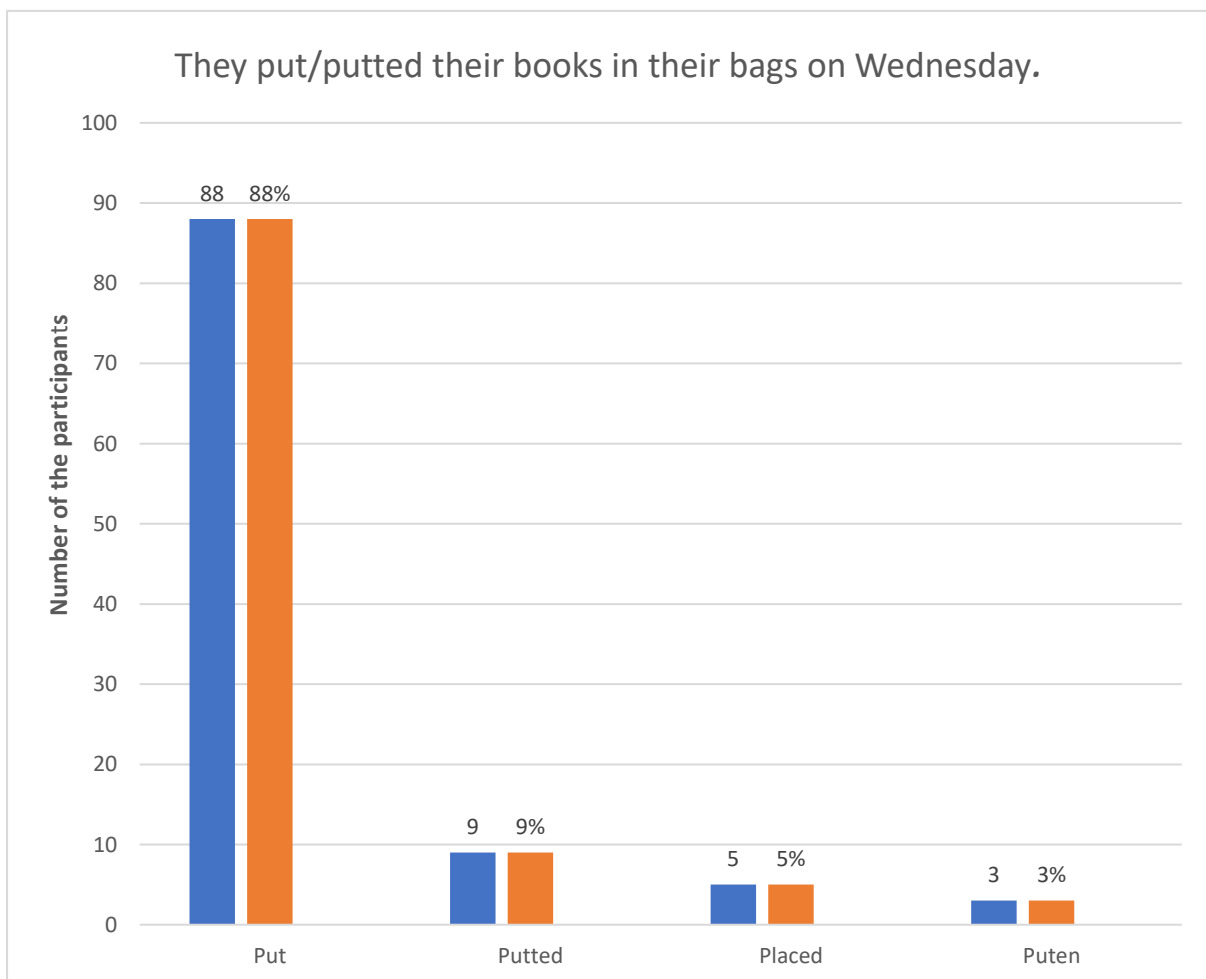


Figure 4.8 (a): Zero-marking

The majority of participants (88%) got the correct past form of *'put'* which remains the same, even in the simple past tense form. The graph indicates that the majority of participants had internalised zero marking, however, 12% gave incorrect responses. 9% of the participants wrote *'putted'* as the past form of *'put'*; this is consistent with that of Muriungi, et al. (2011), that participants sometimes regularise irregular verbs, as well as Rahmi (2014) results that English L2 participants inflected irregular verbs like regular ones. The participants were supposed to know that some irregular verbs have a zero allomorph.

Some participants overgeneralised the rule of the formation of the past tense of regular verbs. Participants experienced a challenge in realising that zero-marking with irregular verbs means that there is no inflectional changes, in all the simple past tense forms. 2% of participants wrote *'placed'*; this means they inserted a synonym of *'put'* instead of giving the simple past form, while 1% wrote *'puten'* which is incorrect. Sometimes in working with irregular verbs, participants come up with words that are non-existent in the English language. This may suggest that they guessed the past forms of words without applying their minds.

Question 16: *The water pipe bursted/burst in the morning*

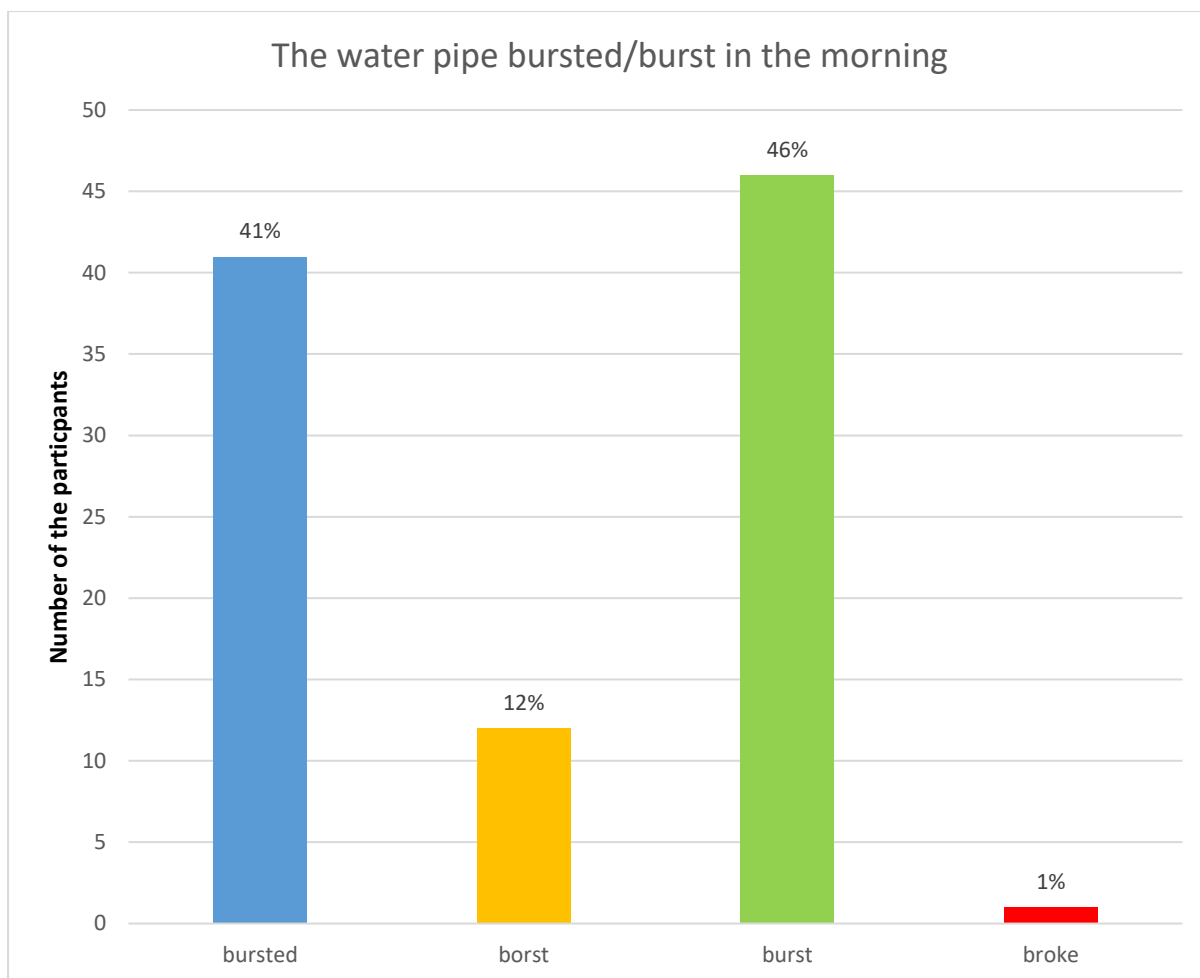


Figure 4.8 (b): Zero-marking

Figure 4.8 (b) reveals that 46% of participants got the correct form of the verb ‘burst’ which remains ‘burst’ as it does not change in the simple past form; the base and the past form do not undergo any transformation, and this is referred to as ‘zero marking’. 54% of the participants wrote an incorrect form of the verb. The past form of the verb ‘burst’ was incorrectly written as ‘bursted’ by 41% of the participants. The participants added the suffix ‘-ed’ to the base form to regularise an irregular verb and this resulted in an error.

The participants were unable to realise that zero-marked irregular verbs do not have inflectional endings when forming the simple past tense forms. The finding is consistent with that of Lambani and Maluleke (2019) who revealed that participants make faulty assumptions about language structures. These L2 learners were prone to overgeneralise rules to apply to unknown or unfamiliar words, and this caused the

error referred to as ‘overgeneralisation’ or ‘overregularisation’. As many as 12% wrote ‘*borst*’ which could be attributed to carelessness, while 1% wrote ‘*broke*’ which can be considered a synonym of ‘*burst*’ and not its simple past tense form.

Question 17: *They cut/cutted a cake at the wedding on Saturday*

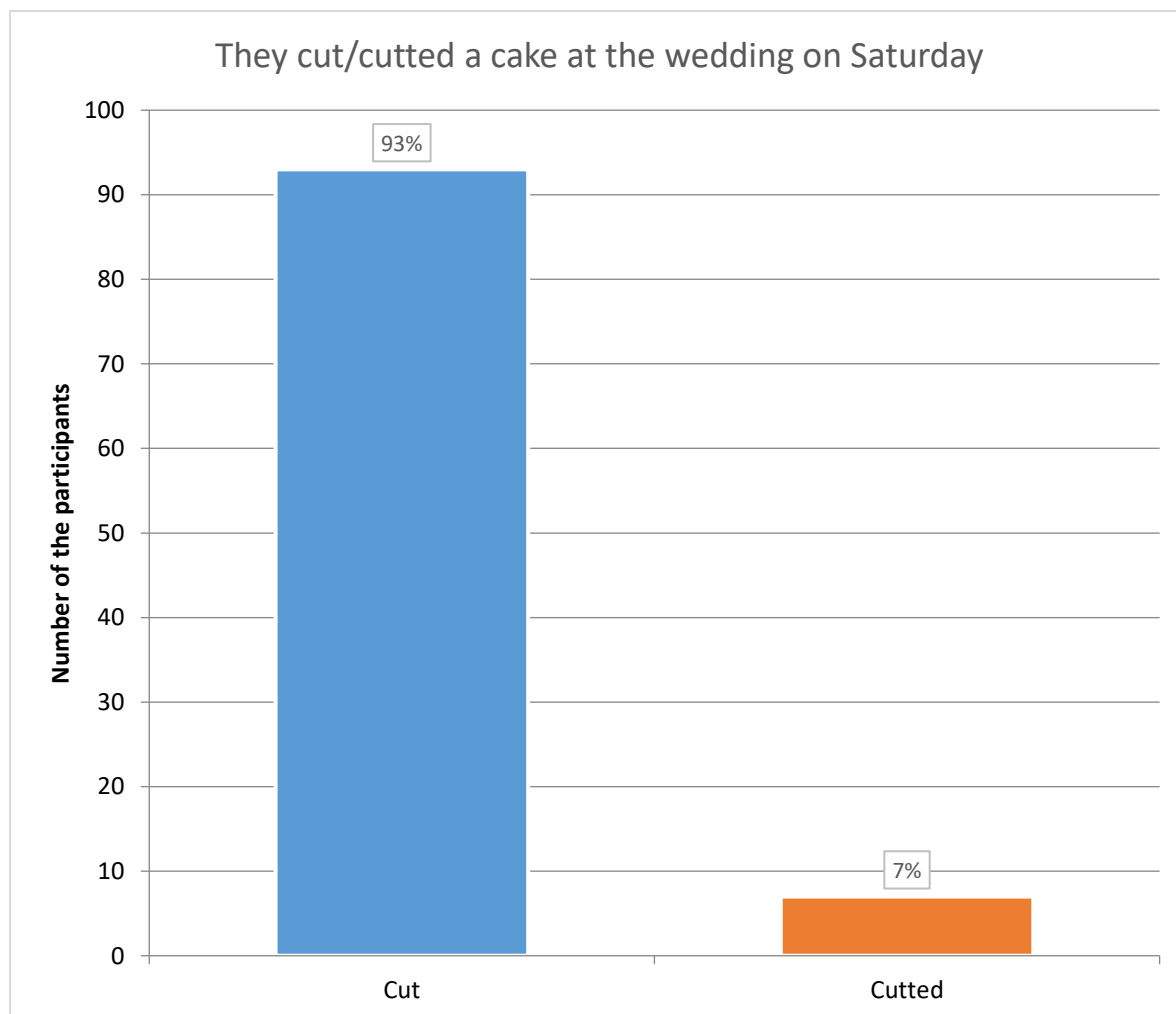


Figure 4.8 (c) Zero-marking

The graph reveals that 93% of the participants wrote the correct form of the past tense of ‘*cut*’ which remains ‘*cut*’ as a result of zero marking, while 7% wrote ‘*cutted*’ as the past form of ‘*cut*’. Figure 4.3.4.3, therefore, shows that most participants (93%) had some knowledge about zero-marking in relation to irregular verbs. Some of the irregular verbs are commonly used and it seems most participants had internalised that there are no inflectional changes to the base form of the verb ‘*cut*’ in the simple

past tense. This discovery is dissimilar to the observation that L2 learners experience difficulties in mastering the rules of irregular inflectional past tense morphology. Teachers might have grouped verbs that are zero-marked for the simple past tense, in a chart and participants had internalised them. For the 7% who wrote ‘cutted’, they have regularised some irregular verbs as was discovered by Muriungi, et al. (2011). The suffix ‘-ed’ was added to an irregular verb ‘cut’; the error is attributable to overregularisation which appears to be the principal cause of many errors.

Question 18: *The cake for the wedding last year cost/costed a lot of money.*

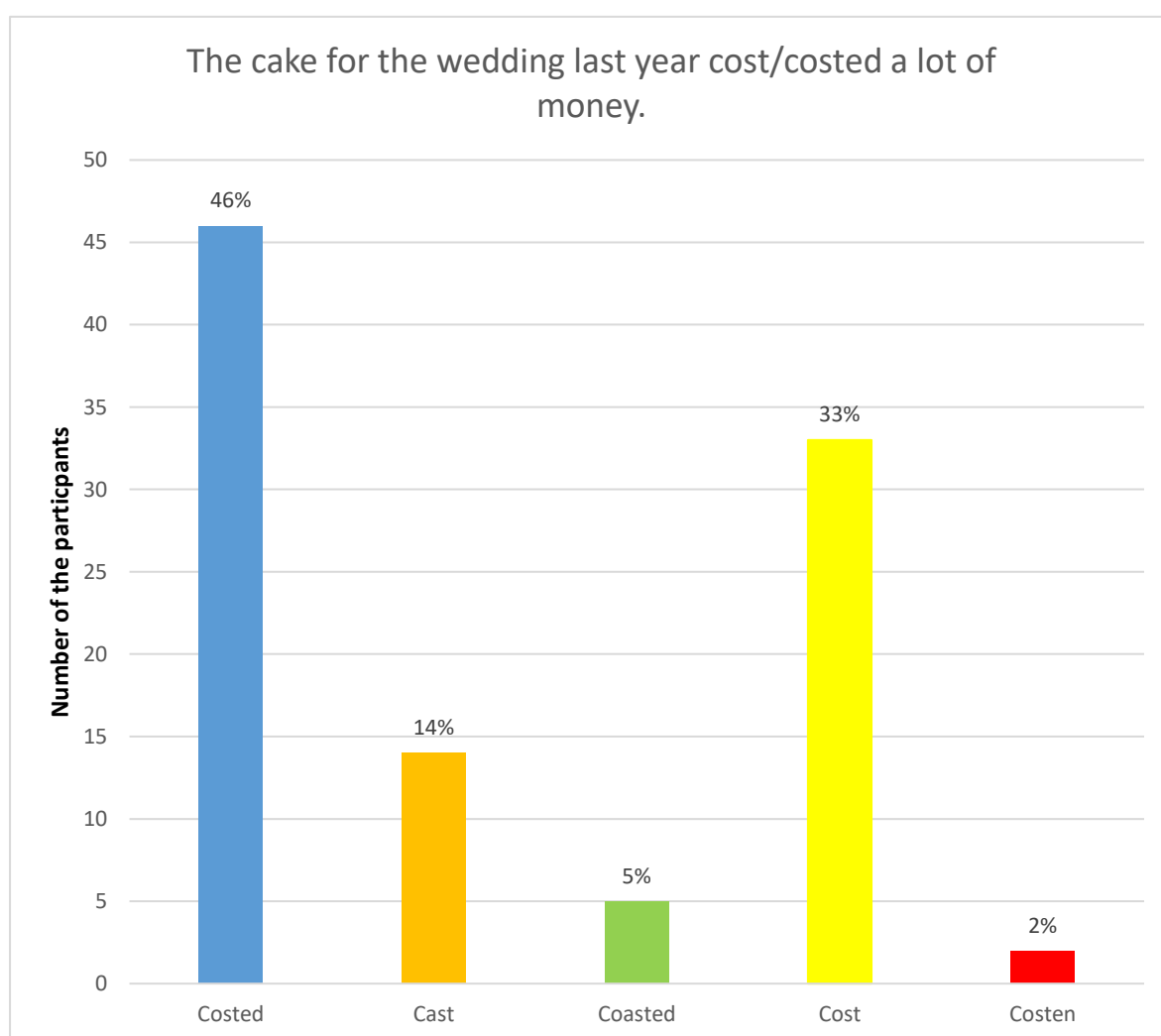


Figure 4.8 (d) Zero-marking

The graph reveals that only 33% of participants got the correct simple past form of ‘costs’ which is ‘cost’ whereas 67% gave incorrect forms. The majority of participants,

46%, wrote 'costed' as the simple past tense form of 'costs' which is incorrect, while 14% wrote 'cast', 5% 'coasted', 2% wrote 'costen'. Generally, participants had difficulties with this base form – they regularised an irregular verb by adding the suffix '-ed'. The finding is consistent with that of Mungungu (2010) who brought to light that errors of overgeneralisation are caused by the inflection of irregular verb. The participants tended to overregularise irregular verbs because they might not have yet internalised that conjugations of regular and irregular verbs are distinct.

Question 19: *They shut/shutted the door last night*

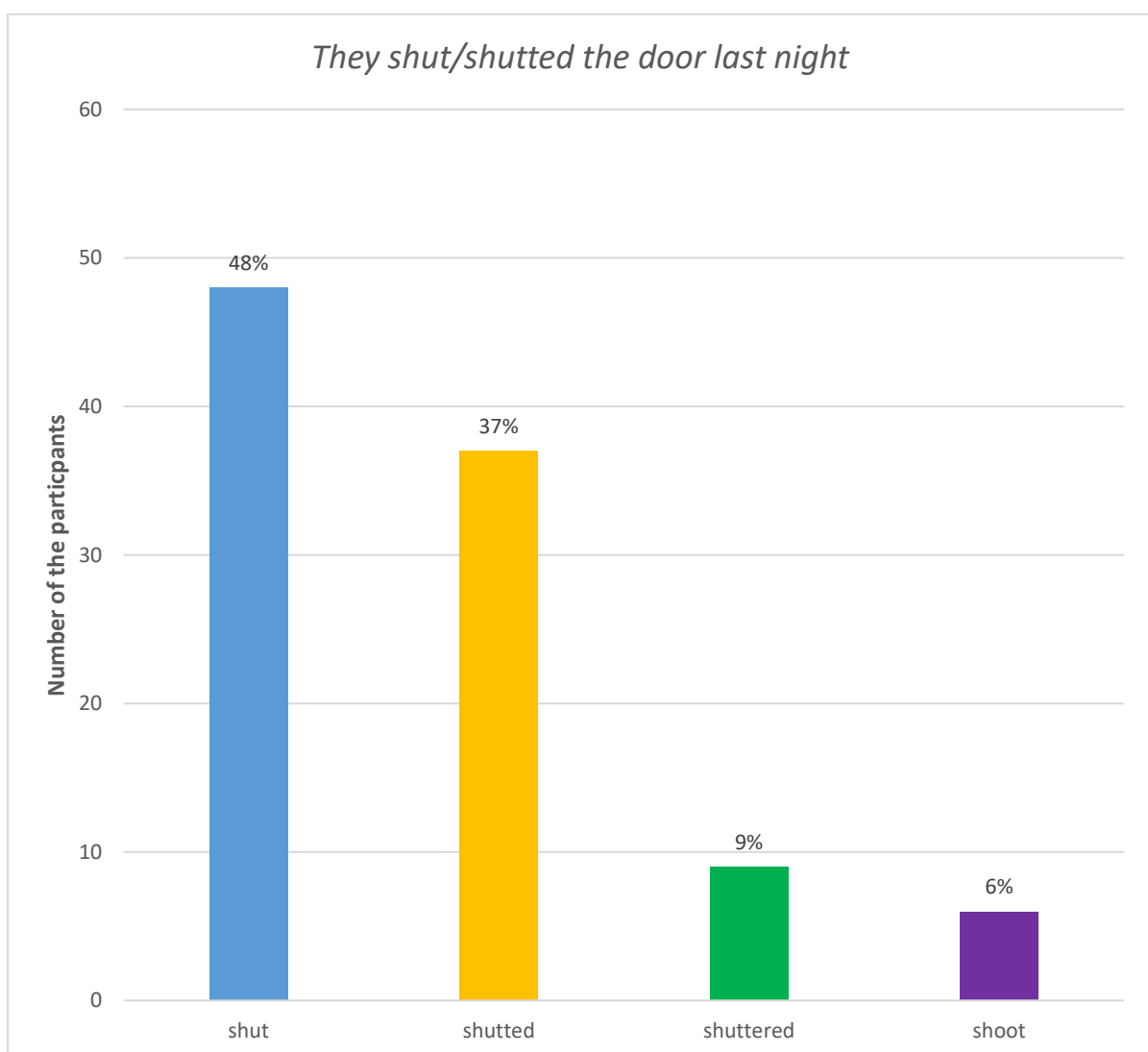


Figure 4.8 (e) Zero-marking

The majority of participants (48%) correctly wrote the simple past tense form of the word ‘shut’ which remains ‘shut’ in the past tense, however, 52% presented incorrect responses. The irregular verb ‘shut’ uses the same form for the present, past and past participle and this is referred to as ‘zero-marking’. 37% of the participants wrote ‘shutted’, 9% wrote ‘shuttered’ and 6% wrote ‘shoot’. The 34% who indicated ‘shutted’ as the past tense form of ‘shut’ committed an error of inflection. The finding is supported by Taher (2011) who found that irregular verbs are problematic for L2 participants. The participants in this case regularised irregular verbs. The verbs ‘shuttered’ and ‘shoot’ as the past tense of ‘shut’ have no relation to the base form. Therefore, this may indicate that participants did not apply their minds when completing the questionnaire.

A summary of the quantitative results of the study are presented in Figure 4.8 (e) illustrated below.

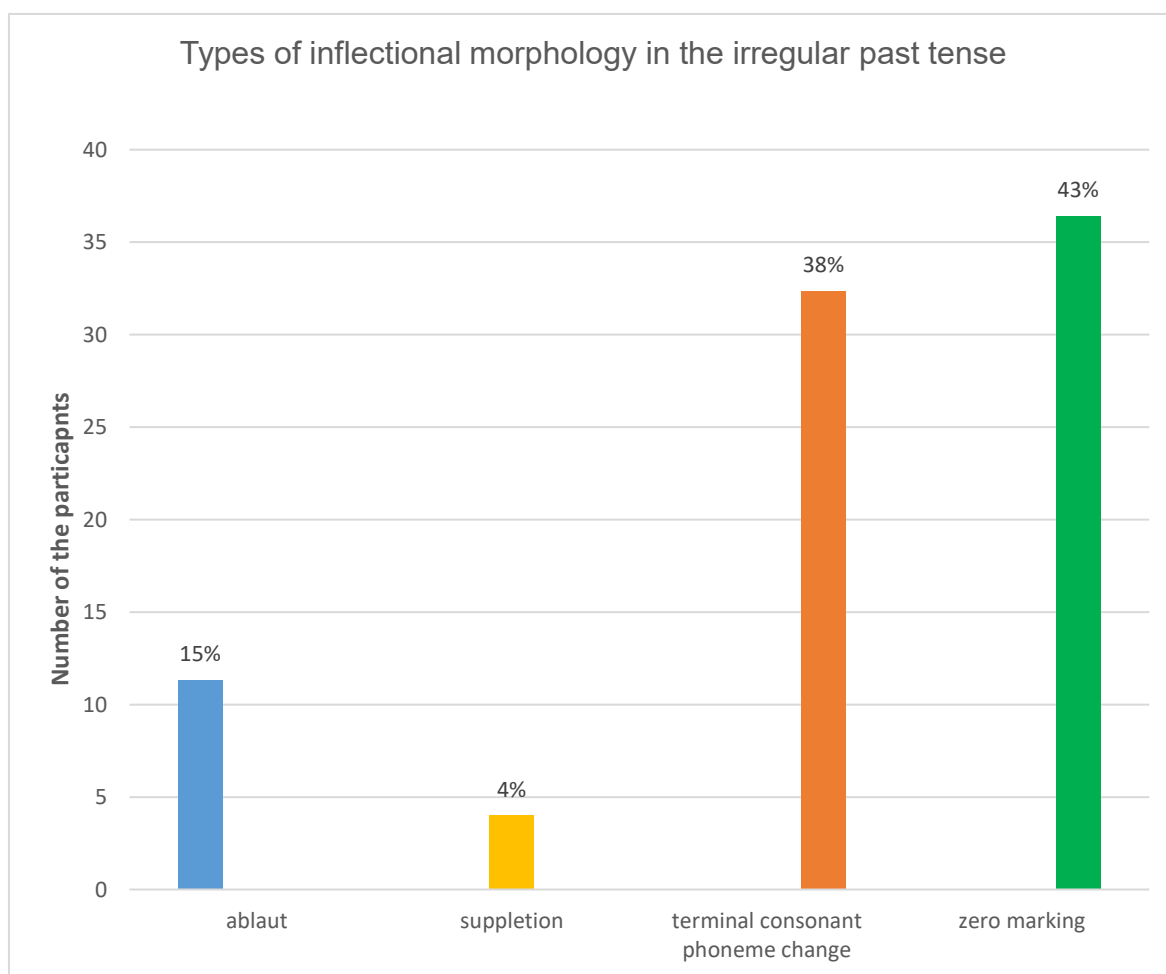


Figure 4.9: Types of inflectional morphology in the irregular past tense

Figure 4.9 presents the types of inflectional morphology exhibited in irregular verbs' past tense. To elicit the quantitative data, 100 participants were given a content-based questionnaire wherein they were required to give the correct simple past tense form of selected verbs. The findings revealed that 11.34% of the participants were not knowledgeable about the ablaut principle as they did not give the correct responses, while 88.66% had some information about the concept. Those who had some backgrounds were able to replace the vowel in the base form to form the simple past tense (*draws/drew, eat/ate, digs/dug/ rings/rang, steals/stole*). The finding is in contrast with the view of most researchers that the L2 participants are unable to conjugate irregular verbs. These selected verbs are commonly used in daily communication and as such participants are exposed to their usage.

Only 4% of participants gave deviant forms as a result of confusing the simple past tense form and the past participle forms of verbs and by wrongly over-applying zero-marking wherein they did not effect any changes to the base form. The results indicate that 96% of participants had some knowledge concerning suppletion. They had internalised the conjugation of the verb, as they knew they had to replace one stem with a different one that has no similarity to the base form (*goes/went*). The finding is dissimilar to the view that L2 learners face challenges posed by the nature of irregular verbs past tense forms. Some of the verbs are frequently used in utterances and participants may have heard teachers using it regularly when they teach the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs.

The findings revealed that 36, 43% of participants could not apply in zero-marking in relation to irregular verbs. Participants struggled to give the correct simple past tense forms of irregular verbs requiring zero-marking. They tended to regularise irregular verbs by adding the suffix '-ed' when it was unnecessary to do so, showing that participants seemed to have not yet mastered the formation of irregular verbs when used in the simple past tense. The participants used overgeneralisation wherein grammatical rules are applied in cases where they do not apply.

Deviant structures were created based on language structures that had already been internalised - the formation of past tense forms of regular verbs. These findings confirm those of Lambani and Maluleke (2019). Some 63.57% of participants wrote the correct past tense forms of verbs (*put/put, cut/cut, costs/cost, shut/shut*), demonstrating that they were competent in zero-marking of irregular verbs as they did not inflect them.

The findings revealed that 32.38% of participants faced difficulties with the correct irregular verb form of the simple past tense classified under terminal consonants phoneme changes. They are more complex due to phonological changes concerning vowels as well as the consonants. In this regard, a deviant structure such as *'taached'* suggests that overgeneralisation had taken place as the suffix '-ed' was added to an irregular verb.

It may seem that overgeneralisation was used as a compensation strategy that participants often fall back on when faced with unfamiliar language structures. It is pleasing to note that 67.62% of participants had knowledge in terminal consonants' phoneme changes. They gave the correct forms of verbs, such as *buys/bought, teaches/taught, kneel/knelt, catch/caught*.

These findings are in line with what Lambani and Van Niekerk (2014) where some Grade 7 English learners misformed the past participle verb form of the word *'teach'* as in *'taached'* and *'tought'*. At Grade 10 English FAL level, participants were expected to have already mastered terminal consonant phoneme changes.

4.4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION (QUALITATIVE)

Qualitative data was collected using document analysis wherein 20 participants were further sampled to produce the qualitative data. The participants' essays were analysed for inflectional morphology errors using the EA theory. The EA approach was directed only on the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs, hence other incorrect language structures were ignored. English FAL learners / participants committed some irregular verbs' past tense errors, in their essays. The discussion

that follows hereunder is based on the identified errors regarding the suppletion principle, ablaut principle, terminal consonants phoneme changes and zero-marking.

4.4.1 Suppletion principle

Suppletion involves the use of two or more phonetically different roots for different forms of the same word. Using Dulay's et al. (1982) surface structure taxonomy, the following sentence is erroneous; *'He gone to school in the morning'*. The correct sentence should have been: *'He went to school in the morning'*. The participants used the past participle form of the word *'gone'* instead of the past tense form *'went'*. This suggests that the participants had failed to discriminate between the simple past tense form and the past participle. The error committed is overt because the past participle requires a helping verb and in this regard the participants were incompetent. The finding concurs with the assertion by Ulla (2014) that errors are mostly traceable to the inability or failure of the learner to master the L2 such as **She is learning on the drive yesterday?*

4.4.2 Ablaut

These findings revealed that some of the participants had not mastered the use of ablaut. The following sentences were extracted from the essays:

- (a) **My elder sister choosed him at university.*
- (b) **Yesterday I meet good people.*
- (c) **They breaked into the spaza shop.*
- (d) **She begun her primary education at Gonden.*
- (e) **Last year she sing in the choir.*
- (f) **The request from my mother to accompany my little sister lead us to trouble.*
- (g) **I wake up in the morning.*
- (h) **We undertaken the journey.*

The sentences above show that participants had mastery of the use of the ablaut principle. The incorrect simple past tense forms - *'choosed'/meet/breaked/begun/sing* - were indicated as the past tense forms, however, the correct forms of verbs should have been *'chose'/met/broke/began/sang*. Errors of addition by adding the suffix *'-ed'*

to irregular were committed in **‘My elder sister choosed him at university’/ *‘They breaked into the spaza shop.’* In these instances, participants regularised irregular verbs and this is referred to as overregularisation or overgeneralisation. This is consistent with the finding by Mungungu (2010) that errors of overgeneralisation are caused by an inflection of irregular verbs as if they are regular ones.

In the sentence **‘Yesterday I meet good people’* the verb remained the same which is incorrect; a vowel change should have taken place. The long /e/ should have been transformed into a short /e/. **‘She begun her primary education at Gonden’* and in *‘We undertaken the journey’* the participants used the past participle forms in a context that required the use of the simple past tense forms; tense errors were committed by using verbs forms indiscriminately.

This finding is consistent with the findings of Taher (2011) that L2 learners commit tense errors. The sentence, **‘Last year she sing in the choir’* reveals that the participant did not transform the verb ‘sing’ to ‘sang’ to indicate that the action that took place in the past. It is as if the verb was zero-marked and it was incorrect. The short /i/ in ‘sing’ is replaced by /ae/ in ‘sang’. **‘The request from my mother to accompany my little sister lead us into trouble’* should have read thus: *The request from my mother to accompany my little sister led us into trouble’*.

The error committed, was that the verb ‘lead’ remained in the simple present tense whereas it was supposed to be in the simple past tense form. It reveals that the participant had not yet mastered the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs. The sentence **‘I was wake up in the morning’* should read thus: *‘I woke up in the morning’*. The participants used the auxiliary verb ‘was’ where it was unnecessary, and the base form ‘wake’ was not transformed into the simple past form.

Two errors were committed in one sentence. The sentence **‘We undertaken the journey’* should instead read - *‘We undertook the journey’*. The error committed by the participants stems from their inability to distinguish between simple past and the past participle form of verbs. The context required the use of the simple past tense form rather than anything else. The tense errors happened because these L2 learners wrongly distinguished between the simple past tense and the past perfect tense.

4.4.3 Terminal consonants' phoneme changes

Several errors were committed in terminal consonant phoneme changes:

- (a) *'The deceased lefted his beloved brothers and sisters'.
- (b) *'We founded two men talking to the shopkeeper'.
- (c) *'He rebuilded her house'.
- (d) *'He lose sight of both of them'.
- (e) *'Yesterday we flee from the spaza shop'.

The sentences above reveal that participants have not yet fully internalised the rules for the formation of irregular verbs past tense forms. The first three sentences should have been: '*The deceased left his beloved brothers and sisters*'/ '*He rebuilt her house*'/ '*We found two men talking to the shopkeeper*'. The errors committed were overt and reveal that the participants added the suffix '-ed' where it was not necessary. There was an attempt to regularise irregular verbs, which were already in the simple past by adding a suffix where it was incorrect to do so. The committed errors are attributable to overgeneralisation.

In the sentences, *'*He lose sight of both of them*'/ *'*Yesterday we flee from the spaza shop*', the correct sentences should be '*He lost sight of both of them*'/ '*Yesterday we fled from the spaza shop*'. The verbs '*lose*' and '*flee*' remained in the present tense and no changes were effected in the simple past tense, demonstrating that The participants had not yet mastered the simple past tense. The finding is supported by the study of Patterson et al., (2001) showing that terminal consonant's phoneme changes are more complex due to phonological changes involving both vowels and consonants.

4.4.4 Zero modification

Participants had minimum mastery of zero-marking because they could not use it accordingly. A single error of verb form was committed in the sentence: *'*Our cab was hitted*' instead of '*Our cab was hit*'. The verb '*hitted*' was indicated as the simple past form of the base form of '*hit*' and by so doing the irregular verb was regularised. The suffix '-ed' was added and this suggests that participants had not yet internalised

the conjugation of irregular verbs into the past tense concerning zero-marking. Zero-marking does not require the change of the base forms. This is congruent with the finding by Rahmi (2014) who attributed this error to limited proficiency in English. This is evidence that participants fall back on rules for the formation of regular verbs to compensate for lack of knowledge concerning irregular verbs conjugation. This error might have developed from an overgeneralisation of rules such as *thrust/thrusted* and *broadcast/broadcasted*.

The participants used the verb ending ‘-ed’, for example, with the irregular verbs, thereby creating *‘*cutted*’ and *‘*putted*’ instead of using the forms ‘*cut*’ and ‘*put*’. Also, they added the suffix ‘-en’ to the irregular verb ‘*cost*’ and erroneously formed the ungrammatical word **costen* which undergoes zero-making. In the process, they also came up with deviant grammatical English language structures as in *‘*teached*’ and *‘*tought*’. In this situation, they committed errors ranging from misordering, misformation, addition or insertion and omission as suggested by Dulay et al. (1982) in their work on surface structures’ taxonomy categories, although, at a certain point, the participants showed some competence in the ablaut or vowel gradation where they obtained 96% in vowel gradation. The analysis of the quantitative data yielded more errors because participants were provided with 20 verbs that they needed to transform into the simple past tense form, but the analysis of the qualitative data yielded fewer errors which can be attributed to avoidance, wherein participants may have avoided using unfamiliar language structures in the writing of their essays.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented, analysed and interpreted both the quantitative and qualitative data generated from research participants. The study focussed on the types of simple past tense forms’ errors of irregular verbs, causes of these errors and strategies to address these errors. The errors were identified, presented, analysed, interpreted and expressed in percentages with the aid of figures for the quantitative aspect, whereas for the qualitative data, the errors were categorised under themes - types of inflectional morphology.

An attempt was made to link the findings with relevant findings by other researchers who had also worked on simple past tense forms of irregular verbs. The causes of error were singled out and explained in full. Most of the errors identified were due to overgeneralisation as most participants erroneously regularised irregular verbs by adding the suffix ‘-ed’. Findings generally revealed that participants were more competent in the use of suppletion and ablaut processes, especially, of frequently used verbs.

The use of zero-marking and verbs that require terminal consonants phoneme changes were challenging to some participants.

CHAPTER 5

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY, SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter provides a brief overview of the entire study. It summarises the study findings, gives the conclusion, outlines the limitations and makes recommendations for further study in the field. The study aimed to analyse the irregular verbs simple past tense errors committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools in Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District. The study had three main objectives:

- To identify types of errors in the formation of irregular verbs’ simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.
- To explain the causes of errors in the formation of irregular verbs’ simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.
- To discuss strategies to address errors in the formation of irregular verbs’ simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected

schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the types of errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners, in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?
- What are the causes of the errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?
- What are some strategies for addressing the errors in the formation of irregular verbs' simple past tense, committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa?

The following is a brief outline of the chapters of the research study:

Chapter 1 presented the introduction, background, problem statement, aim and study objectives, research questions, study significance, explanation of terms and concepts, and division of the study.

Chapter 2 presented the theoretical frameworks underpinned by Lado's CAH and Pit Corder's EA Approach Theories. During the literature review, the focus was placed on the items including grammar, explanation of tenses, the simple past tense, regular and irregular verbs, types of inflectional morphology in regular and irregular verbs, types of errors, sources of error as well as strategies to address irregular verbs' simple past tense errors.

Chapter 3 provided a detailed explanation of the research methodology, through deliberating on - the research design, setting, and population, sampling techniques,

data collection instruments, data analysis and presentation as well as ethical principles adhered to.

Chapter 4 focused on the presentation of the collected data, analysis and interpretations generated using questionnaire and document analysis from sampled participants in selected schools. Both quantitative and qualitative findings were presented through the use of figures and themes, respectively.

Chapter 5 offers an overview of the study, a summary of the findings, conclusion, limitations and recommendations for further study.

5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The past tense forms of verbs are used in various writing and speaking activities and competency would result in good grades. The study focused on errors with the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs by a sample of Grade 10 English FAL learners from five selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, South Africa. The majority of participants committed multiple errors with verbs that require either zero-marking or terminal consonant phoneme change than with those which involved the ablaut and suppletion processes. Overgeneralisation, ignorance of rule restrictions, simplification, carelessness and incomplete application of rules were some of the major causes of errors. The procedures in EA were used to analyse the errors. The qualitative data demonstrated fewer errors which could be attributed to the avoidance strategy, wherein participants might have decided to avoid unfamiliar language structures.

5.4 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study does not assert to be all-encompassing or all-inclusive. The participants in the study were Grade 10 ENG FAL learners and different types of simple past tense forms of irregular verb errors might emerge from learners in the other grades. This research focused on the 'simple past tense' forms of irregular verbs only, ignoring all other errors that learners may have committed in their responses. The research method and instruments that were used might have limited the findings that could be obtained if alternative research methods and instruments were used.

5.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify and analyse irregular verbs' simple past tense mistakes made by the Grade 10 English FAL learners in selected schools at Tshinane Circuit, South Africa. To address the research questions, an investigation was instituted among selected Grade 10 English FAL learners at Tshianane Circuit.

Concerning the first research question, the findings revealed that some participants lacked proficiency in using English irregular verbs' simple past tense forms. They made mistakes in applying the following rules to irregular verbs: zero-marking, ablaut and suppletion processes, as well as terminal consonant phoneme changes.

As regards the second question, the zero-marking errors were caused by factors including faulty inferences about the rules of the target language, inability to internalise irregular verbs' past tense morphological inflections, confusing the simple past tense forms and the past participle forms and overgeneralisation of the rules to apply to irregular verbs,

With regards to the third question, the literature suggests that direct corrective feedback on errors committed is necessary and helpful. A teacher is required to provide learners with the correct form by writing it above or near the incorrect one. Learners need to know the irregular verbs' simple past tense forms and use them in everyday conversation and in writing too. Teachers are to contextualise and involve controlled practice using irregular verbs in meaningful communicative activities, where the learners would be required to produce expanded output using irregular verbs' simple past tense structures.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings have shown that Grade 10 learners in Tshinane Circuit were not proficient in using irregular verbs' simple past tense forms as they could not adequately respond to questions provided by the researcher in the questionnaire and in their essays. Teachers are supposed to present the simple past tense cognitively and functionally so that learners would deem the lessons relevant. Unfamiliar and

familiar irregular verbs can be presented methodically so that learners comprehensively gain new insights into the verbal system in English. Explicit teaching of grammar and exposure to more reading resources in English may go a long way in curbing errors, particularly the simple past tense forms of irregular verbs and increase learners' language proficiency, in general.

Further research is needed for the lower grades to find out in what grades the challenges with verbs emerge so that relevant strategies can be provided, timeously, to assist learners to overcome the difficulties in grammar, particularly, the irregular verbs' past tenses. There should also be another research to determine whether teachers employ relevant approaches to assist learners in the mastery of targeted English language structures in the classroom.

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ANNEXURE A: QUESTIONNAIRE

A1: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

For each of the following items, numbered 1 to 4, tick or put a cross next to your most preferred answer.

1. Age

14-		16-		17-	
15		17		18	

2. Gender

Female		Male	

3. Participants by Language

1. Tshivenda	2. English	3. Other
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4. Number of years in Grade

1		2	
---	--	---	--

5. Participants by question: *Do you enjoy learning English FAL?*

Complete the following statements by choosing the correct answer from the alternatives provided in brackets, and then write your answers in the spaces provided as indicated in the subsequent example:

STATEMENT	ANSWER
My friend buys/bought me a present last year	

1. She goes/ went to town with her friends yesterday	went
2. The artist draws/drew/drow a beautiful picture last year	drew
3.They eat/ ate/eaten delicious food last night	ate
4.Her friend rang rung/ rong/ rings the doorbell that morning	rang
5.After receiving the present I write/wrote/written her a thank you note	wrote
6. He digs/dug/digged/ dag a hole at the back of the house.	dug
7. Jim steal/ stole/ stealed/stoles from other learners in class last week	stole
8. They sell/sold fish at a low price this morning	sold
9.He teaches/taught me valuable lessons last month	taught
10.We sweeped/ swept our class before our lessons today	swept
11. In the movie they kneeled/knelt down before eating	knelt
12. Fisherman catch/caught a lot of fish in the dam last week	caught
13 Jane leaves/leaved/left early this morning	left
14. She seeks/seeked/sought advice from her friends while in class	sought
15. They put/putted their books in their bags on Wednesday	put
16. The water pipe bursted/burst in the morning	burst
17. They cut/cutted a cake at the wedding on Saturday	cut
18. The cake for the wedding last year cost/costed a lot of money.	cost
19. They shut/shutted the door last night	shut

ANNEXURE B: ETHICS CLEARANCE (UNIVERSITY OF VENDA)

**RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR**

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Ms TJ Thivhafuni

Student No:

9106048

PROJECT TITLE: Investigating past tense errors committed by Grade 10 English first additional language learners in Tshinane circuit, Vhembe District.

PROJECT NO: SHSS/18/ENG/01/2805

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr MN Lambani	University of Venda	Supervisor
Mr VT Bvuma	University of Venda	Co - Supervisor
Ms TJ Thivhafuni	University of Venda	Investigator – Student

ISSUED BY:


UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: April 2018

Decision by Ethical Clearance Committee Granted

Signature of Chairperson of the Committee:

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




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University of Venda

Date : 03 April 2018

Research Ethics recommendations on Application for Ma TJ Thivhafuni on
Project title: *Investigating past tense errors committed by Grade 10 English first
additional language learners in Tshinane circuit, Vhembe District.*

The following comments and recommendation

Science and Methodology:

- Mixed methods – questionnaire and an essay test excise will be employed to gather data from grade 10 learners. The choice of grade 10 is found logical in view of the fact that they are the entry into Further Education and Training (FET) phase and so could be facing language challenges. It is also noted that an experimental or action form of research approach is relevant to collect data from directly affected learners.
- Questionnaire which is going to collect data needs to be modified. Qualitative data cannot be analysed according to the types of errors that learners have committed. The student should go back to research objectives/questions and qualitative (create interview questions) which will make her to analyse collected data through themes and sub-themes.

Ethical Considerations:

- It is noted that the researcher is aware that grade 10 learners are largely minors and so the consent of their parents and principals should be sought. Added to that, the Department of Education will have to approve the study to be conducted in schools. There is letter to District manager for request to conduct the study but there are no consent forms for parents and school principals.

Informed Consent Forms:

- It is noted that while there is a letter to District Director on permission to conduct the study in schools, relevant actual consent forms for key participants and concerned parties, namely learners, their parents and school principals are not attached.

Recommendations:

The application was provisionally approved subject to compliance to the above comments to the satisfaction of the reviewers and supervisors/promoters.

Thank you

.....
SENIOR PROF G.E. EKOSSE

.....
DATE

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

TO : MR/MS T.J THIVHAFUNI
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND SOACIAL SCIENCE

FROM: PROF J.E. CRAFFORD
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

DATE : 23 JANUARY 2018

DECISIONS TAKEN BY UHDC OF 23RD JANUARY 2018

Application for approval of Master's research proposal in Human and Social Sciences: T.J Thivhafuni (9106048)

Topic: "Investigating Past Tense Errors committed by Grade 10 English First Additional Language Learners in Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District."

Supervisor	UNIVEN	Dr. M.N Lambani
Co-supervisor	UNIVEN	Mr. V.T Bvuma

UHDC approved Master's proposal



Prof J.E. CRAFFORD
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

Research Ethics Committee

To: Senior Prof GE Ekosse

Director Research and Innovation

Applicant Name : Thivhafuni T.J
 Staff/ Student No : 9106048
 School : Human and Social Sciences
 Department : English
 Project Title : Investigating Past Tense Errors Committed By
 Grade 10 First Additional Learners In Tshinane
 Circuit, Vhembe District.
 Supervisor/Promoter : Dr Lambani M.N
 Date : 28 May 2018

The following comments and recommendations were made:

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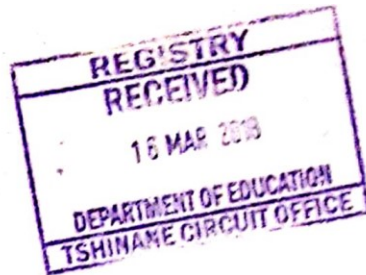
T. Thivhafuni
Signature by Applicant

28/05/2018
Date

M. Lambani
Approval by Supervisor/Promoter

28/05/2018
Date

ANNEXURE C: PERMISSION APPLICATIONS LETTERS



P.O. Box 2903

THOHOYANDOU

0950

18 March 2018

The Circuit Manager
Department of Education
Tshinane Circuit
P/Bag x 4000

TSHIDIMBINI
0972

Dear Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT TSHINANE CIRCUIT

I, Takalani Jane Thivhafuni, an English FET Curriculum Advisor at Tshinane Circuit and a student of Masters in English at the University of Venda wish to request permission to conduct research at Tshinane Circuit in fulfilment of my studies. The data will be conducted on Grade 10 English First Additional Language learners.

Title: Investigating past tense errors committed by grade 10 English First Additional Language Learners in Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the irregular simple past tense errors committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners of Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District in their written work including finding out how these errors affect learners' proficiency.

Research questions

- What written irregular simple past tense errors are committed by English FAL learners of Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District?
- What types of the written irregular simple past tense errors are committed by Grade 10 English FAL learners at Tshinane Circuit, Vhembe District?

C4: Parent/guardian of a learner who is underage in the Tshinane Circuit

Enq. TJ Thivhafuni

Tell: 015 962 8661

Cell: 0820944500

Dear Parent/Guardian,

REQUEST FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

I am Thivhafuni Takalani Jane, a Masters degree student in the Department of English, School of Human Sciences, at the University of Venda. As part of my studies, I am doing a research on the topic: "Investigating past tense errors committed by Grade 10 English First Additional Learners in Tshinane Circuit Vhembe District". I humbly request you to allow your child to participate in this research project. In this situation, the District Senior Manager has already kindly granted me permission to conduct this research.

I have to contact the parents of the learners who are minors and ask for permission to allow them to participate in this research. The reason for me conducting this research project is that English is currently an important language that unifies the whole world into a single unit as is also the case here in South Africa.

The research procedures will be explained duly so that your child can understand and participate voluntarily. The child's participation will not entail any remuneration. Should you have any questions concerning this request, please feel free to contact me. Learners will be given a 30 minute once-off language test and a brief essay to write based on the use of tenses which will be followed by a short interview. As a researcher, I will not disclose learners' personal information and their results will not be shared with anyone. After writing up the research report, the data will be destroyed, however, a summary of results can be given to the respondents at their own or their parents' request.

If you would like to grant the requested permission, please complete the **attached form** and give it to your child who will give it to his/her English teacher, in turn. I will be grateful for your positive cooperation in this regard.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

TJ THIVHAFUNI [9106048]

ANNEXURE D: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN
PARENT/GUARDIAN.....

TO: Ms TJ THIVHAFUNI
STUDENT NO: 9106048
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
THOHOYANDOU

I, Miss/Mrs/Mr.....the parent/guardian of the learner.....Grade.....do hereby grant permission for my child, who is under-age, to participate in the research project titled: "Investigating past tense errors committed by Grade 10 English First Additional Learners in Tshinane Circuit Vhembe District which will be conducted atsecondary school/school premises as per request. I am free to be contacted at any given time should any need arise to do so.

Thank you,

Signature.....Date.....

Cell phone/Telephone.....

E-mail.....

INVESTIGATING PAST TENSE ERRORS COMMITTED BY GRADE 10 ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TSHINANE CIRCUIT, VHEMBE DISTRICT

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INVESTIGATING PAST TENSE ERRORS COMMITTED BY GRADE 10 ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TSHINANE CIRCUIT, VHEMBE DISTRICT

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

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