

EXPLORING GRADE 11 ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS'  
COMPETENCE IN THE USE OF TENSES: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED SCHOOLS  
IN THE VHUMBEDZI CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA

by

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## DECLARATION

I, *Farisani Thomas Nephawe* (Student Number: 8702342), hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy in English Language Teaching at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university, and that it is my own work in design and execution and that all reference materials contained herein, have been duly acknowledged.

Signature:..... Date:.....

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late wife, Mrs MJ Nephawe, and my children, Tshifhiwa, Wanga and Fulufhelo, for supporting me during the development of this thesis. This thesis is also dedicated to my parents, who made it possible for me to be who I am today. Lastly, it is dedicated to my fellow Ngwaniwapo traditional leaders for going through a painstaking exercise, because of my frequent absence from our indispensable chiefs' meetings.

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## ABSTRACT

Learning English as a second language by the South African learners studying English First Additional language (EFAL) presents many challenges, such as poor competence in the use of tenses, because of the differences between the learners' first and second languages. In Grade 11, which is the closest point with regard to the exit point to institutions of higher learning or to the workplace, learners still display certain discrepancies in the mastery of the English tenses. These discrepancies occur despite the fact that in many South African schools, English is used as a medium of instruction and is learnt as a First Additional Language. The study used pragmatist research paradigm to collect data from the sampled respondents.

The study answered four questions based on the types of errors committed in the use of tenses, the description and evaluation of errors, establishment of the causes of errors; and remedial measures for the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses. Thus, Error Analysis Approaches were applied to find learners' errors committed in written tasks.

The types of errors identified include the inter-lingual transfer, overgeneralisation, false concept hypothesised, inadequate learning, fossilisation and ignorance of rule restrictions. Learners' errors occurred in the domains of the simple present, the simple past, the present perfect and the past perfect tenses, regular and irregular verb inflectional morphemes, third person singular and plural subjects; and subject-verb agreement. In essence, this study reveals that some learners still face challenges in the use of tenses. Thus, remedial measures were suggested for the errors committed.

**Key words:** *competence, error analysis, grammar, tense, inflection.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
DECLARATION.....	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS .....	xi
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	5
1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY .....	6
1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY .....	6
1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	7
1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	7
1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY .....	7
1.8 DEFINITIONS OF THE OPERATIONAL TERMS .....	8
1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY .....	10
1.10 SUMMARY.....	11
<b>CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	13
2.2 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS.....	13
2.3 ERROR ANALYSIS APPROACH .....	21
2.4 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE MODEL .....	26
2.5 GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE THEORY .....	28
<b>CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	30

3.2	IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR IN THE STUDY OF A LANGUAGE .....	30
3.3	TENSE DEBATE.....	33
3.3.1	Simple present tense.....	38
3.3.1.1	Third person singular verb inflectional morphemes.....	41
3.3.3.1	Past participle verb inflectional morphemes .....	59
3.3.4	Past perfect tense.....	65
3.3.5	Infinitive marker <i>to</i> .....	69
3.3.6	Third person singular and plural subjects.....	70
3.3.7	Subject-verb agreement.....	71
3.4	SUMMARY.....	72
	<b>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>74</b>
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	74
4.2	RESEARCH APPROACH.....	74
4.2.1	Quantitative research approach .....	75
4.2.2	Qualitative research approach .....	75
4.3	CASE STUDY.....	76
4.4	RESEARCH SETTING .....	76
4.5	POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE.....	77
4.6	SAMPLING METHOD.....	78
4.7	RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS .....	78
4.9	DATA COLLECTION .....	80
4.10	DATA ANALYSIS.....	81
4.11	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY .....	82
4.11.1	Validity.....	82
4.11.2	Reliability.....	82
4.12	PILOT STUDY.....	82
4.13	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	83

4.13.1	Informed consent .....	83
4.13.2	Right to privacy: anonymity and confidentiality .....	84
4.13.3	No harm to respondents.....	84
4.14	SUMMARY.....	84
<b>CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.....</b>		<b>85</b>
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	85
5.2	RESPONDENTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (QUANTITATIVE).....	85
5.3	DATA ON THE USE OF TENSES: CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS ...	91
5.3.1	Quantitative research approach analysis .....	92
5.3.1.1	<i>Types of errors, their descriptions, and causes</i> .....	92
(a)	Simple present tense .....	92
(b)	Simple past tense.....	111
(c)	Present perfect tense.....	123
(d)	Past perfect tense.....	129
5.3.2	Qualitative research approach analysis .....	135
5.3.2.1	<i>Types of errors, their descriptions, and causes</i> .....	135
(a)	Simple present tense .....	136
(b)	Simple past tense.....	145
(c)	Present perfect tense.....	153
(d)	Past perfect tense.....	156
(e)	Substitution of tenses.....	159
(f)	The use of the infinitive marker <i>to</i> .....	160
5.4	SUMMARY.....	162
<b>CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE STUDY, SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ...</b>		<b>163</b>
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	163
6.2	OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE STUDY .....	165

6.3 SUMMARY.....	167
6.4 CONCLUSION.....	171
6.5 LIMITATIONS.....	172
6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	173
REFERENCES.....	176
ANNEXURE A: QUESTIONNAIRE .....	202
ANNEXURE B: ETHICS CLEARANCE (UNIVERSITY OF VENDA) .....	207
ANNEXURE C: PERMISSION APPLICATION LETTERS.....	208
ANNEXURE D: GRANTED PERMISSION LETTERS.....	215
ANNEXURE E: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN .	223

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1 : Biographical information of respondents .....	86
Table 5. 2 : Coordinative apposition.....	96
Table 5.3 : Descriptive statistics (simple present tense) .....	110
Table 5.4 : Terminal consonants phoneme changes .....	113
Table 5.5 : Ablaut principle.....	116
Table 5.6 : Zero-marking principle .....	118
Table 5.7 : Descriptive statistics (simple past tense) .....	122
Table 5.8 : Present perfect tense .....	123
Table 5.9 : Descriptive statistics (present perfect tense).....	128
Table 5.10 : Past perfect tense .....	129
Table 5.11 : Descriptive statistics (past perfect tense).....	134

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1	:	Vhembe District Municipality map: schools' distribution.....	77
Figure 5.1	:	Respondents by 'school' (n = 70).....	87
Figure 5.2	:	Respondents by 'age' (n = 70).....	88
Figure 5.3	:	Respondents by 'gender' (n = 70).....	89
Figure 5.4	:	Respondents by 'years in Grade 11' (n = 70).....	90
Figure 5.5	:	Respondents by 'dwelling place' (n = 70).....	91
Figure 5.6	:	Proximity principle: nouns closest to verbs.....	93
Figure 5.7	:	Proximity principle: nouns not closest to verbs.....	94
Figure 5.8	:	Collective nouns.....	99
Figure 5.9	:	Indefinite pronoun (determiner 'no').....	101
Figure 5.10	:	Indefinite pronoun (determiner 'none').....	102
Figure 5.11	:	Relative clause antecedents.....	104
Figure 5.12	:	Relative pronoun ('who').....	105
Figure 5.13	:	Quasi-coordinators.....	107
Figure 5.14	:	Suppletion.....	112

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

B.C.	:	Before Christ
CAH	:	Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
EA	:	Error Analysis
ECA	:	English Curriculum Advisors
EFL	:	English Foreign Language
EFAL	:	English First Additional Language
LoLT	:	Language of learning and teaching
N	:	Number of respondents
NSC	:	National Senior Certificate
SPSS	:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
{sic}	:	An error that is reproduced
Std	:	Standard
TESL	:	Teaching English Second Language

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This chapter comprises the background to the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, definitions of the operational terms, structure of the study and summary.

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

English is the principal *lingua franca* throughout the world as it is essential for international communication in commerce and tourism, in economic and military aid (Greenbaum, 1991). According to Petchtae (2011), English has achieved a genuinely global status and enjoys advantages over other languages. In South Africa, English is one of the 11 official languages, and it is a non-native language, which is recognised and adopted as a medium of instruction in schools. Although second language (L2) learners need to listen, speak, read and write with confidence and enjoyment; in the deep rural traditional villages of South Africa, these learners are not competent in English grammar with specific reference to the use of tenses.

Lemmer (1995) postulates that the use of tenses may have a detrimental effect on the mastering of academic content by the L2 learners. For instance, if L2 learners do not meet the required standard of using tenses at a high level of proficiency nor receive the requisite knowledge and practices (Mosha, 2014); language learning becomes difficult to handle. Although Lambani (2015) postulates that the mastery of EFAL is a fundamental qualification for future job opportunities, these L2 learners do not represent the ideas they intend to convey. For this reason, the use of English as L2 has been problematic for non-native learners throughout the world.

A number of studies have constantly been conducted on learners' competence in the use of tenses all over the world; only some limited findings will be highlighted in this study. In Europe, Butterworth, Garrett and Vigliocco (1996) conducted a study on competence in the use of tenses and found that learners commit tense errors in simple present and simple past tenses. In Thailand, Petchtae (2011)

conducted research on competence in the use of tenses and discovered that the majority of students could not use the past participle tense correctly. In Indonesia, Megaiab (2014) conducted research on competence in the use of tenses and discovered that English tenses were problematic for the students. In Malaysia, Darus and Subramaniam (2009) conducted a study on English essay writing with 72 respondents and found that competence in the use of tenses has been a challenge to them.

In Namibia, Mungungu (2010) studied the competence of English L2 learners and found that the Namibian students committed errors when trying to improve their competence in the use of tenses. In South Africa, Ntombela (2008) and Nzama (2010) conducted a study on competence in the use of tenses among the rural secondary schools' learners; and found that learners were incompetent in the use of tenses. In this regard, Lado (1957) developed the theory of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), while Corder (1967) introduced Error Analysis (EA) Approach to indicate the state of the learners' knowledge to teachers, future researchers, and learners themselves. Based on this insight, there is a need to use the theory of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Error Analysis Approach as basic techniques for analysing L2 learners' errors.

As languages comprise listening, speaking, reading and writing skills; in South Africa, grammatical features including verb tenses, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling are predominantly taught in English in both rural and urban schools. Writing entails the use of tenses, but these tenses make writing difficult for the reader to read and understand (Noor, 1985). In this regard, CoBuild (1994); Reishaan (2013) and Jara (2015) assert that the morphological inflection of the verb forms expresses distinctions in time; and shifts the perspective from things that are happening now, have already happened, or will happen in future. Therefore, tenses are expressed in a verb form to indicate the time at which an event takes place.

In English, the verb tense differs from time, in that the former refers to a grammatical category of a verb, while the latter involves a category of meaning (Huddleston, 1988). Therefore, the knowledge of tenses is indispensable, not only

for learners who have learning barriers with regard to the English language but also for L2 learners in general. Thus, despite the disparity between verb tenses and time, competence in the use of tenses promotes effective communication.

As verb tenses are language specific and crucial for the development of languages, the concept of 'tense' has not been completely understood (Schubert, 2011) despite the increase in its knowledge base over the years, traditional and modern grammarians emerge with different opinions regarding the number and existence of certain verb tenses in English. Traditional grammarians hold that English consists of three main verb tenses: the present, the past and the future (Palmer, 1974) while the modern grammarians contend that there are only two true verb tenses: the present and past (Comrie, 1985) since there is no future tense (Moldova, 2009). However, according to Alzuhairy (2016), English consists of more than three tenses. In this situation, the concept of 'tense' is one of the most controversial grammatical features in the English language.

Although there are several verb tenses in English, the current study focuses on the simple present, simple past, present perfect and past perfect tenses due to the challenges they pose to L2 learners with regard to the inflection of regular and irregular verbs. The simple present tense is formed by inflecting the '-s' or '-es' ending to the base form of regular verbs (Woodward English, 2018), which is predictable, as in *plays* and *passes*; while irregular verbs are unpredictable and can be formed in a number of ways, as in *fly/flies*. It includes an action occurring at the present moment (*John drives a car*), shows what habitually (Sherman, Slawson, Whitton & Wiemelt, 2010) is true (*The earth is round*), expresses an intention (*The train leaves tomorrow*), and states a custom (*Eskimos live on mountains*). Therefore, the simple present tense is the most used tense in English as there are a number of instances in which it is used.

The simple past tense (preterite), entails a verb action that ended in the past (Uchiyama, 2006), as in *He drove a car*. According to Sherman *et al.* (2010), it is formed by the addition of the '-d' ending to the stem of all regular verbs, for example, *decide/decided*. However, an extra allomorph /-ed/ occurs after the /-t/ and /-d/ sounds, as in *grant/granted*. In this regard, the /-t/ allomorph occurs after

all voiceless consonants, for example, *kick/kicked*, while the /-d/ allomorph occurs after all voiced consonants such as *derive/derived*.

The formation of irregular verbs often presents a challenge to L2 learners due to the lack of a similar pattern of phonological conditioning, as in *try/tried*, although it is evident in the pronunciation of the regular past tense form of the verbs. In addition, the marking of the simple past tense occurs in a variety of ways including zero markings (no suffix nor stem change, for example, *put* and *cut*), terminal consonant phoneme change (for example, *bend/bent*), ablaut or apophony (a single vowel change, for example, *dig/dug*); suppletion (the whole word changes, for example, *go/went*). The simple past tense can be formed without the use of any auxiliary verb (Grammar Bytes, 2006), as in *He kicked the ball*.

The present perfect tense refers to an action or state of affairs that happened at an indefinite time in the past before another time or event (Mcintosh, 2017) and continues to the present. Lester and Beason (2013) postulate that the present perfect tense is formed by combining *has/have* with the past participle form of verbs. However, L2 learners are likely to commit errors when using the *has/have* as main verbs or auxiliaries because the conjugation of irregular verbs does not follow the typical pattern ‘-t’ in *keep/kept/kept*, ‘-en’ in *fall/fell/fallen*, ‘-n’ in *prove/proved/proven* or the ‘-ne’ in *go/went/gone* or *do/did/done*. Thus, without the auxiliary verbs *has/have*, actions that started in the past and continued to the present cannot be presented.

The past perfect tense entails actions that took place in the past before another past action began (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006). It is formed by combining *had* with the *past participle* form of the verbs. According to George (2015), irregular verbs take the suffix ‘-n’, and ‘-en’ morpheme to form past participle form of verbs; while regular verbs use the suffix ‘-ed’, as in ‘*He listened to the song*. Hence, the past perfect tense is extremely difficult as it cannot be replaced by any other English tense.

L2 learners use the rules of the components and elements (Ramelan, 1992) inappropriately when attempting to construct grammatically correct sentences based on their level of understanding. Kyeyune (2003) asserts that the inability to

master English tenses at an adequate level can be a serious setback and debilitating hurdle for learners, despite their determined struggle to improve their knowledge levels. Thus, L2 learners' grammatical competence can be affected negatively by the poor mastery of the English language.

South Africa is not an exception as the majority of learners, and their teachers are English L2 speakers who are required to learn most of their subjects in English in order to facilitate teaching and learning. Therefore, the design of this study necessitates the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The purpose of using these two approaches was to combine, collate and corroborate the findings from each approach so that the results derived from learners' written tasks can be reliable, valid and credible.

In essence, to pass examinations, L2 learners are expected to write meaningful and complete sentences. However, in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa, Grade 11 and 12 learners often write sentences that cannot represent the ideas they intend to convey, and cannot perform well in their final examinations. In this regard, the researcher decided to explore the types of errors, describe and evaluate them, establish their causes, and suggest remedial measures for the errors committed in learners' written tasks with particular reference to the use of tenses in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The numerous verb tenses of the English language make its mastery a challenge to many. Amongst others, these verbs cover aspects such as the state of being, progressive and completed actions. There is no proficiency in the language without the correct usage of the verb in regard to the tenses, which forms the cornerstone of a language. Any attempt to disregard this fundamental obligation results in sentences expressing something other than what was intended by the speaker or leads to a misunderstanding by the listener or reader. The status accorded to the English language both socially and educationally, compels the users to master the correct verb usage for general effective communication and improved results for learners, respectively.

Although the South African curriculum emphasises the importance of the teaching and learning of English verb tenses from as early as Grade 4, many EFAL learners still struggle with the correct usage of verb tenses. Every year when Grade 12 learners write their National Senior Certificate (NSC) final examinations, the South African public expect them to perform well. However, it is a concern that these learners do not perform according to expectations. Over the past five years, Grade 12 EFAL results have been hovering around 58%. This has been the situation despite the exposure of students to different tenses and other language structures introduced through the teaching of parts of speech and their appropriate conversions in sentences, the years learners have spent learning English both as a subject and as a language; and the status accorded the English language as the medium of instruction.

Amongst others, the Vhumbedzi Circuit is one of the underperforming circuits in the Vhembe District, South Africa. There is a suspicion that poor performance may be caused by the fact that Grade 12 learners are not competent in the use of the English verb tenses, including the simple present, the simple past, the present and the past perfect tenses. Based on this premise, this study sought to explore Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of the tenses in the selected secondary schools within the circuit.

### 1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to explore Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa; and suggest possible remedial measures for the errors committed.

### 1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective of this study was to explore Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa. To achieve the main objective, the study sought to follow the following objectives:

- To identify the types of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses;

- To describe and evaluate the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL Language learners in the use of tenses;
- To explore the causes of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses; and
- To suggest possible remedial measures for the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempted to answer the next questions:

- What types of errors are committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?
- How can errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses be described and evaluated?
- What are the causes of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?
- What are the possible remedial measures for the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?

## 1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study can improve the teaching and learning of Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence by highlighting specific and common tense errors made by learners in their written tasks. As learners may face difficulties with the use of tenses, teachers can assist learners by bringing tense errors to the learners' attention so that they can avoid them, and improve their English proficiency. Study material developers and curriculum designers can gain insight into the types and causes of tense errors faced by the learners, and develop materials that can be used against those errors. The study can contribute to the debate on tense errors, and the significant issues that merit further research.

## 1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Due to the large number of potential respondents in the Grade 11 EFAL subject, learners' competence in the use of tenses, the sampled population involved in this

study comprised of 70 learners (10% of 704 learners) from five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa. This circuit is located in the deep rural traditional villages stretching eastwards from beyond the Tshamutshedzi River and form the border between the Kruger National Park and the Vhembe District.

## 1.8 DEFINITIONS OF THE OPERATIONAL TERMS

The following definitions are provided to bring coherence and uniformity of the operational concepts throughout the study:

**Competence** refers to a complete mastery and native-like control of two languages and production of meaningful utterances in the other language. It entails a person's subconscious knowledge of the rules governing the formation of speech in the language (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006); and refers to a cluster of related abilities, knowledge and skills enabling learners to act effectively in a wide variety of situations.

**English First Additional Language** is defined as the proficiency level at which the second language is offered (National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12, 2012). It is learnt neither as native nor acquired language. It is used as a medium of learning and teaching in education.

**Error analysis** is a process used by researchers and teachers to observe, analyse, classify and systematically interpret the unacceptable forms or incomplete language learning (Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Hamid & Quayyimah, 2014) produced by learners. Hence, it uncovers and reveals the incidence, nature, causes, and consequences of errors.

**Grammar** refers to a set of rules and examples dealing with the syntax and word structures of a language (Nordquist, 2017). In addition, Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) assert that it entails the rules governing the configurations that the syntax of a language assumes, and are known by all the L1 speakers.

**Inflection** is a change in the form of a word resulting from the addition of appropriate suffixes to obtain the meaningful form of the word (Fowler, 1985; Tidke,

Binuyakya, Patil & Sugandhi, 2013). It indicates a grammatical relationship, for example, declension, conjugation, and comparison for changes made in words by modifying their meanings.

**Morphemes** refer to a homogeneous, indivisible units of linguistic form linking some components of meaning (Anderson, 2016) with a set of mutually exclusive allomorphs. It consists of a word element that cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts without changing its meaning or leaving a meaningless remainder.

**Morphology** is defined as, the study of the structures of words regarded as free morphemes or combination of morphemes. Peters (2013) explains that it refers to the internal structure of words, meaning, units of which they are composed. Thus, it deals with the inflectional and derivational processes used in forming such words and their meaning.

**Subject-verb agreement** refers to the agreement between subjects and verbs in number. Mcintosh (2017) notes that subject-verb agreement is a specialised situation in which the words in a sentence match one another according to the rules of grammar.

**Syntax** is the body of rules followed by the speakers of the language when combining words into sentences (Barker,1989). Therefore, syntax refers to the backbone of grammar as it entails the structures, which constitute sentences and the combination of words into plurals and clauses, which can form predictions.

**Tense** is a grammatical category of a verb expressing time reference, and places a state/action in time. It refers to the form of a verb which shows whether reference is being made to the past, present or to the future (Jabbari, 2013). Thus, it entails a linguistic phenomenon involving the selection of suitable verbs expressing an action.

**Time** with reference to tenses presents a grammatical category of a meaning (Huddleston, 1988) embedded in a verb. Jabbari (2013) signifies that it is an extra-linguistic concept determined by the moment the speaker chooses to speak. Thus,

time is a mental projection of the real-time visualised by a speaker to be understood by the hearer.

A **verb** is, a word that characteristically is the grammatical center of a predicate, and expresses an action, occurrence, or state of being (Nordquist, 2017). It is a word/group of words denoting action, occurrence, or a state in which a thing or a person exists, or joins the subject of the sentence in the written or spoken language.

## 1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into six chapters which sought to explore Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa.

### CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 presents the background to the study, explains the importance of English as an internationally acclaimed language. It presents a statement of the problem, the aim of the study, objectives of the study, "research questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study;" and the definitions of the operational terms. This chapter ends with the structure of the study.

### CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework underpinned by Lado's (1957) CAH, Corder's (1967) EA Approach, Hymes' (1972) Communicative Competence; and Chomsky's (1965) Grammatical Competence. It presents Corder's four steps, which can be used in analysing errors as a way of understanding the types of errors, their description and evaluation, causes, and remedial measures.

### CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 presents the literature review comprising the importance of grammar in the study of a language, the tense debate, the simple present, the simple past, the present perfect, and the past perfect tenses as well the verb inflectional

morphemes. In addition, it presents the third person singular and plural subjects and subject-verb agreement.

## CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 presents a detailed description and discussion of the research methodology utilised in this study. It also presents the research approaches, the case study, the research setting, the population size, the sampling method, the research instrument, the development of the tasks, the data collection process, the data analysis process, validity and reliability, the pilot study and ethical considerations: informed consent, the right to privacy; and no harm to respondents.

## CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 presents the research findings, and discussions based on the data gathered through the use of questionnaires and the document analysis from the sampled respondents. It presents the findings from the quantitative research approach with the use of figures and tables with a descriptive statistics analysis for comparison purposes among sub-questions, tenses, and between males and female respondents. Lastly, it also presents the study findings from the qualitative research approach analysis.

## CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6 presents an overview of the whole study, a summary of the study findings, the conclusion, the limitations of the study, and the recommendations for further research. The purpose of making these recommendations is to improve Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses informed by the realities concerning the type of errors identified in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa.

### 1.10 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 has outlined the background to the study by highlighting EFAL competence in the use of tenses inside and outside the classroom situation. It also discussed a number of findings from the studies conducted throughout the world to signal the challenge faced by non-native learners of English as far as tenses are

concerned. In addition, it presented the problem statement, the aim and objectives of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the delimitation of the study, the definitions of the operational terms; as well as the organised structure of the study were also provided. Chapter 2 follows next and it discusses the theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework that forms the backbone of the current study as it is underpinned by Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, Corder's (1967) Error Analysis Approach, Chomsky's (1965) theory of Grammatical Competence and Hymes' (1972) Communicative Competence. Therefore, the researcher chose these approaches and theories, because of their relevance to the topic of the current study.

### 2.2 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS

The main idea behind the CAH was propounded by Lado in 1957 in his book, *Linguistics across cultures*, and was used extensively in the 1960s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of the L2 are more difficult to acquire than others (Rustipa, 2011). The view that the first language (L1) can play "a negative role (Fries, 1945) in the learning of the L2 started as early as in the forties and the fifties. During that time, it was found that the areas of difficulty can be deduced when using a foreign language. Thus, strategies for tackling difficulties in the learning of L2s were predicted.

Lado (1957) postulates that when two languages and cultures differ, there can be great difficulties in the learning of the L2. However, learning can become simple if these two languages and cultures are similar. If the L2 aspects are similar to those of the learners' L1, it may be easy for the L2 learners to comprehend; while those that are different, appear difficult to learn. On this basis, there was a necessity of developing a theory of communicative competence.

Noor (1985) asserts that language structures that are similar, may be easier to learn, but those that differ can be more difficult to master. The difficulties in acquiring a L2 may be caused by the differences in syntax that exist between the L1 and L2, which often translate into the 'interference of the systems of the L1. Therefore, the difficulties in L2 learning can be predicted through the comparison

of the structures of the two contact languages even though incorrect predictions of learner difficulties might be made. The differences between the structures of two languages (the L1 and the L2) can be helpful in the prediction of problems regarding a foreign language. In this situation, Sanchez-Escobar (2012) asserts that if the L1 and L2 differ greatly, the process of learning the L2 can be difficult. Therefore, Lennon (1991) postulates that the greater the difference, the greater the degree of expected difficulty in learning the L2. Hence, CAH is used as a method of explaining why some features of the L2 are more difficult to learn than others. Furthermore, Lukáčová and Pavelová (2017) also postulate that the difference between learners' L1 and L2 may cause difficulties in the mastery of the language.

In turn, behaviourist theories accentuate that learning is a habit since the regular use of the sentence structures may advocate the appropriate use of the language. This 'Surface Strategy Taxonomy' is based on how learners alter the surface structures of the language when they use it incorrectly; and how errors can be committed due to a change in surface structures in specific and systematic ways.

The purpose of CAH, therefore, is to investigate, predict and indicate the linguistic difficulties or errors that occur during the transfer of information from the learner's L1 to the L2. Zhang (2015) postulates that the difference between the learners' L1 and their L2 can be the main source of difficulty in the learning of the L2. The transfer of errors, may therefore, be caused by the interference of the learners' L1 to a certain extent which prevents them from acquiring the forms and rules (Corder, 1971) of the L2. Transfer errors can occur when there are great differences between the learner's L1 and 'the language the learner is trying to acquire.' Therefore, the interference of the L1 may constitute a negative influence on the learner's mastery of the L2.

In the course of investigating the differences between the L1 and the L2, the following assumptions are of considerable importance:

- The L1 can form the foundation upon which the L2 learner builds to learn another language;
- The structures that are similar in both the L1 and L2 can facilitate the acquisition of the foreign language (positive transfer); and

- The differences in the structure between the L1 and L2 can result in difficulties (negative transfer/ interference).

From these assumptions, it can be deduced that the L1 does not only play a negative role in L2 learning; it can also have a positive role as well. According to Mbau (2014), errors can be classified into four types: inter-lingual transfer, the context of learning, and the communication strategies applied by the speaker/writer. Richards (1971), Richards and Reppen (2014), also found overgeneralisation, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rule restriction, false concepts hypothesised, simplification, fossilisation, and inadequate learning usable in the identification of the tense errors in this regard.

### 2.2.1 Inter-lingual transfer

Inter-lingual transfer error may be the first source of errors as it refers to the effect of one language when learners are learning another language. The inter-lingual transfer can mostly occur in the early stages of learning other languages (Nurjanah, 2017). It can result from the learners' knowledge about the L1, which can still have a strong influence. Hence, the early stages of learning the L2 can be prone to inter-lingual transfer from the native language, resulting in the errors committed by L2 learners.

According to Brown (2000), this transfer can occur when sentences in the L2 exhibit interference directly traceable to learners' L1. During the inter-lingual transfer, both positive and negative transfer can take place. Positive transfer can occur when both the learners' L1 and L2, respectively, have the same linguistic features. It can be caused by transferring information from the L1 to the L2. Accordingly, an inter-language may be identified between English and Tshivenda where it is permissible to say in Tshivenda:

lyani ni dzhie tshidulo tshanga.

Go and take chair my

\*Go and take chair my

*Go and take my chair.*

The sentence: *\*Go and take chair my* (direct translation from Tshivenda) is ungrammatical and meaningless, whereas *Go and take my chair* is grammatical although it is impolite in the sense that there is a repetition of *going* and *taking*. However, even if the action of *going* has never been mentioned, the *taking* of the chair can still take place. Thus, to be polite in terms of the English usage, the best sentence construction could be: *Take my chair*.

*Negative transfer* is the type of transfer that can lead to the development of tense errors, making learning more difficult to handle. For instance, during this kind of transfer, some learners may still construct the sentence: *\*John kill the snake* instead of *John kills the snake* and *\*They kills a snake* instead of *They kill a snake*, thereby violating the rules of English grammar. Thus, L2 learners are seriously challenged as they tend to omit or add morphemes to verbs unnecessarily.

As the 'behaviourist learning theory' advocates that old habits contribute to the way of learning new habits, Ellis (1991: 176) postulates that:

In the context of learning a second language, the grammar programmed into the mind as the first language will interfere with the smooth acquisition of the second language. The interference happens as the result of what is called as proactive inhibition where the way in which previous learning inhibits the learning of new habits. An error is likely to arise in the second language because the learner will transfer the realization [sic] device from his first language into the second.

Therefore, Ellis (1991) is correct in postulating that when the L2 learners realise that learning becomes difficult, they transfer skills from the L1 to the L2. Consequently, during such a transfer of skills, errors are likely to occur in the L2 learning.

### 2.2.2 Intra-lingual transfer error

Intra-lingual transfer error is the second source of errors noticeable when the L2 learner is trying to construct a sentence. In contrast with the inter-lingual transfer, Brown (2000) asserts that intra-lingual transfer is the main factor that causes errors when learning other languages. Intra-lingual errors can happen to the L2 learners who have already known the rules pertaining to the L2.

Richards (1971) argues that although these errors refer to the language forms created by the L1 learner, they do not reflect the structure of the L1 nor the L2. These errors occur when the L2 learners attempt, to build up a hypothesis about the language from a mere limited experience obtained from the classroom or textbook (Huang, 2013). Therefore, learners may oversimplify the use of a language due to limited contact with the L2, or try to derive the rules behind the data which they have been exposed to.

Intra-lingual interference occurs when the L2 learners are confronting patterns within the structure of newly acquired language (Scovel, 2001) without considering how the L2 patterns might be in contrast with the learner's L1. Therefore, Kaweera (2013) sees it as a *deviate* form of language caused by conflicting information of the L2. AbiSamra (2003) notes that error analysis underscores the significance of errors in learner's interlanguage system. In this regard, intra-lingual transfer occurs when the L2 learner fails to achieve the intended meanings; and improvises rules based on the little knowledge they possess based on their L1.

According to Richards (1971), intra-lingual errors are language forms created by the learners; and do not reflect the structure of the learners' L1, instead, only the challenges faced by the learner could be reflected. Thus, a misleading explanation by teachers, the incorrect presentation of a structure or word in a course book, ineffectively memorised and improperly contextualised pattern can be the cause of this error.

### 2.2.3 Overgeneralisation

Overgeneralisation involves the application of the grammatical rule in cases where it does not apply. For instance, learners may say '*foots*' instead of '*feet*', or produce verbs like *bringed*, *goed*, and *cutted* without imitating the adults around them or without having learned those forms from the adults. These learners may be figuring out grammatical rules to form past tense verbs and plural nouns (Denham & Lobeck, 2010) and produced deviant structures in this way. It involves the use of previously available strategies in new situations (Richards, 2013). Thus, with regard to overgeneralisation, learners may overgeneralise the inflection of the suffix '-ed' to all irregular verbs without consideration of the other possible ways.

Learners may resist the effort to incorporate some fine distinctions that the other speakers make (Girard & Takashima, 1983; Hakuta, 1974; Takashima, 2009) through believing that the speech is understood by the speakers. If learners realise that their speech is unacceptably slow and hesitant when trying to communicate clearly, they over-extend certain grammatical rules and violate their restrictions by creating *deviant* structures on the basis of the evidence and experience of the L1 structures.

These learners may overgeneralise the rules of the language and create deviant structures if they have limited exposure and inadequate data, and want to find an easy way out to reduce their linguistic burden (Wen, 2013). In this situation, learners can regularise the language and ignore the exception to reduce the learning load or simplify the language structures. These deviant structures can be created in place of two regular structures.

Learners may omit the suffix ‘-s’ of the third person singular verb, as: *\*He come home every weekend* or add this ‘-s’ to the third person plural verb, as in *\*They comes home*. Similarly, learners may use the past tense marker ‘-ed’ in irregular verbs in the simple past, and the past participle form of verbs as one form or construction in one context; and extend its application to other contexts where it should not apply.

Learners may use the ‘-ed’ marker to almost all the irregular verbs in the simple past tense or the past participle form of verbs because they find themselves under the heavy pressure of all other endless forms, (Denham & Lobeck, 2013), as in *\*goed* instead of *went*, *\*runed* instead of *ran* or *run*; and *\*I’ve go* instead of *I have gone*. Therefore, these learners may be devising their ‘own grammatical rules’ and construct sentences that can be at their level of understanding.

#### 2.2.4 Incomplete application of rules

The incomplete application of rules is the systematic difficulty in the use of grammatical features, including tenses or sentence types. Importantly, the incomplete application of rules occurs when a learner fails to fully develop certain

structures required fully to produce acceptable sentences, as in *\*They very busy* or *\*I not eaten anything*. In this regard, these learners display poor competence in the use of tenses as they construct ungrammatical sentences.

#### 2.2.5 Ignorance of rule restrictions

The ignorance of rule restrictions refers to the type of transfer caused by using the rules that the learners have already acquired in the new contexts where they do not apply. It occurs when learners do not become aware of the rules and restrictions of a particular structure, use the incorrect analogy and memorise certain tenses. Learners may use *\*Boys and girls are busy sleeping* (present continuous) instead of *Boys and girls are asleep* (simple present tense). Denham and Lobeck (2013) posit that learners may add ‘-ed’ to all the verbs when forming the simple past tenses, for example, *\*They goed home*. Therefore, learners may add the suffix ‘-ed’ verbs unnecessarily; and form the sentence: *\*If I was you, I would do it* instead of *If I were you, I would do it*.

#### 2.2.6 False concepts hypothesised

This type of error occurs when errors are attributed to incorrect hypothesis and faulty rule learning formed by learners at various levels. False concepts hypothesised involves class developmental errors derived from faulty comprehension of the distinctions in the L2 resulting from the poor gradation of teaching items. It can be committed by both the teachers and learners in their classrooms. Bui Thi (2010) postulates that the false concept hypothesised entails errors committed by learners who may have developed the wrong assumption about the target language. Hence, it results in challenges in the formation of ungrammatical sentences by the L2 learners.

Touchie (1986) asserts that the false concepts hypothesised can be attributed to the incorrect hypotheses formed by learners when they are unable to differentiate between the present perfect continuous and the simple past tense, as in *\*He has died last year*. Touchie argues that even if the teacher teaches learners how to use the simple present tense forms of the verb *be*, learners may falsely assume that such forms are the markers, can be used with the simple past or the past

continuous tenses. For instance, learners may commit errors such as *\*Grade 11 learners are absent yesterday*, and *She is sleeping*, thinking that the copula 'is' is the marker of both tenses. Thus, the incorrect understanding of grammatical rules can also be the source of this error.

### 2.2.7 Simplification

Simplification occurs when learners choose simple forms and constructions instead of more complex forms and constructions, or reduce a complex aspect of grammar to a simpler set of rules. Learners reflect 'a process that is used when messages are conveyed with limited language resources.' Simplification may occur with limited contact with the L2 to lessen the speaker's linguistic burden (Lambani & Nengome, 2017). In this situation, learners may improvise their own rules based on the limited knowledge obtained earlier and then end up with erroneous suppositions, as in *\*She cook food on the stove* instead of *She cooks food on the stove* and *\*They likes to play soccer when it rains* instead of *They like to play soccer when it rains*.

### 2.2.8 Fossilisation

Fossilisation pertains to the persistence of errors in a learner's speech, despite progress in other areas of language development. Furthermore, fossilisation occurs when learners' grammatical development appears to have fossilised at a certain level, and recurring errors of both grammar and punctuation become permanent or non-stop features of a learners' speech. According to Nghikembua (2014), it results from the effect of the linguistic system of the L1 on the speech produced by learners. Besides, it is also caused by incorrect teaching and training, translating into some identifiable errors in the learner's speech.

During fossilisation, learners stop learning the language on the assumption that they have learnt enough of the language to communicate sufficiently. Consequently, they eventually invent their own syntax in contexts which may not be appropriate for such items (Selinker, 1972). Littlewood (1984) postulates that fossilisation could occur when the learners realise that the error does not disturb the fulfilment of communicative needs at any level. Gass and Schacter (1989)

assert that fossilisation is a stage which is short of success. Accordingly, during fossilisation by the L2 learners, there is no more development in the users' language.

Fossilisation is often coupled with fruitless conscious efforts to make drastic changes. Although there may be some brief changes, they are minor and can become a stable state. This problem can occur even after extended exposure (Spada & Lightbrown, 1993) to the target language. According to Brown (1994), fossilisation can even happen with people who are well instructed in the language, as in *\*I doesn't understand what she says*; and *\*We goes to church every Sunday*. Therefore, fossilisation can result in poor competence in the use of tenses, particularly by the learners in this context.

#### 2.2.9 Inadequate learning

This type of error is usually caused by under-differentiation and incomplete learning. An example of inadequate learning is the omission of the third person singular '-s' in the simple present tense, as in *\*He want to stay happy* or addition of third person singular '-s', as in *\*We prefers playing soccer to rugby*. Inadequate learning can also result from the addition of the suffix '-ed' in the past tense, as in *\*He cutted firewood yesterday* or omission of the suffix '-ed', as in *\*Last week Farisani play soccer in the playground*. Hence, inadequate learning is one of the major difficulties that are faced by the L2 learners.

### 2.3 ERROR ANALYSIS APPROACH

Corder's (1967) EA Approach refers to a technique, which is employed by the researchers and teachers to identify, classify and interpret the unacceptable forms produced by a language learner using any of the principles provided by the linguists systematically (Crystal, 1997; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Johansson (2018) notes that EA Approach describes errors in the learner language. It is often combined with CAH pragmatics, or discourse analysis (Köhlmyr, 2001). In turn, Al-Dhubib (2013) defines EA Approach as a branch of applied linguistics that studies and analyses the errors committed by learners. EA Approach was developed by Stephen Corder (1965) and his colleagues in the 1960s, and it

focuses only on speaking and writing productive skills (Lennon, 2008), but not on learner receptions, such as, listening and reading skills. However, writing is the most comprehensive skill used in the assessment of productive writing.

EA Approach can be done by means of the analysis method (Corder, 1974; Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). It can also be done through the 'Surface Strategy Taxonomy' to describe and classify errors committed as it can frame the work, and classify every error to the nearest element that can be identified in the learners' study of the L2. Thus, the EA Approach is an effective way of tracing and identifying learners' errors in languages; and it elucidates what and how learners learn when studying the L2.

According to Nzama (2010), learners learn more efficiently through the exploitation of the knowledge of the learner's dialect required for pedagogical purposes. It is the first approach to the study of L2 acquisition that includes an internal emphasis on learners' creative ability to construct language (Nurjanah, 2017). With this technique, heavy emphasis is placed on learners' errors and the evidence of how their errors can provide an understanding of the underlying processes of L2 learning or L2 acquisition. Thus, the theories behind EA Approach are based on the belief that language acquisition is a mentalist process, and that errors committed by learners give insight into what has already been acquired and what is not.

Erdogan (2005) asserts that EA Approach gives useful input for designing and carrying the teaching and learning processes out after the sources of errors have been discovered. In this context, learners' errors are beneficial in giving information about the language that a learner is using (Garrido & Romero, 2012). Thus, these errors indicate how a language is being learnt. In this way, they assist learners in discovering what they know and do not know about the L2.

Richards (1984) postulates that EA Approach indicates the learner's state of the language, and examines errors attributable to all the possible sources to elevate the errors' status from complete undesirability (Lennon, 2008) to the special status of the research project. According to Garrido and Romero (2012), learners themselves institute hypothesis testing to find out their level of learning. On the

other hand, teachers can understand the learner's progress in language learning. Errors can be viewed as red flags (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Shami, 2013), which signal the evidence of the learner's knowledge of the L2. Therefore, in the past, errors were undesirable and were identified diligently so that they could be avoided.

However, errors are now being viewed as evidence of a creative process in language teaching and learning, where learners employ hypothesis testing (Touchie, 1986); while teachers assess learning and teaching at the level of classroom experience so that priorities for future effort are developed (Richards & Sampson, 1974). It is important to note that researchers can explore how language is acquired and learnt by L2 learners in schools. Richards (1974) postulates that errors contain valuable information on the strategies used by learners to acquire the language. Investigations of errors can be done through judging the reluctance of learners towards learning (James, 1998). Thus, without errors, researchers, teachers and learners will not understand the status of the L2 learners' performance.

Nzama (2010:3) proposes the following reasons for studying learners' errors:

.. the pedagogical justification, namely that a good understanding of the nature of error is necessary before a systematic means of eradicating them could be found, and the theoretical justification, which claims that a study of learners' errors is part of the systematic study of the learners' language which is itself necessary to an understanding of the process of second language acquisition.

Therefore, a distinction can be drawn between an 'error' and a 'mistake'. Brown (1993) postulates that *mistakes* and *errors* are often used interchangeably, particularly by teachers in their classrooms regardless of the functions performed by each of them. Mistakes refer to a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip due to the failure to utilise a known system correctly. Thus, errors are inconsistent deviations occurring when learners have been taught a certain correct form; but they then use this form inconsistently, by using one form sometimes and another form at another time.

According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) and Nurjanah (2017), learners can make mistakes when writing or speaking due to a lack of attention, carelessness or performance slip caused by fatigue or excitement. In essence, mistakes occur because of memory lapses, physical states, or psychological conditions; and occur when learners use the correct forms sometimes and the wrong ones at other times. Hence, all people can make mistakes irrespective of whether they are native or the L2 speakers. When learners always use the forms incorrectly, it constitutes an error, but if they can correct their own deviant writing, it is a mistake, however, if they cannot correct their own mistakes, errors are committed.

Native speakers are normally capable of recognising and correcting such mistakes, which are not the result of a deficiency in competence, but occur because of a breakdown in the production process. Errors can be systematic if they occur repeatedly without having been recognised by the learner; and either the teacher or researcher would locate them (Gass & Slinker, 1994). They can be non-systematic when occurring in the learner's L1 and are not significant with regard to the learning of the L2. Thus, errors are linguistic parameters that cannot be activated by native speakers.

In addition, errors are classified and assessed (Corder, 1981; Fauziati, 2009; Burt & Kiparsky, 1975) into overt/global errors and covert/local errors with regard to their interference with communication. *Global errors* refer to errors that affect the overall sentence organisation and consist of sentences that are grammatically well-formed to make the meaning apparent, and are evident only in context. They do not hinder communication significantly, as in *Where you live?*, instead of *Where do you live?*

However, *local errors* hinder proper communication significantly as they are ungrammatical and make an utterance difficult to understand. Although these errors affect single elements in sentences, either the listener or the reader understands nothing of the communication, as in *\*Yesterday she entertained by that movie*. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) contend that these errors are not interpretable in the context of communication as their 'Surface Structure Taxonomy' is based on the ways surface structures are altered in erroneous

sentences. Thus, these types of errors hamper the competence of the L2 learners regarding the use of tenses, and finally disrupt communications.

According to Lennon (2008), the procedure for EA was described by Corder (1974) as comprising five stages:

- Collection of the sample of learner language;
- Identification of the errors;
- Description and evaluation of errors; and
- Explanation of the causes of errors.

In the first step, researchers collect a sample of learner language. As the type of sample that is collected, may influence the nature and distribution of the errors observed, it is important to describe the type of discourse collected and whether learners had time to answer their questions efficiently or not. The second step involves the identification of errors by making a comparison between what the learner has produced and what a native speaker counterpart would produce in the same context. It is assumed that every sentence that a learner produces is erroneous so that those sentences, which are well-formed through comparison with a native speaker's samples, are eliminated to identify errors in sentences.

The third step involves the description and evaluation of errors, which is done through comparison of the learners' erroneous sentence with a reconstruction of expressions in the target language (Nghikembua, 2014). In order to describe errors, a linguistic taxonomy is required. This taxonomy is referred to as a Surface Structure Taxonomy (Ellis, 1994). Thus, these steps, which can be used when analysing errors assist researchers, teachers and learners with identifying errors, describing and evaluating them, establishing their causes; and suggesting their remedial measures. These surface structures are altered by the modification of the target forms (Krashen & Acarcella, 1978; Sompong, 2014; Wahyudi, 2015) in specific ways such as:

**Omission** occurs when sentences do not contain certain elements that have to exist in them. Thus, these elements are omitted although they should be present as in *\*My sister a crook* instead of *My sister is a crook*.

**Addition** entails the occurrence of an element that does not exist or should not be part of the sentence, for example, *\*She is want* instead of *She wants*. 'Addition' consists of the:

- Addition due to double marking, for example, *\*We didn't went* and *\*He doesn't writes*;
- Addition due to regularisations, for example, *\*She cutted* and *\*Those childs suffer*, and
- Addition due to simple addition, for example, *\*They doesn't take care of us*.

**Misinformation** involves the use of one grammatical form such as incorrect morphemes and structures in the place of another grammatical form, for example, *\*The dog eated it* and *\*They camed last week*. It consists of the next types of errors:

- Regularisations: The use of regular and irregular verbs in the wrong place, for example, *\*camed* instead of *come*;
- Archi-forms: The use of one class form to represent or describe another class form in different situations, for example, *\*That girl is mine*; and *That cars are theirs*;
- Alternating forms: When the learner mistakenly uses some forms alternatively, resulting in the wrong word, for example, *\*Those cat* instead of *Those cats*; and

**Misordering** is the incorrect placement of morpheme/s in sentences, for example, *\*We don't remember what is her name at this time* instead of *We don't remember what her name is at this time*

## 2.4 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE MODEL

The concept of 'communicative competence' was introduced by Hymes in 1971. It refers to the ability to select from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available as forms appropriately reflecting the social norms used to govern

behaviour in specific encounters. It also entails knowing what to say to whom in what circumstances and how to say it. Hymes' (1971) communicative model was refined by Canale and Swain (1980) who postulate that it entails the underlying system of knowledge (conscious or unconscious) of an individual about language and its use and the skill needed for communication. This knowledge entails the ability to produce a grammatically correct sentence (Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2007). However, L2 learners cannot always produce grammatically correct sentences. Thus, this knowledge entails the ability to combine utterances and communicative functions in discourse principles.

Canale and Swain (1980) propose four components of communicative competence.

- **Grammatical competence**

*Grammatical competence* entails the ability to use knowledge of grammatical structures and lexical items including morphology (the formation of words), syntax (combination of words and phrases), semantics (conveyance of meaning through language), vocabulary (body of words used in languages), phonology (attachment of speech sound to the words); and mechanics, pertaining to the use of inventions such as punctuation.

- **Sociolinguistic competence**

*Sociolinguistic competence* refers to the ability to produce sociolinguistical utterances, including the interpretation or production of languages in different sociolinguistic contexts (appropriateness).

- **Discourse competence**

*Discourse competence* involves the ability to combine forms and meanings to achieve unified spoken or written texts (cohesion and coherence).

- **Strategic competence**

*Strategic competence* is the ability to organise messages effectively and compensate for communicative breakdowns when there is insufficient grammatical

competence (verbal and non-verbal conversion strategies). Canale and Swain (1980) and Lyster (1996) suggest that these communicative competences function together in language production to enhance the communicative competence of an individual. However, in this study, these competences are narrowed down into grammatical competence as the cornerstone of the topic under discussion:

## 2.5 GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE THEORY

This theory refers to the system of linguistic knowledge possessed by native speakers of a language. Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that grammatical competence focuses on the command of the language code, including such aspects as the rules of word and sentence formation, meanings, spelling and pronunciation. Canale and Swain (1980) also postulate that the idea behind grammatical competence is the same with the mastery of forms and meanings (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010) promoting accuracy and fluency translatable into proficiency interpreted as communicative competence. However, even if learners can use correct grammar in their daily oral language performance, they may not have the competence of the rule.

Grammatical competence refers to the unconscious knowledge of grammar, allowing speakers to use and understand a language (Nordquist, 2017), although such knowledge is innate and unconscious (Chomsky, 1965). A person can match sounds and meanings to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical ones. In this situation, some level of grammar is required to learn words and sentence formation, meanings, and vocabulary that can be used in effective communication.

Grammatical competence has been widely adopted as the only level of language that is studied throughout the world. It is concerned with the mastery of the linguistic code (Gao, 2001; Ma, 2009; Woods, 2010), which consists of knowledge of morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic, vocabulary, orthographic rules; and mechanics known as the use of inventions such as punctuations. Therefore, the aim is to acquire knowledge and ability that can be used in the expressions full of correctness and eloquence.

According to Savignon (1983), grammatical competence is important when creating effective communication. Therefore, when the learner advances in proficiency, there is also an increase in its importance because grammatical competence involves the accurate use of words and structures. It focuses only on speaking and writing productive skills or the knowledge for better understanding of the expression of literal meaning. According to Subasini and Kokilavani (2013), correct grammar avoids the misuse and misinterpretation of the language. However, error-ridden communication makes it harder for interlocutors to express their ideas clearly and concisely to each other.

According to Wardhaugh (2018), the learner's knowledge of grammatical structures, usage and appropriateness can be useful in a given social context. It can result in "the shift of emphasis from the formal rules of language to what makes language appropriate in a given situation" (Gillett, 2005). This shift can occur even after the learner has already mastered the grammatical features making language an effective tool of communication. Thus, the knowledge of grammatical competence is a prerequisite for the development of effective communication.

## 2.6 SUMMARY

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework based on Lado's (1957) theory of CAH; Corder's (1976) EA Approach, Hymes' (1972) Communicative Competence and Chomsky's (1965) Grammatical Competence. It has been found in the current study that no theory can be applied in isolation, but is rather reliant on the support of the others for better functioning. The types of errors discussed in Lado's CAH theory, and Corder's steps of EA Approach are invaluable for communication. Thus, both communicative competence and grammatical competence discussed in this chapter are useful for communication. The next chapter deals with the literature review of the study.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 presents the importance of grammar in the study of a language, the tense debate, the simple present, the simple past, the present perfect, and the past perfect tenses. It also presents the third person singular and plural subjects, the third person singular inflectional verb morphemes, the subject-verb agreement, the simple past tense inflectional verb morpheme and the past participle verb inflectional morphemes.

### 3.2 IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR IN THE STUDY OF A LANGUAGE

'Grammar' is a complex concept which means different things to different people. To ordinary people, it connotes correctness or incorrectness of the language that people speak, while school students view it as an analytical study of sentences. Therefore, analytic *grammar* makes the knowledge of rules used in the operation of the language more explicit than *operational grammar*. Thorne (1993) postulates that grammar entails taking language structures apart to see the way in which effective communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) can be achieved. In this regard, Thorne (1993) concurs with the rules pertaining to the use of grammar. Thus, grammatical competence is an indispensable aspect of communication required to establish good communicative competence.

These structures in language govern the proper use of the language" (Stork & Widdowson, 1974; Shaw, 1995; Debata, 2013), because not all combinations of words are acceptable in communication. For instance, the sentence: \**They ready are to come* is rejected in favour of *They are ready to come* as the former is ungrammatical while the latter is not. Accordingly, "grammar governs the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence" (Bin Abdulla, 2013). Therefore, grammar is not merely a collection of forms, but involves three dimensions such as morphosyntax (accuracy), semantics (meaningfulness) and pragmatics (appropriateness).

These dimensions are enhanced by the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, of which, writing is considered the most difficult skill in teaching and learning process (Richards & Reinandya, 2002; Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Therefore, a grammar does not only have a morphosyntactic form, but rather deals with the questions of *accuracy*, *meaningfulness* and *appropriateness* with regard to form, meaning and use. Thus, although these dimensions are different, they are interrelated, as a change in one, will normally constitute a change in the other.

Putra (2015) comments that L2 learners usually experience problems with using grammar properly when constructing words into correct sentences, while Muhsin (2016) argues that learners will find grammar difficult to handle if they do not have well-developed writing skills. L2 learners acquire communicative skills by being mutually exposed to grammatical rules (National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12, 2012), which should be emphasised to avoid poor competence in the use of tenses. Thus, grammar is indispensable for creating effective communication.

According to Patzold and Gramley (1992), English is preferable to other languages in South Africa for the following reasons:

- The usefulness of English in science and technology as compared to the local languages;
- The availability of suitable schoolbooks in English; and
- The status of English as an international language of wider communication, useful in administration, education, trade and diplomacy.

According to Wither (2015), grammar rules enable learners' thoughts to be expressed clearly. It also leads to the achievement of appropriate communicative goals (Zhang, 2015). However, if these rules are not emphasised, learners may commit errors when applying rules pertaining to the use of tenses.

Mart (2013) asserts that grammar skills help learners with the organisation of words and messages to be effectively meaningful in the language. Conscious understanding of grammar entails knowing the parts of sentences and how they work together, how sentences connect with one another to build meaning, and understanding; and how and why we use language (Haussamen, Benjamin, Kolln

& Wheeler, 2003). Hence, the knowledge of the rules of grammar is valuable in the development of language.

As a person's competence is judged according to the command of the language and errors in the use of tenses that may cause embarrassment during communication. These errors may arise since L2 learners neither master grammar nor understand the rules (Ramelan, 1992; Gass & Slinker, 1994; Muhsin, 2016) of language components and elements easily.

Cook and Richards (1980) posit that the English grammar consists of a number of rules pertaining to tenses, articles, parts of speech and sentence patterns, which should be considered carefully to make communication more effective. Ifeyinwa (2009) observes the fact that grammar involves a set of normative rules determining correctness in the use of language because all the rules that are applied mechanically, resulting in a well-constructed sentence. In turn, Praninskas (1980) explains that grammar assists students with learning the language, so that their sentences do not break its rules. Anizoba and Anizoba (2002) note that grammar does not only involve the application of the basic rules of a language to form acceptable sentences, but also involves its appropriateness. Therefore, it is necessary that L2 learners are conversant with the rules of grammar.

Grammatically correct sentences entail usages preferred among native speakers, educated or cultivated speakers. According to Chapman (2000), what is condemned in language can be a good sign of an educated English user. In communication, some utterances can be grammatically correct, while others are not. Therefore, judgment about the correctness of a language is possible if the phonology, fluency, construction of words and sentences and the comprehension of complex lexical and syntactic usage are correct.

According to Yule (1996), grammar constitutes what might be considered linguistic etiquette offering prescriptive statements about usages considered acceptable and those that are considered unacceptable in English. It involves the subject matter of a study, and highlights the importance of both CAH and EA Approach of the learner's L1 and the L2. A description of the structural patterns of the two languages exposes the similarities and dissimilarities between the languages and

the difficulties encountered in the process of learning the grammar of the L2. Hence, knowledge of the structures of the L2 is important for avoiding potential difficulties.

Importantly, grammar is used as a set of normative rules that determine correctness with regard to the use of a language and embody the morphological and syntactic rules of a language. It comprises a body of prescriptive statements about the usages that are considered acceptable and those that are not in a particular language; and the intuitive knowledge of the native speakers about their language. It involves *prescriptive rules* and *descriptive rules* determining the correct usage of the language, whereas *generative rules* provide instructions for the production of sentences. Thus, the rules of grammar cannot be put aside if one would like to be successful in achieving effective communication.

Furthermore, grammar involves how a language works (Chapman, 2000) as it deals with the acceptable systems and patterns operating in a language to attach meaning to an utterance. Grammar rules govern sounds, words combination, sentences construction and their interpretation in the language. For instance, \**She reject the boy's proposals* is disallowed in favour of *She rejects the boy's proposals*. Thus, the rules pertaining to the agreement between the subject and the verb for the imperative in making acceptable sentences.

According to Chomsky (1965), a fully functional grammar can be rendered complete by means of studying the structural pattern indicating how a sentence is to be understood by the interlocutors. It is apparent that in English, any deviation from the established and acceptable norm is ungrammatical. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) assert that if a subject contains a plural feature, the verb must have the same feature to make the sentence grammatically acceptable. Thus, if this rule which pertains to the structural pattern is violated, ungrammatical sentence construction may occur in communication.

### 3.3 TENSE DEBATE

According to Lester and Beason (2013), tense is one of the most confusing concepts in English grammar as it refers, often quite inconsistently, either to verb form or to verb meaning. Tense is a grammaticalized [sic] expression of location in

time (Uusikoskil, 2016), and determines time with reference to the time point of the act of speech. A third definition of a verb tense is that of Klein (1994) who explains that it entails the relations between the topic time and the time of utterance.” Therefore, these three definitions are far from being the only definitions, since there are a number of different definitions of tense. Hence, tense definitions may not be right or wrong depending on the meaning they propose; but can be more or less appropriate to a given study.

The choice of any concept affects every aspect of the study from data collection to a conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of the study. Close (1981), Nelson and Greenbaum (2015) concur with Uusikoskil’s (2016) assertion when they argue that this linguist attempted to give an informed interpretation of the notion of ‘tense’. As linguistic phenomena are not objective, language-independent entities, they may be defined subjectively in a variety of ways. Accordingly, the concept of ‘tense’ is difficult to understand since the perception of time is quite cultural (Schubert, 2011), whereas a verb and what it represents, is universal and not cultural. Thus, it is evident that tense does not rely solely on a particular definition, but may differ from one study to another.

English verb tenses include the past, the present and the perfect tenses but not the future tense as the latter does not belong to the notion of tenses. The simple past and the past perfect/pluperfect differ only in terms of the aspectual meaning, although they do not differ greatly. The sentence: *I slept the whole day*, for instance, is in an aspectual opposition with the past progressive *\*I was sleeping the whole day*, which is impolite and substitutes the past progressive for the simple past tense. Hence, a particular verb tense can be replaced by another and still means the same thing, for example, *I leave for England next week* (simple present) and *I will/shall leave for England next week*.

According to Lyons (1977), verb tenses ‘grammaticalise the relationship, which holds between the time of the situation being described and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context. Verb tenses are also used to mark the purely temporal relations of the past and the present time. Moreover, they can show a relationship between time and the verb forms. However, not all changes in the verb forms are directly related to time, since the way the action is understood to take place, also

affects the verb forms. According to Jabbari (2013), different verb forms show different conditions, including certainty, definiteness; possibility, and whether the action is completed. Hence, 'tense' is a linguistic concept involving the selection of a suitable verb tense to express a particular action.

Each main verb in English has five forms: *take/takes/took/taken/taking* used for the distinction of events in time. A verb can stand on its own in a sentence, as in *He takes his books* (the simple present), and *He took his books* (simple past). Thus, the verb can be supported by the relevant helping verbs or modals with regard to the time, the stage and the nuance of the action to be expressed in tenses, including, *He has taken his books* (present perfect), and *He had already taken his book when we arrived* (past perfect).

A verb can be that part of speech that describes an action, serving as a predicator in a sentence (Wen, 2013), for example, *come*, *become*, or *happen* which forms the main part of the predicate of a sentence. It indicates an action of body or mind, a state of being, or an occurrence, but not what the word is doing. On this basis, a verb moves the meaning of the sentence along and can change form to show time and person.

In English, sentences are structured around verbs, and they are central to the construction of sentences. Grammar Bytes (2014) avers that they are a necessary component of all sentences used to put stalled subjects into motion, while the other verbs clarify the subjects in meaningful ways by determining the other components of words in sentences; and defining the relationships among them. English consists of a one-word verb such as *type*, two-word verbs (*is typing*) and a three-word verb (*has been typing*). The verb 'be' makes a distinction between the present tenses, such as the simple present and the present continuous. Thus, the base form 'be' is completely different from its present form, as it consists of a number of forms including *am*, *is are* and their past forms.

The verb 'forms' are largely periphrastic as they are formed by a combination of words. Verbs in the simple present and the simple past tenses can be conjugated into another form by using the ending '-ed' for the simple past; and '-s' for the simple

present tense, although some English sentences require auxiliary verbs to add value, functionality and grammaticality of meanings. However, languages such as Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and Pedi, do not require verb inflections to change from one tense to another.

To create sensible and correct sentences, the verb phrase is placed into the correct order; most action verbs are inflectional as they have singular and plural forms, the progressive form, and the perfect form, as well as the simple past tense in regular and irregular forms. However, these verbs have different forms when used in different aspects of time. Hence, there are rules relating to the use of verb forms, which must be understood by all learners so that they can use them in different situations.

For all verbs, except 'be,' such distinctions are only found in the present tense where the third person singular has the '-s' form, whereas, the first, second and the third person plural do not have the '-s' form, as in *He comes home* and *The come home*. Therefore, the verb 'be' makes distinctions in the simple present tense verbs, such as *am* for the first person, *is* for the third person; and *are* for the third person plural, as in *I **am** not happy today*, *The boy **is** happy today*, and *The boys **are** disgusted today*.

The forms of verbs *being* and *been* require the ending '-ed' past participle form of verbs in the perfect tenses. The verb endings '-d' and '-ed' are identical in terms of verb inflection, as in *kick/kicked* and *wait/waited*. The regular verb consists of the base (*play*), ending '-s' (*plays*), and '-ing' (*playing*) present participle. The ending '-ed' in the simple past and the past perfect tenses, is added to the stem of the verb, as in *played* and *stitched*. Thus, tense entails the way a verb is formed to communicate when an action takes place.

Tense is different from time in that the latter is a mental projection of the real-time as visualised by a speaker to be understood by the hearer. The present time can be real-time to the minute, stretches to a part of the day, such as *evening*, *morning*, or may include the whole day. Time extends from a *day to a year/decade, or even a century*. However, tense concerns a grammatical category referring to "the time

of the situation indicated by the form or meaning of a verb” (Huddleston, 1988). Conversely, the ‘12 a.m.’ and ‘11 a.m.’ may both indicate actions in the past. However, *the morning, days, or weeks*, before that moment require the past form. Thus, time is determined by the moment the speaker chooses to speak.

English tenses led to the emergence of the traditional and modern grammarians with regard to the number and existence of some tenses, with regard to two tense forms, namely, the present and the past; three persons, the first, second, and third persons; and two numbers, such as singular and plural. According to traditional grammarians, including Palmer (1974), Hornstein (1990) and Reishaan (2013), English has three tenses such as the present, the past and the future. In contrast, modern grammarians contend that there has been no clear distinction among (Bin Abdulla, 2013; Noori, Al Shamary & Yasin, 2015) those three tenses over the years.

Escalas (2000) postulates that the English language consists of only the present and the past verb tenses. However, Tickoo (1976); William Bull, cited in Schubert (2011) and Alzuhairy (2016) contend that English has more than three tenses. However, the perception of the number and types of verb tenses that are present in English cannot be supported fully with facts because it consists of a number of tenses, although in this study, only those verb tenses that pose challenges to the L2 learners are addressed.

In English, a morpheme is used to combine stem words and suffixes and change them into another form. It is the smallest unit of which a word is composed, and in which there is an arbitrary union of a sound and a meaning or function (Kosch, 2004). It differs from a morph in that it involves a sequence of phonemes bearing a meaning and cannot be divided into smaller meaning-bearing phoneme sequences (Lockwood, 1993), neither does it constitute phonemic material referring to the phonological form of a morpheme. Therefore, a morph is the phonological representation of a morpheme and has an overt or concrete manifestation by means of which it can be recognised.

According to Lyons (1968), morphology in English comprises derivational and inflectional morphemes. Derivational morphemes can be either prefixes or suffixes, exhibit other differences and can change the meaning of a word or its part of speech, as in the prefix 'dis-' added to the base *like* in order to form a completely opposite meaning *dislike*; and suffix '-able' to form the adjective *likeable*. The inflectional morphemes can only be suffixes and show grammatical relationships, functions or meanings. However, a morpheme cannot be dissected further into small meaningful units as it has the same stable meaning in different verbal environments.

The suffix '-ed' for instance, added to the verb *walk* changes neither the meaning of *walk* nor its part of speech. In English, past participle suffixes including '-d', '-ed', '-n' and '-en' form appropriate verbs as they are used within the verb 'to have' in the present perfect tense and past perfect tense (Petchtae, 2011), as in *completed*, *cleaned*, *taken* or *done/befallen*. English words contain many derivational affixes, but only one inflectional affix. In this regard, if a word has an inflectional suffix and one or more derivational suffixes; the derivational suffixes will always precede the inflectional suffixes.

Although there are several tenses in English, in this study, verb tenses were narrowed down to the simple present, the simple past, the present perfect and the past perfect tenses due to the challenges that they pose to learners in written and spoken tasks. Thus, there is a need to identify the types of tense errors, describe and evaluate them, establish their causes; and suggest possible remedial measures for the errors committed.

### 3.3.1 Simple present tense

According to Sherman, Slawson, Whitton and Wiemelt (2010), the simple present tense refers to an unchanging, repeated, or recurring action or situation that exists only now, for example, *I smoke* to indicate that smoking is a habit to the speaker even though the speaker may not be smoking now. Lester and Beason (2013) postulate that the simple present form does not really mean the present time although it sounds rather awkward when used in the present tense, as in *I walk*

*now*, and *We run now*. The simple present tense is formed by combining the subject + verb + object which may sometimes be operationalised.

For all the verbs, except 'be,' there are two forms for the present, namely, the '-s' form and the 'base form'. The '-s' form is used for the third person singular and the singular noun phrases as a subject, for example, *He pushes the wheel*, and *The wheel turns full circle*. The 'base form' is used for all other subjects including *I we, they*, and plural noun phrases as subject, for example, *We water the plants*, and *The boys water the plants*. Woodward English (2018) explains that the verb conjugation in the simple present tense is formed by using the 'base form' of the infinitive, for example, *We speak Tshivenda at home*. Thus, the simple present tense is used to express what happens at the present moment and can mostly be seen by the presence of verbs in sentences.

Thompson and Martinet (1982:145), contend that although the:

...main use of simple present tense is to express habitual action, but it does not tell whether or not the action is being performed at the moment of speaking, and if this is to be made clear a verb in a present continuous tense should be added, for example, *My friend is drinking beer*. However, the simple present tense is used to describe an action that is regular, true or normal, including repeated or regular actions in the present time period.

The simple present tense can also express facts, or examples, *A cat sees well at night*), habits (*They go to church every Sunday*), things that are generally true (*It rains heavily in summer*), and to make the statement clear to indicate a routine action (*He usually goes to church at this time*) by using adverbs such as *often, usually, always, or generally*. Uchiyama (2006) observes that adverb/s including *sometimes, never, seldom, occasionally, twice a year, fortnightly, every week, and frequently* can indicate the frequency of an action, for example, *We occasionally visit the dentist*, and *I seldom read English books*. Therefore, adverbs assist with the indication of the time at which the action takes place whether in the past, the present or to the future.

The simple present tense can be used for a number of other purposes including what *is habitually true* (*The earth is round*), intention (*I am seeing Sarah tonight*), future action (*The train leaves tomorrow*), custom (*Eskimos live mainly on mountain*), dramatic narrative in plays and public functions (*Macbeth is the chief protagonist*), planned actions or series of actions (*We leave Dzwerani at 10.00 tomorrow* or *We spend two hours at Sibasa*), quoting someone or something, even if the words were spoken in the past (*This label says 'For domestic purposes only'*); and in newspaper headlines or television news, (*An 80-year-old woman falls pregnant*, and *Mandela dies aged ninety-two*). Thus, the fact that the simple present tense consists of a number of different functions, suggests that it is one of the most used verb tenses in English.

In addition, it can be used with verbs that cannot be used in the continuous form, such as, *love, see, hear, believe*, for example, to form sentence such as *I love you* instead of *\*I am loving you*, *Believe half of what you see* instead of *\*Believing half of what you seeing*. It provides a commentary on the occurring event, or describes some theoretical sequence of events, as in *According to the chief's idea, I welcome the guests, and you give a presentation*, or *I chop the chives and add them to the mixture*. In this regard, the simple present tense also indicates the sequence of events preferred by the speaker or writer.

The simple present tense can be used in a temporal adverbial, rather than in present progressive clauses, as in, *I can feel the pain in my stomach as I speak*. It can also be used for an action happening about this time, for example, *I write what I like*, and for the definite arrangement in the near future such as *I see Jane tonight*. Thus, the simple present tense also includes the time of speaking which usually extends backwards and forward in time, as in *We live in London*; an event that is simultaneous with the time of speaking, for example, *Here comes the tall woman*.

However, Chele (2015) postulates that the simple present tense causes problems, mainly where the third person singular forms are inflected, while others are not. In this regard, Leech and Svartvik (1994) observe that some learners view the third person singular number as troublesome, tantamount to a slip of the tongue, and,

therefore, lengthen the word and its pronunciation. Based on this insight, to avoid the issue of the speaker's message being ambiguous to the listeners and readers, English speakers and writers use the third person singular number with extreme caution.

### 3.3.1.1 Third person singular verb inflectional morphemes

Morphemes refer to a process where affixes combine with roots to signal basic grammatical categories, such as, tense or plurality, for example, *travel/travels* or *chair/chairs*. With regard to the inflectional morphemes of the third person singular verbs, the alveolar fricative phoneme 's' follows the same pattern of phonological conditioning. However, the 's' morpheme occurs where others do not, and can be pronounced in different ways depending on the sound of the last syllable of the verb (Jara, 2015). In the other words, it can be realised in three different allomorphs, for example, /-s/, /-z/ and /-iz/ inflected after the base forms ending in voiced, or voiceless sounds.

Likewise, Crystal (2008) points out that the third person singular verb inflectional morphemes are phonologically conditioned because the selection of the allomorph depends on the last sound of the verb. If a regular verb ends in a voiceless sound; the 's' allomorph marks the tense as present (Meyer, 2009), for example, *lick/licks* and *play/plays*. However, if the verb itself ends in a voiceless sound /-s/, or /-tʃ/; the 's' allomorph is not selected, for example, *kisses* and *preaches*. If the verb ends in a voiced sound, the 'z' allomorph marks the tense as the present tense, for example, *loves* and *proves*. When the verb itself ends in a voiced sound /-z, -ʒ, or -dʒ/; the 'z' allomorph is not selected, as in *criticise* and *jeopardises*. The suffix '-iz' allomorph marks all the English verbs that end in the /-s, -ʃ, -tʃ -z, -ʒ or -dʒ / sound, as in *kiss, rush, search, measure* and *judge*. Accordingly, these morphemes are useful in determining spelling and the inflection of regular and irregular verbs in spoken or written English.

In this context, Woodward English (2018) remarks that the spelling of verbs in the third person inflections differ depending on the verb endings, as in

- For verbs ending in **-o**, **-ch**, **-sh**, **-ss**, **-x**, or **-z**, the ending **-es** in the third person is added, as in *go – goes*, *catch – catches*, *wash – washes*, *kiss – kisses*, *fix – fixes* and *buzz – buzzes*.
- For verbs ending in a **consonant + y**, the **-y** ending is removed and the **-ies** is added, as in *marry – marries*, *study – studies*, *carry – carries*, *worry – worries*.
- For verbs that end in a **vowel + y**, the **-s** ending is added, as in *play – plays*, *enjoy – enjoys*, and *say – says*. Thus, an understanding of the verb spelling assists with the inflection of verbs.

a) Proximity principle

The proximity principle refers to the practice of relying on the noun that is closest to the verb to determine whether the verb is singular. When two singular subjects are connected by *or*, *nor*, *either... or*, *neither... nor* a singular verb is required, as in *Either the doctor or the nurse arrives late*, *Neither the girl nor the boy writes neatly*, and *No meat or drink is supplied*. Therefore, *neither* and *either* are both 'disjunctive determinatives,' whereas, the word *one* is a 'negative determinative'. According to Bock and Miller (1991), when there is a plausible shift in plurality and the phrasing distances, copular verbs from the grammatical subjects, sound more natural when matching the closest subjects. Therefore, this suggestion is congruent with the rules pertaining to the proximity principle where the determination of the correct verb relies on the closet verbs.

The proximity principle involves cases 'where two or more subjects are connected by the coordinating conjunctions *or/nor* and are differently marked for number,' as in *The learners or their teacher waits for the bus*, *Thomas or his friends are here*; and *Neither the soldiers nor their captain is wounded*. Importantly, the proximity principle entails an agreement between the subject and a noun/pronoun when the subject consists of one noun that is countable, uncountable or collective (Straus & Kaufman, 2014). In proximity principle, when both phrases are plural, a plural verb is required. Hence, this rule indicates that the closest subject determines the correct form of the verbs, as in *Neither the waiters nor the hotel **owners** are reliable*, and *Neither the waiters nor the hotel **owner** is reliable*.

When one phrase is singular and the other plural, the verb must agree in number with the phrases closest to it (Wardhaugh, 2003), as in *Neither the waiters nor the hotel owner is reliable*. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) postulate that the correlatives: 'either...or'; and 'neither...nor' determine the form of the verb nearest to the nouns as long as the verb only agrees with the second of the two subjects. Peters (2013) contends that a *lost subject* occurs when the subject is so "complicated that the actual subject gets lost". In this essence, the verb mistakenly agrees with a word that is not the actual subject,' for example, *A good idea about thieves is to kill them. Hence,* in this situation, the lost subject determines the correct use of tenses, the correct verb is not determined by the noun *thieves*, but instead by the *idea*.

Johansson (2018) postulates that errors may be quite difficult to identify when a proximity agreement error has occurred, as it can be the intention of the speaker to address the listener in an informal manner. Thus, Jabbari Almnaseer (2016) has found that there is a systematic deviation in his studies of the proximity principle, while Stapa (2010) has found that students commit errors in this regard. Hence, the proximity principle may cause challenges if L2 learners are not conversant with the way it works in sentences.

Wardhaugh (2018) comments that learners' knowledge of the grammatical structures, usage and appropriacy is useful in a given social context to produce grammatically correct sentences. Thus, the grammatically correct usage can be determined by the relevant structures, usage and appropriacy.

#### b) Compound subjects

Compound subjects are subjects with two noun phrases joined by the conjunction *and* joining words or groups of words of equal rank (Shaffer & Shaw, 2016). If the coordinating conjunction 'and' connects two or more subjects, the plural verb must be used in a sentence regardless of the presence of the singular noun phrases, as in *The boy and the girl are at the party*. In some instances, two linked units may be viewed as a combination (nonentity); and, accordingly, take a singular verb, as in *Singing and laughing makes us healthy*. If the compound subjects are joined with the correlative conjunction 'both' and the conjunction 'and,' a plural verb is required.

Thus, the meaning of sentences determines the singularity and plurality of subjects and verbs, as in *Both Tom and Peter live in the city*.

Straus and Kaufman (2014) postulate that even if each of the subjects of the sentence is singular or has two or more phrases; the presence of *and* 'does not mean that the verb should be singular,' as in *\*Your laptop, printer, table and office are very clean*. Conversely, if the conjunction *and* is implied although it is not actually present in a sentence, the verb should be plural, as in *Your class, fence, toilet are very old*. In addition, Balwit (2017) explains that tricky subjects take a singular subject. However, Sompong (2014) contends that learners use alternating forms when they use some forms mistakenly resulting in the wrong answer. In addition, a subject can be plural even when one of the main nouns is implied although not actually present, as in '*British and American English are dialects of one language*' and '*British English and American English are dialects of one language*'.

Lester and Beason (2013) postulate that exceptions occur in the coordinated subjects. These exceptions include *one and the same*, *each and every*; and *bacon and eggs*. According to Stapa (2010), these coordinated subjects are exceptions, but not the rule, and can be used according to grammatical etiquette, branding and appropriateness in the command of English. The exceptions cannot be treated independently from one another. Therefore, these coordinated subjects are regarded as singular in number; and should be used with the singular verbs in sentences to ensure effective communication.

c) One and the same

Lester and Beason (2013) postulate that a singular verb is used with the correlative *one and the same* or two nouns referring to the same person or object. A singular verb is used if *one and the same* is referred to even though the compound subjects joined with the coordinating conjunction *and* are plural, as in *Her daughter and favourable girl in town, enjoys singing*. Hence, the singularity of *one and the same* as a subject is conspicuous in the use of tenses due to the fact that it requires a

singular verb to make it possible for a speaker/writer to be meaningful in a proposition.

d) Each and every

When *each and every*, is used to modify a compound subject, the verb is singular (Lester & Beason, 2013). Chele (2015) argues that learners experience problems with the quantifiers such as *each and every*. Subasini and Kokilavani (2013) assert that learners overgeneralise when trying to figure out their own answers. Thus, *each and every* is an implicit paraphrase of *each one* and *everyone* in the context, as in *Each teacher and member of the council is here*.

(e) Bacon and eggs

When compound subjects are recognised as a single unit and are joined with the coordinating conjunction *and*, a singular verb is required, as in *Bacon and eggs is recommended for our health*. The majority of learners disregard the coordinated subjects and construct a sentence: *\*Bacon and eggs are recommended for our health*. Lambani and Nengome (2017) postulate that L2 speakers may overgeneralise sentence structures to lessen the linguistic burden they face. This application is congruent with Muhsin's (2016) view as he suggests that students will find grammar difficult to handle because of a lack of well-developed writing skills. Thus, to avoid these kinds of challenges, the L2 should be well acquainted with the grammatical structures of the English language. In this situation, Stapa (2010) examines errors in the coordinating conjunction 'and' has found that the L2 learners experience difficulties in this context.

f) Collective nouns

Collective nouns refer to a group of people (Lutrin & Pincus, 2007) or any objects including *committee, family, mob, team, gang, and administration*. Kolln and Funk (1998) assert that collective nouns are the name of a group of individual members of a population who share common characteristics, including time and place. However, according to Johansson (2018), collective nouns give rise to problems when it comes to agreement, because they can be perceived cognitively as semantically different by different people, and it also depends on what dialect the

speaker prefers. Thus, the correct use of collective nouns can improve competence in the use of tenses.

With collective nouns, a singular verb is used when the noun referent is thought of as a collective, while a plural verb is used when the noun referent is thought of as a number of individuals. Crystal (1997) estimates that when a singular noun co-occurs with either a singular or a plural verb, the noun should be a collective rather than a single entity. In this situation, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985) provide a broader scope of the tense errors by including co-referring personal pronouns and relative pronouns explicitly in their definitions. As collective nouns can be singular or plural pronouns, the correct use of tenses will depend on the correct matching of subjects and verbs.

An advantage of the definition by Quirk *et al.* (1985) over that by Juul (1975), is that a collective noun definition sanctions the inclusion of nouns, which can only appear with singular verbs, and sometimes take plural pronouns. Drennan (2009) suggests that collective nouns denote a group of similar individuals considered as one complete whole. Collective nouns may either take a singular or plural inflection depending on the meaning of a sentence (Senn & Skinner, 2001; Grammar Bytes, (2019). In this regard, when members of the group are viewed as a unit, singular pronouns and singular verbs are usual, as in the sentence *Old people like to stay happy.*

Plural verbs and nouns are used when the members of the group are viewed as individuals, as in *The team are all here* (all the members). The possibility is that problems often arise when 'all' is used to quantify a collective subject and thus, one should be able to use it accordingly. In contrast, Richards and Schmidt (2010) express the view that the use of the plural verb suggests that something is seen as a group of individuals sharing more or less similar characteristics, while the singular verb suggests that it is seen as a single whole. Therefore, the noun *troop* is the collective name of the group of baboons or soldiers; and *school* or *shoal* refer to a group of fish viewed as singular subjects and require singular verbs.

Both foreign learners and native speakers of English are often faced with the problem of treating collective nouns as there is a choice between singular and plural concord marking (Vantellini, 2003). Anderson (1954) and Quirk and

Greenbaum (1973) postulate that if the subject contains a plural feature, the verb must have the same feature to make the sentence grammatically acceptable. In this regard, the singularity or plurality of verbs is determined by the number of subjects rather than by their forms.

Örlegård (2014) confirms that with collective nouns, the singular verb is the most preferred number of agreement within the news genre, as observed in Swedish English. However, the plural verb is influenced by stylistic and semantic factors.

According to Örlegård (2014:22) the Swedes:

...prefer singular verbal agreement with collective nouns, even though plural forms occur, which seem to be closer to British and American English. The plural forms of political parties that seem to constitute collective units usually show variation in Sweden, whereas they take only plural verbs in American and British English.

Dziemianko (2008) studied collective nouns and found that collective nouns are as difficult for the subjects as indicating the count-mass distinction by means of the indefinite article and the zero article. Therefore, the L2 learners are likely to commit tense errors when dealing with rules pertaining to the use of tenses.

#### g) Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to people or thing in a general way rather than specifically (Lutrin & Pincus, 2007). The determiner *none* refers to a mass noun, and its inflection is uncontroversially singular. Senn and Skinner (2001), however postulate that the object of the preposition that follows the pronoun in sentences prescribes the singularity or plurality of the sentence. In this regard, Doest (2004) recommends that if the determiner *none* refers to a singular noun, it requires a singular verb. Notwithstanding, if this determiner is referring to a plural noun, the plural verb is, therefore, required in this context.

In turn, Peters (2013) claims that indefinite pronouns, such as, *any* and *none* as the head of a noun phrase are part of singular or plural agreement of the verb. Besides, Chele (2015) posits that with reference to indefinite pronouns such as *everyone*, *everybody*, *every individual* and *each and every*, the traditional prescription maintains that a singular verb and subject agreement rule applies as

*each* and *every (one)* function grammatically as singular subjects. These learners, therefore, experience problems with the quantifiers such as *everyone* and *each and every*.

Although the other indefinite pronouns including *you, they, someone, anyone, the majority of, some, both, few, and a few* are indefinite in number they also cause problems to learners. These quantifiers are also *determinatives* because they determine the number of people or things in sentences. Determinatives refer to unspecified persons, things, or groups (Lester & Beason, 2013). However, indefinite pronouns do not only refer to people in a general way but also refer to places without pointing to a specific one or objects. Thus, subjects in the indefinite pronouns are always singular when the quantified subject noun is singular even when the quantified subject noun refers to a definite plural set.

The determiner *none* in association with countable plural nouns is not used regularly, while the plural verb is most preferred by the majority of the people in the sense that the notional concord requires a plural verb more frequently. Pooley (1934) concurs with the fact that plural verbs can be used regardless of the traditional rule that advocates that a verb must agree in number with its subject without considering the feeling or intention of the subject no matter what the form might be. However, the correct use of the determiner *none* is determined by the rule pertaining to the singularity and plurality of verbs.

Brenner (2014) argues that the determiner *none* takes a singular verb if what it refers to is singular, and a plural verb if its referent is plural. However, at times, the plural verb 'are' can be used if the notion behind the quantifier *none* is in 'plural form' such as 'students'. In substantiation of this assertion, Peters (2013) posits that in notional agreement, the singularity or plurality of the subject is matched in the verb, overriding the noun's 'actual form' as singular or plural. Accordingly, the singularity or plurality of the verb determines the notional agreement especially when the subject and the verb agree based on the intended meaning behind the words, as in *None of the students is going home for the vacation* instead of *\*None of the students are going home for the vacation*.

Indefinite pronouns can easily be confused with adjectives since an indefinite pronoun is singular; and, therefore, requires a singular verb, as in *Some furniture in our newly bought house is filthy*. The number in matching the subject and verb is ambivalent because it is always associated with the determiners in the indefinite pronouns of amount and quantity, for example, *At least **no** money is withdrawn without the depositor's signature*. Thus, it is evident that with the non-count usages, verbs are singular, as in *In the whole village, water is usually scarce in winter*. Therefore, the verb should only be plural with plural count nouns, for example, *No people of that name live in Dzwerani village*.

In personal, reflexive, possessive, demonstrative pronouns; and the wh-word pronouns to some extent, indefinite pronouns lack definiteness. These pronouns comprise of numbers: some of which are singular, others plural, and the other can be either singular or plural (Kolln & Funk, 1998; Rozakis, 2003). Therefore, the verb of the sentence is singular when the modifier of the subject headword is also singular. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) claim that foreign learners of English may experience problems with the quantifiers. In addition, verbs are always singular when the quantified subject noun is also singular in sentences.

Although the quantified subject noun refers to a definite plural set; the verbs with the quantifiers should still be singular for example, *Each of her examples was irrelevant*, because the focus is on individual members of the set and not on the entire set in its totality. In this regard, a singular verb requires singular subjects, although L2 learners usually commit tense errors when they construct their sentences.

Stapa (2010) conducted a study on the use of indefinite expressions as a subject in the use of tenses; and found that students commit most tense errors with both the indefinite and personal pronouns. On this basis, most importantly, indefinite pronouns require extreme thoughtfulness when dealing with the simple present tense to enhance competence in the use of tenses.

## h) Relative clause antecedents

A relative clause is a type of a subordinate clause that contains the element whose interpretation is provided by an antecedent on which the subordinate clause is grammatically dependent; that is, there is an anaphoric relation between the relativised element in the relative clause and the antecedent on which it depends. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) contend that matching the subject and verb in tenses is “particularly problematic in certain types of relative clauses,” as in *\*She is one of those girls who likes fun*. Thus, the antecedent rule in *those girls*, disagrees with the non-intervention principle, since a singular verb *likes* is applied in this context.

The relative-clause antecedents also use a plural verb such as *People who live in glasshouses, enjoy life to the full*. The same rule applies when the relative pronoun refers to a personal pronoun, for example, *You, who are my closest friend, betray me* (you are my closest friend). In addition, a what-clause’ requires a singular or plural verb depending on the context of the sentence, as in *What excites me is when the evil is punished* (that which excites me). Therefore, knowledge of the use of relative clauses is required for the development of writing skills as far as tenses are concerned.

In relative clause antecedents, if the subject is singular, a singular verb should be used. However, if it is plural, a plural verb should be used. Straus and Kaufman (2014) assert that if the antecedent is singular, the pronoun is also singular and, thus, takes a singular verb. As the relative pronoun describes the noun that comes before it, such a pronoun is singular or plural depending on the noun it refers to (Chele, 2015). Therefore, the pronoun *who* becomes singular or plural depending on the subject and meaning of the particular sentence.

Duffield (2012) studied the use of agreement in speech errors in relation to the relative clause, and found that students committed a number of tense errors just as much as some of the respondents did in this sub-question. Karim, Fathema and Hakim (2015) found that students committed tense errors, while Eng and Heng (2005) report that students have difficulty with using relative clauses in tenses.

Hence, it is possible for the relative pronouns *which*, *who*, and *that* to be either singular or plural.

i) Quasi-coordinators

Quasi-coordinators agreement refers to the situation where unnecessary words are, deliberately, placed in the sentence; but do not change the actual meaning of the particular sentence. The quasi-coordinators including *together with*, *along with*, *after*, and *as well as* should be ignored to ascertain if sentences require a singular or plural verb. Drennan (2009) postulates that subject containing these quasi-coordinators should take singular verb as they are not part of the subject (Straus & Kaufman, 2014). The coordinating conjunction *and* can be generalised as being on par with both of the subjects in a sentence with a quasi-coordinator *together with*. Hence, they should be ignored when analysing the meaning of a sentence.

The presence of the interruption words serves no purpose, because their absence from a sentence does not change the meaning of that particular sentence. According to Greenbaum (1991), when a singular subject or noun phrase is joined with the preposition 'with,' the subject should be singular even though the preposition is similar in meaning to the conjunction *and*, as in *The house together with its furniture is for sale*. Accordingly, it is evident that the prepositional phrase 'together with its furniture' poses a serious challenge to L2 learners because of their presence; sentences do not change their meaning.

In this situation, a prepositional phrase cannot contain the subject of the sentence and warn against the errors (Kirsznier & Mandell, 2006), which may arise when a particular phrase comes between the subject and verb as an interrupting statement because this could lead to an incorrect verb choice. Thus, a similar situation applies to phrases that come between the subject and the verb as they also do not contribute to the quantity of verbs.

If the subject is in the plural, a plural verb must be used, for example, *The houses, as well as their furniture, are for sale* instead of *\*The houses, as well as their furniture is for sale*. In English, a singular verb is required if there is a preposition 'after,' as in *One person after another is booked for an interview* rather than *\*One*

*person after another are booked for an interview.* In this situation, it is a requirement to contemplate the presence of prepositions in sentences so as to conform to the rules pertaining to the use of quasi-coordinators.

The other subjects regarding quasi-coordinators are clearly singular in meaning or intent (Anderson, 1954). The singularity of nouns, which may be based on the two nouns qualifying the same person and the totality of the subject, confuses the L2 learners at times for example, \**The doctor and member of the taxi association are gone*, Therefore, in this case, ‘the doctor’ and ‘member of the taxi association’ are the two subjects referring to one person, and do not both denote the plural forms of nouns, therefore the singular verb *is* is used instead of *are*. Thus, the lack of knowledge of these grammatical dynamics can be another problem resulting in grammatical errors. Dela Cruz (2012) and Dacumos (2016) studied the use of quasi-coordinators, and found that students ‘fail to achieve the needed competences in regular classroom instruction.’ Consequently, such students had major challenges with regard to the application of the rules pertaining to the use of quasi-coordinators.

Even though learners may think that the simple present tense is easier to handle, however, “many errors could be committed in the simple present tense” (Lester & Beason, 2013). Putri (2013) and Munawar (2016) assert that although the simple present tense is a useful tool, it is, however, a difficult grammatical feature or skill to be learnt by the L2 learners. Therefore, in order to avoid the development of tense errors, tenses should be studied first before other grammatical concepts are studied.

### 3.3.2 Simple past tense

The simple past tense (preterite) refers to an action or situation that was started and finished or happened in the past (Uchiyama, 2006; Sherman *et al.*, 2010). It is formed by adding the ‘-d’ or ‘-ed’ ending to the ‘base form’ of the verb, as in *move/moved* and *play/played* for regular verbs, and is formed in a number of ways for irregular verbs including *come/came*, *cut/cut*, *fight/fought*, *try/tried*, and *seek/sought*.

According to Grammar Bytes (2016), the simple past tense always has just one part and does not need any auxiliary verb. For instance, in the sentence: *She came last weekend*, an auxiliary verb is not required since its inclusion in this sentence forms ungrammatical and meaningless sentence construction, as in *\*She was came last weekend*. In this regard, all English verbs have only one past form, for example, *pull/pulled*, while the forms of 'be': *am/is are* has two forms, namely: *was* for the first and third person singular, *were* for the first person and the third person plural.

It is used to indicate that the event that is being spoken/written about is over, although it does not necessarily specify when it took place nor give clear evidence for the crime committed, as in *Tom committed an abominable crime*. Thus, speakers may choose to indicate the time at which such a crime was committed by using the time expression or additional information, as in *Tom committed an abominable crime in 1979*. The 'year 1979,' indicates the period during which the *crime* was committed. Thus, in communication, the speaker/writer should be grammatically advanced to be meaningful.

Fadzilyna (2014) postulates that the simple past tense is used to describe actions that took place in the past and no longer take place in the present. However, it 'does not convey the same sense of continuity or relevance as any other English tense.' As a result, it is necessary for those who would want to talk about the past, which has nothing to do with the present or future. Frederickson (1997) notes that an understanding of the simple present and the simple past tenses depends on how each of them is used in the language. Therefore, these tenses are also useful in communication.

### 3.3.2.1 Simple past tense verb inflectional morphemes

The simple past tense verb inflectional morphemes exhibit a similar pattern of phonological conditioning in the pronunciation of the regular past tense ending of verbs. For verbs, the sounds are used for marking the simple past tense and the past participle form of verbs. Besides, the same phonological patterns prevail. Robbins (2007) and Zaia (2015) declare that inflectional verb morphemes are predictable in regular verbs, but are unpredictable in the irregular ones. Hence, the difference in sound patterning between regular and irregular verbs depends on the

fact that these verbs do not follow the usual pattern of verb formation because they are members of three different morphemes.

In the simple past tense, the ‘-d’ allomorph has three variants: /-t/, /-d/ and /-id /. When the regular verb ends in a voiceless sound, the ‘-t’ allomorph marks the tense as the simple past, as in *kicked* and *pricked*. When the verb itself ends in a voiceless sound ‘-t’, the /-t/ allomorph is not selected, for example, *gifted*, *limited* and *shifted*. However, when the verb ends in a voiced sound, the ‘-d’ allomorph marks the tense as the simple past, for example, *loved* and *served*. When the verb itself ends in a voiced sound ‘-d’, the ‘-d’ allomorph is not selected, for example, *load* and *prod*. If the verb ends in the sound /t/ or /-d/; the ‘-id’ allomorph is selected, as in *waited* and *prodded*.

According to Thompson and Martinet (1982), irregular verbs can end in a variety of ways with absolutely no consistent patterns, including:

- Zero marking: no suffix nor stem change, for example, *put* and *cut*;
- Terminal consonants phoneme changes, for example, *bend/ben*;
- An ablaut: where there is vowel change, for example, *dig/dug*; and
- Suppletion: where the whole stem changes as there is no regular phonological correspondence with other forms, for example, *go/went*.

Thus, the following are inconsistent patterns that can occur during the irregular verb inflections:

a) Suppletion principle

Suppletion refers to the unrelated allomorphs (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, 1975) of the same morphemes. Therefore, it involves the word-forms of the same lexeme with phonologically distinct stems. According to Smith, Moskal, Xu, Kang, Bobaljik (2018), suppletion is the phenomenon in which a single lexeme or root morpheme is associated with two phonologically unrelated realisations depending on the morphosyntactic context (Moskal, 2015). Hence, the two unrelated realisations are possible in suppletion than any other question/item in the simple past tense.

Some learners tend to overgeneralise the suppletion rule and never realise that the entire stem /go-/ has to be replaced by the different stem /went/ historically derived from the ‘unrelated form’ of the verb *wend* (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011) to effect a total change within a paradigm. It is one of the irregular past tense areas where L2 speakers encounter challenges as it requires that the root morpheme be replaced by a phonologically unrelated form to indicate a grammatical contradiction. Thus, the stem is replaced with another, resulting in an allomorph/morpheme, which bears no phonological similarity to the other allomorphs.

According to Aronoff and Fudeman (2011), suppletion occurs when the syntax requires a form of a lexeme that is not morphologically predictable. The paradigm for the verb ‘be’ is characterised by suppletion. Therefore, in this situation the forms *am, are, is, was, were, and be* have completely different phonological shapes. Crystal (2008) postulates that it is most likely to be found in the paradigms of high-frequency words because of the whole word ‘changes’ due to the lack of any regular phonological correspondence with other forms. However, the stem ‘be’ has eight paradigmatic forms consisting of *be/am/is/are/being/was/were/been*.

Ntombela (2008) and Nzama (2010) conducted a study among the secondary school learners in rural parts of South Africa, and found that L2 learners commit the following errors, as in:

1. \**We **goed** to the church last Sunday.*
2. \**The train **ised** at the station.*

Learners in this context may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ to form past and past participle form of verbs. The findings were congruent with those of Denham and Lobeck (2010) who suggest that such students might be ‘figuring out their own grammatical rules.’ However, the correct version of these sentences should have been:

1. *We **went** to church last Sunday.*
2. *The train **was** at the station.*

Therefore, in this context, the irregular verb *go* should have been transformed into *went* in a sentence (1); and *ised* in (2) should have been *was* through a complete stem change from one form of a verb to another based on the suppletion principle. In addition, Hamid and Qayyimah (2014) conducted a study on the use of tenses and found that students experience difficulties in the use of tenses in the simple past tense. Therefore, in this situation, this finding suggests that some L2 learners are incompetent in the use of the simple past tense, because they cannot apply the rule pertaining to the suppletion principle.

b) Terminal consonants phoneme changes

The terminal consonants phoneme changes entail the removal of one of the vowels for a particular word and the addition of the sound ‘-t’ to the words with the stem vowel such as *keep/kept*, *bend/bent*, as in *Sarah kept the tone very low* instead of \**Sarah keeped/keep the tone very low*. If a vowel is removed and replaced with another vowel, the terminal consonants phoneme changes occur, as in *The fish bones stuck in his false-teeth*. Therefore, there are some verbs that include phonological changes, involving both vowel and terminal consonants phoneme changes.

In terminal consonants phoneme changes, verbs can form a past tense by adding the final ‘-t’, and the changing of the stem vowel from ‘-i’ to ‘-e’, as in *creep/crept*, ‘-i’ to ‘-o’ (*think/thought*), ‘-e’ to ‘-o’ (*sell/sold*) or *seek/thought*, and ‘-i’ to ‘-u’ (*stick/stuck*). Verbs can also be formed through doubling the last consonants of the irregular verbs before adding the suffix ‘-ed’ to produce a more or less similar word. In this situation, the L2 learners have to understand the formation of different irregular verbs.

Patterson, Lambdon, Horges & McClelland (2001) conducted research on the use of the past tense and found that the past-tense verb abilities of eleven patients with semantic dementia had a marked and frequency-modulated deficit with regard to irregular verbs. Likewise, Jacobson and Schwartz (2005), also found that the students were more accurate with regular than irregular verbs. Therefore, it is

evident that the formation of irregular verbs is not predictable in the simple past tense as they can be formed through different strategies.

c) Ablaut/vowel gradation principle

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (1975), the ablaut involves a systematic variation of vowels in the same root or in related roots or affixes in languages that are usually paralleled by differences in use or meaning. It entails sound change within a word indicating grammatical inflection of the irregular verbs; and exemplified as internal vowel alternations which could form the words: *sing*, *sang*, *sung*, and *song*.

The grammatical suffixes involve sound fluctuations and occur grammatically. This vowel alternation between 'i' and 'a' indicates a difference between the present and the past tense in the pair *sing/sang*. In this regard, Crystal (2008) and R'acz, Becner, Hay and Pierrhmbert (2014), explain that the ablaut principle entails the relationship between verb forms based on variations in the root vowels taking place from the simple to the past tense form, as in 'a' to 'i', 'i' to 'u', or 'i' to 'o.' Thus, vowel gradation involves the changing of vowels from one form to another when the simple past tense is formed.

According to Plag and Schneider (2000), the use of the ablaut principle, and found that native speakers of English do not only use the regular inflexion '-ed' to form the irregular past tense from given nonce verbs used once or for a special occasion. However, the alternation of the vowel occurs from '-i' to '-u', or '-i' to '-a'. Hence, the vowel change is a prerequisite in the formation of irregular verbs in simple past tense.

d) Zero marking principle

This principle refers to a situation where the irregular verb does not show the inflection of the verb. It refers to a situation where the indication of grammatical function can be done through the absence of allomorphs or morphemes such as suffix, prefix or infix. In other words, there is no change in the form of a verb in the simple past tense, present perfect and past perfect tense. Kosch (2004), Patterson

*et al.* (2001); and Crystal (2008) postulate that zero marking implies no phonological substance in the regularisation of verbs. Based on this insight, some verbs show no inflectional change in the formation of irregular verbs as zero modification is caused by the lack of any regular phonological correspondence with other forms. The same form of the irregular verb in all three forms such as *thrust* (simple present) *thrust* (simple past); and *thrust* (perfect tense) could be used, as in *He thrust a spear into the water yesterday.*

According to Bybee and Slobin (1982), the verb basis of some words end in the sounds that are already associated with the past tense ‘-t’ or ‘-d’, as in *cost* or *spread*. In turn, Marchman (1997) studied the productive use of the past tense in a school-aged children elicited production task, and found that errors were committed in the overall responses although all children demonstrated productivity with the regular verb pattern, as in *look +looked*; and irregular ones, for example, *sit + sat*, and *ride- + rode*. The study also found that while the overall frequency of errors decreased with age, the tendency for irregularisation increased in the older groups. In this situation, students were challenged by the rules pertaining to the irregularisation of verbs in the simple past tense.

### 3.3.3 Present perfect tense

The present perfect tense refers to an action or state of affairs that happened at an indefinite time in the past before another time or event (Mcintosh, 2017) and continues in the present. According to Lester and Beason (2013), the present perfect tense is formed by combining *has/have* with the past participle form of the verbs. As the auxiliary verbs *has/have* could be used both as main verbs and auxiliaries, the learners are likely to commit tense errors in the conjugation of irregular verbs because it does not follow the typical pattern ‘-t’ in *keep/kept/kept*, ‘-en’ in *fall/fell/fallen*, ‘-n’ in *prove/proved/proven* or the ‘-ne’ in *go/went/gone* or *do/did/done*. Thus, the use of the auxiliary verbs *has/have* is necessary in the formation of the present perfect tense.

### 3.3.3.1 Past participle verb inflectional morphemes

The inflectional morphemes in the past participle form of verbs occur both in the present perfect and the past perfect tenses with reference to regular and irregular formation of verbs. However, verb inflection takes place differently due to the complexity of verbs. Regular inflectional morphemes are predictable, follow the usual pattern of verb formation and can change the form of a word to indicate grammatical properties attached to verbs, nouns or adjectives as they follow the usual pattern (Penston, 2005; Zaia, 2015) of inflecting ‘-d’ or ‘-ed’ to infinitives.

Thompson and Martinet (1980) postulate that the simple past and past participle form of verbs both add the ‘-ed’ ending to the infinite form of the verbs irrespective of the third person singular, the third person plural, the first person; or; the second person subjects. However, Thompson and Martinet (1982) then assert that irregular verb inflectional morphemes have no inflexions with regard to the past participle form of verbs because it follows the unusual suffix of the last consonants of verbs for past participle markers. Thus, the inflection of regular and irregular verbs determines learners’ competence in the use of tenses, as some regular verbs, the perfect tenses have exactly the same form as the simple past, for example, *played/played*, and *kicked/kicked*.

The irregular inflectional morphemes are unpredictable and use different inflections since English has a strictly grammatical function of marking the tense properties, gender and case. Accordingly, an inflectional form of a noun, pronoun or adjective indicates its grammatical relation to the other words. Hence, verb formations in irregular verbs differ considerably and quite unpredictably, and do not conform to the regular pattern of adding ‘-d’ or ‘-ed’ to the base form as in *did/done* and *went/gone*.

In Sudan, Muhammad Ahmed (2012) who conducted research on competence in the use of tenses, found students do not know when to use *has/have* as main or helping verb, nor know that the infinitive ‘to’ must not be followed by the inflection of the morpheme ‘-s’, ‘-ed’ nor ‘-ing’ in written or spoken sentences. Hence, although the meaning can still be decoded, poor sentence construction would not have been expected at this level of language learning.

In English, the past perfect tenses in verbs use the auxiliary verb *had* plus the past participle form of verbs, as in *By the time examination was written, students had already seen their semester marks* and *By the year 1995, a number of exiles had already returned to South Africa from the other parts of the world*. In this situation, the formation of the present perfect tense differs from that of the past perfect tense, through the inclusion of different auxiliary verbs.

a) Using *have* with first person singular and plural subjects

With reference to the subject-verb agreement, in English the use of *have* with the first person singular and plural subjects 'I' and 'We' require the plural auxiliary verb "have" plus the past participle form of verbs in written or spoken sentences, as in the next instances:

1. *I have invited all my friends for dinner.*
2. *We have waited for the movie all night long.*

However, it would be quite ungrammatical for the L2 learner to construct the following sentences:

1. *\*I have invite all my friends for dinner.*
2. *\*We have wait for the movie all night long.*

In addition, the auxiliary 'have' could be used with the third person plural subjects: 'They' and 'The boys.' This is one of the areas in which learners commit the subject-verb agreement errors in English, as in:

1. *They have discussed the matter with their community.*
2. *The boy has cleaned their dormitory.*

In English, it is impolite to construct the next sentences:

1. *\*They have discuss the matter with their community.*

2. *\*The boy has clean their dormitory.*

In Switzerland, Taher (2011) conducted a study on the analysis of the tense errors among the high school students, and discovered that a number of those students could not apply the rules pertaining to the use of tenses. As a result such students revealed poor competence in English. In this regard, Köhmyhr (2003) asserts that the most frequent types of tense errors are found in cases where the subject is the pronoun 'I'. The present tense confuses the L2 learners as they can think that this tense deals with the present tense rather than addressing the past actions. Thus, the L2 learners disrupt their grammatical competence and cannot participate effectively in communication.

- b) Using *has* with third person singular subjects

The auxiliary *has* requires the past participle form of verbs in the present perfect tense, as in:

1. *He has written his homework.*
2. *It has rained the whole day.*
3. *Thomas has played soccer.*

However, after discovering that the rules pertaining to the use of tenses reject the use of the auxiliary 'has' without the inclusion of the '-en' or '-ed' ending when forming the past participle form of verbs, it would be ungrammatical to construct the following sentences:

1. *\*He has write his homework.*
2. *\*It has rain the whole day.*
3. *\*Thomas has play soccer.*

Thus, the L2 learners committed tense errors, because they could not use the auxiliary 'has' with the '-en' or '-ed' ending to form the past participle form of verbs in their written sentences.

- c) Using *has/have* with the subject nouns

In this item, learners' judgment is crucial in using the auxiliary *has/have + been* to form the past participle form of verbs, as in:

1. *\*Furnitures has been buy for the visitors.*
2. *\*Equipment has been clean after use by the workers.*

However, it is possible to construct the next sentences depending on the judgment of the interlocutor and the meaning of the sentences, as in:

1. *Furniture has been bought for the visitors.*
2. *Equipment has been bought for the visitors.*

d) Using *have* with a plural subject noun phrase

Using *have + been* with the basic forms of verbs to form the past participle form of verbs, for example:

1. *We have waited for the bus.*
2. *Memorandum for the test has been stolen.*
3. *They sharpen the knife.*

Hence, it would be wrong to leave the main verb in its basic form without adding the suffix '-ed', '-n' or '-en', as in:

1. *We have wait for the bus.*
2. *Memorandum for the test has been stole.*
3. *They sharp the knife.*

Karim *et al.* (2015) conducted a study on the analysis of tense errors, and discovered that the highest number of errors were committed in the use of the present perfect tense. In this context, the EFL learners were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense than the other tenses.

e) Using *has/have* with singular subject nouns

The use of *has* with nouns including *specification* and *modification* calls for the addition of the ‘-ed’, ‘-en’ ending to form the past participle form of verbs, as in the following sentences:

1. *Specification of the car engine has been supplied; and*
2. *Modification has been done in the latest Nissan cars.*

However, the verb inflectional morphemes of the ‘-ed’ suffix might bring the next challenges to learners:

1. *\*Specification of the car engine has been supply; and*
2. *\*Modifications has been do in the latest Nissan cars.*

f) Using *has* with some diseases

The use of the auxiliary *has* also requires the addition of the ending ‘-ed’ in regular verbs and/or ‘-en’ with the irregular verbs, as in:

1. *Mumps has troubled the poor villages; and*
2. *Measles has recently been spoken about.*

However, errors occur in the present perfect tense, as in:

1. *\*Mumps has trouble the poor villages; and*
2. *\*Measles has recently been spoke about.*

Taher (2011) conducted the study on the use of the present perfect tenses, and discovered that a number of students could not apply the tense rules appropriately due to a limited understanding of the inflection of past participle form of verbs. However, the present perfect tense can be used when speakers of English language do not know when something happened, want to be vague, or when the specific time is not important.

Frederickson (1997) asserts that the present perfect tense is not used when the exact time is mentioned, since there is no connection with the present. It allows a person to communicate that an action or occurrence has just recently happened or continues to happen; or place that action or occurrence in relation to a separate action or occurrence (Sherman *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the present perfect tense is used for an action or occurrence that has just taken place or is continuing to happen, as in *They have repaired the watch* but not *\*They have repair the bus*.

The present perfect also describes actions that have occurred continuously from some time in the past right up to the present moment sometimes with the implication that these actions would continue into the future, as in *They have watched the movie all night long*. In addition, it is useful when speakers stress their actions at some indefinite time in the past or talk about things that have happened in a time period that is not completed. Thus, English accepts: *The petrol price had gone up twice when the bill was introduced*, and *The petrol price went up twice when the bill was introduced*.

It can be used with *today* or *this morning* only up to about one o'clock because after this period 'this morning' becomes a completed period, and actions which occur within it must be placed into the simple past tense form. It is necessary to consider that 'at 11 a.m.' the correct grammatical construction should be acceptable, for example, *John has watched movies two times this morning already* (at 11 o'clock), and *John watched the movie two times this morning* (at 2 p.m.). Similarly, 'this afternoon' will end at about 5 o'clock, for example, *I haven't watched the movie this afternoon* (at 4 p.m.), and *I didn't watch the movie this afternoon* (at 6 p.m.). Thus, it is regarded as informal to use o'clock (of the clock) with 'a.m. or p.m.', as in *\*He gets up at 4 o'clock a.m.* instead the formal construction should be *He gets up at 4 o'clock in the morning*.

The present perfect tense can be used with a period of time, such as 'for six weeks/a long time' to show the time extending from somewhere in the past and progresses into the present, as in *They have lived in Venda for six weeks*. In this case, the people 'in context' still live in Venda. With 'already' it can be used in the

affirmative situation only if the speaker wishes to talk about the events that happened some time before now, and with 'not yet' for the events that have not happened before now. Thus, the speaker may expect the event to have happened earlier, or in future.

It can be used with *to yet* to find out if something has happened before now, *ever* to refer to at any time up until the present, *never* to talk about that which has never happened, with *just*, *late*, *lately* or *recently* to emphasise that something happened very recently, began in the past; and was finished at an indefinite time but closely related to the present or future; *so far*, *since*, *for*, *up to now*, to indicate that that something began in the past and continues in the present; and it is possible that it may continue to a certain period in the future. Hence, it gives an idea to understand the past perfect tense embedded on the past participle form of verbs.

In 2011, Petchtae investigated the use of present perfect tense and found that some errors occurred in the transformation of the actions from the simple present to the past participle form of verbs. Thus, learners can fossilise the rules pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs in the present perfect tense.

### 3.3.4 Past perfect tense

The past perfect tense (pluperfect) refers to an action that took place (perfected) in the past before another past action (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006). It is formed by combining *had* with the *past participle* form of the verbs. According to George (2015), irregular verbs take the suffix '-n', and '-en' morpheme when forming the past participle form of verbs; while regular verbs use the '-ed' ending, as in *They had already listened to the song when it rained*, and *He **had** taken listened to the song*. Therefore, the past perfect tense is a requirement when indicating actions that had already taken place in the time past before the other action begun.

#### a) Using *had* with first person singular pronoun

The first person singular pronoun 'I' or 'we' are with 'had' in the past perfect tense, for example,

1. *I had fixed my old car when the new model arrived.*
2. *We had cleaned the table when they arrested him.*

However, it is improper to say or write sentences in this tense, for example,

1. *\*I had fix my first car when the new model was arrived.*
2. *\*We had clean the table when they arrested him.*

b) Using *had* with the subject noun phrase.

The use of the auxiliary *had* with the subject noun phrase also causes errors as its use with the subject noun phrases requires past participle form of verbs, as in:

1. *\*After the lorry ceased to function, he bought the new one.*
2. *\*After she received the sad news, she collapsed.*

Therefore, the correct versions for this attempt should be:

1. *After the lorry had ceased to function, he bought the new one.*
2. *After she had received sad news, she collapsed.*

c) Using *had* with the conditional subject noun phrase

In this area, respondents also reflect challenges with reference to the subject phrase stating possibilities. At times, where the respondents were required to use “had” with the noun phrase ‘If he’ or ‘should they,’ they usually committed tense errors in grammar, as in the following examples:

1. *If he stayed indoors, he would not have died in the car accident.*
2. *Should they listened to the lecturer, they would have passed the test.*

In English the grammatically correct answer should be as follows:

1. *If he had stayed indoors, he would not have died in the car accident.*
2. *Should they had listened to the lecturer, they would have passed the test.*

d) Using *had* with prepositional phrases

In the use of the auxiliary 'had' with some prepositional phrases, learners conclude that their message is well received by the listener/reader, as in:

1. *We did not call him until he arrived at the birthday party; and*
2. *She did not disclose to the secret until the culprit was arrested.*

In this regard, the correct version should be:

1. *We did not call him until he had arrived at the birthday party; and*
2. *She did not disclose to the people until the culprit had been arrested.*

In Sweden, Taher (2011) conducted a study on the use of the past perfect tense, and found that the majority of students were unable to use *had* with some prepositions, resulting in poor competence in the use of tenses. Therefore, this had an effect on the grammatical competence of the students leading to imperfect communicative competence.

e) Using *had* with relative clauses

In relative clauses, with regard to antecedents in the past perfect tense, the use of the auxiliary 'had' usually confuses learners particularly in a situation where they have to indicate their competence in the use of tenses, and commit the following tense errors:

1. *\*When we arrived she has never cooked any food; and*
2. *\*They have already listed to the news when their house caught fire.*

To construct grammatically correct sentences, the learner should know that the relative pronoun *when* is followed by a clause that:

1. Relates a point in time for viewing the progress or completion of the activity in the main clause of a sentence; and
2. Includes an activity with a relatively short duration or of little importance.

Hence, the L2 learners could construct grammatically correct sentences, as in the following sentences:

1. *Before we arrived, she had never cooked any food; and*
2. *They had already listened to the news when their house caught fire.*

In this regard, Karim *et al.* (2015) assert that students develop poor competence in the use of the past perfect tense.

f) Using *had* with prepositional subject phrases

In English, the phrase *by the time* is followed by a clause that:

1. Relates a time-frame, for viewing the progress or completion of the activity in the main clause; and
2. Includes an activity with duration and an end-point.

Therefore, in this question learners commit tense errors, as in:

1. *\*By the time the train arrived, the school bus already go home; and*
2. *\*The taxi has long been repair by the time mechanic arrived.*

However, in English the grammatically correct sentences would be:

1. *By the time the train arrived, the school bus had already gone home; and*
2. *The taxi had long been repaired by the time the mechanic arrived.*

Therefore, with regard to the use of the past perfect tense, the auxiliary *had* is a requirement and indicates the actions which had already taken place even before a particular action took place.

The past perfect tense can be used readily with an adverb specifying a past time frame for occurrence. Therefore, it is both incorrect to say: *\*We have taken a long trip last Sunday* nor *\*We had taken a long trip last Sunday* because the use of 'last Sunday' specifies the past time and correct when it takes *We undertook a long trip last Sunday*. However, there is no objection to *We had undertaken a long trip the previous Sunday morning*.

This tense can also be used to refer to actions that started and stopped somewhere in the past, as in *I have waited for you outside the kitchen* instead of *I had waited for you outside the kitchen*. Therefore, past perfect forms of verbs have the characteristics of both verbs and adjectives as can be noticed in the sentences: *He completed (verb) the task* and *This is a completed (adjective) task*.

Ntombela (2008) conducted a study on communicative competence and found that the auxiliary 'had' could be used with the past perfect forms of verbs, and 'be' in passive construction, as in, *The trees had been cut*. Therefore, learners can commit errors with the use of *had* + past participle form of verbs because they hardly know that the choice of using the present perfect and the past tense both depend on the frame of reference, or period in which the event is conceived as occurring.

Therefore, the cause of errors in this regard can include inadequate learning, false concept hypothesised and fossilisation of rules (Lado, 1957) pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs.

### 3.3.5 Infinitive marker *to*

An infinitive refers to the basic form of a verb, for example, *to sing* and *to dance*. According to Matrood (2010), the particle *to* comes before a verb as the 'first infinitive' and the 'second infinitive' respectively (Hartmann & Stork (1973). Yespersen (1962) asserts that *to* is identical to the first person singular performing the functions of a noun, but displays the characteristics of a verb (for example, *I asked him to go*) except with auxiliary and other verbs, as in *No one saw her leave*. Hence, learners commit errors in the infinitive marker *to*, concluding that the verb should stay in its present tense form.

The infinitive of a verb has two forms: the *to-infinitive* and the infinitive without *to*. The former form consists of *to* plus the base form of the verb (*She wants to see you*); while the latter consists of the base form of the verb, as in *I made them wait for you*. The *to-infinitive* in a clause with a verb that has no subject (a non-finite clause) can also be used although it focuses on the idea of an action or the results

of an action, rather than the action itself, as in *To visit a doctor when you are broke is a nightmare*.

The infinitive marker *to* can be used before the base form of the verb” (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006) to show **intention** (*I set out to collect it*), **result** (*We managed to come home*), **cause** (*I am sorry to hear that*); and an **action** that you want or are advised to perform (*I would like to pass the test*); and without following verb when the missing verb is easy to find (*She asked him to come but she didn't want*). On this basis, the infinitive marker *to* is also the main source of errors in English and results in poor competence in the use of tenses.

Matrood (2010) conducted research on the use of the infinitives, and found that the students had problems with knowing when to use the infinitive marker *to* with certain verbs. Therefore, the infinitive marker *to* requires a good understanding of how they can be used, because one may end up turning the verb after the infinitive *to* into the past tense.

### 3.3.6 Third person singular and plural subjects

The third person singular and plural subjects refers to third party individuals. It uses the subject pronouns *he, she, it, and they*. The subject of the sentence is “the noun that is doing or being something and must be in harmony with the verb” (Writing explained, 2019).

The subject noun can either stand alone in a sentence, for example, *Mungona likes peace among his subjects* or as a subject noun phrase, as in *The Mungona chief likes peace among his subjects*. Thus, the verb usually retains the form in which it is found in a sentence any sentence to conform to the rules of using the infinitive marker *to*.

The singularity or plurality of the subject ‘Mungona’ or subject noun phrase ‘Mungona chief’ does not have an effect on the verb *likes*. As ‘there are two numbers: singular and plural’ (Greenbaum, 1991), there are two forms for the simple present tense verbs: the ‘-s’ and the base form for all verbs except *be*. The ‘-s’ (or ‘-es’) form is used for the third person singular subjects and any singular

verbs, hence, verbs should agree with their subjects in *number* (singular/plural) and in *person* (first, second, or third).

### 3.3.7 Subject-verb agreement

Subject-verb agreement refers to the agreement in number between the subject and verb in a sentence (K-12 Reader, 2012). Agreement entails the matching of at least one syntactic or semantic feature of one linguistic unit on another so that there is a systematic covariance between a syntactic and/or semantic feature of the semantic and a syntactic feature of the target. The subject-verb agreement rule maintains that the subject of a sentence should agree in number with the finite verb (Plummer, 2003). In this case, Tafida and Okunade (2016) assert that the subject-verb agreement is vital in language and it depicts the extent to which a user of the language, has internalised the rule when both speaking and writing.

Mancini, Postiglione, Laudanna and Rizzi (2014) posit that agreement is generally conceived as a syntactic dependency whose computation and comprehension processes deal with agreement features uniformly, without differentiating among them. They also concluded that the correctness of a verb form should be determined by the person and number of its subject, as in this case, the subject and a verb phrase determine the morphological shape of a word syntactically related to the noun phrase (Jabbari Almnaseer, 2016). Thus, in English, agreement between subjects and verbs is required to bring good competence in the use of tenses.

Subjects and verbs are distinguished as an antiquity of two parts of speech, without which, a complete sentence could not be formed; often taken to be a substantive universal (Jabbari Almnaseer, 2016). Therefore, Kroeger (2005) asserts that this agreement refers to a system in which the form of the verb reflects the person, number, and/or the gender of one or more arguments, which bear the grammatical relations of the subject, object, or secondary object. Thus, a verb changes its forms depending entirely on the number of the subjects, whether the subject is singular or plural; and that the changed forms should be on a par with the use of tenses in grammar.

In this regard, Shrestha (2013) postulates that, in the simple present tense, a verb changes its form only when its subject is third person singular. When the subject is singular, the finite verb must be singular (Noriko, Paola, Dussias & Kroll, 2009). Therefore, when it is plural, the finite verb must be plural although one might think that adding an ‘-s’ to a verb makes it plural as is the case with nouns. However, an ‘-s’ on the verbs like *writes*, *likes*, and *plays* does not make them plurals, hence, such verbs should be matched with singular subjects. According to Marchman (1997), the plural verb *write* should be matched with a plural subject. Therefore, agreement between subjects and verbs is indispensable in determining competence in the use of tenses.

According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) and Noriko *et al.* (2009), even highly proficient speakers commit “subject-verb agreement errors more often than might be expected, in their native language and this is caused by a temporary overload in working memory” (Negro & Chanquoy, 2000) although this agreement seems quite simple. Any error committed by learners is quickly noticeable as it is determined by the agreement with the subjects. Thus, the third person singular inflection of verbs could be used if the subject is a singular proper noun, a singular common noun, a collective noun, or a third person singular pronoun.

Shaffer and Shaw (2016) postulate that learners can easily produce the correct sentence construction when the subjects and verbs are simple and precede verbs. However, this is incongruent with the fact that the subject-verb agreement poses challenges as it occurs for learners at all levels, and at times, such as the native speakers of African languages (Maliwa, 2009) including Tshivenda or IsiXhosa. As the copula and auxiliaries of the form *be* have distinct forms for first and third singular *am* and *is* (Dopke, 1999), singular subjects take singular verbs. While plural subjects take plural verbs, not all subjects proclaim themselves clearly to be singular or plural.

### 3.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has addressed matters pertaining to the literature review that have a bearing on the subject of the study. The linguists, including Sherman *et al.* (2010), Lester and Beason (2013), and Muhsin (2016) were dealt with in this chapter. This

chapter also discussed the extent of the problems related to the use of tenses. Accordingly, it presented the simple present, the simple past, the present perfect and the past perfect tense, the infinitive marker *to*, singular and plural subjects, the agreement between subjects and verbs.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study and also explains how data were collected and analysed. Furthermore, this chapter, discusses the ethical considerations which serve as the foundation for the interaction between the researcher and the respondents. In this context, it is the mechanism driving the data collection and analysis procedures necessary for exploring Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses. The purpose of providing a research methodology in this study is to give a detailed description of the approaches used "during the process of conducting" this research (Mafuwane, 2012). Therefore, without the provision of the fundamental strategies used in collecting and analysing the study findings; the results obtained can be deemed to be invalid, unreliable, and incredible.

### 4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

A research approach entails a set of guidelines and instructions that are followed in addressing the research problem (Fetters, Curry & Creswell, 2013). It is the plan according to which the researcher approaches the research respondents to collect information from them. A pragmatist research paradigm was used to triangulate, combine and collate data, as well as collecting information from the respondents. This approach was also used to counterbalance the weakness of one approach with the strength of the other. A clear vision of learners' competence in the use of tenses when viewed from different angles (Corbetta, 2003; Creswell, 2008) was obtained to make the findings valid, reliable and credible.

Data was collected from five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa as Alibali and Nathan (2010) postulate that these schools were the excellent source of respondents. As all the respondents came from deep rural traditional villages, there was a possibility that they could share similar exposure to the English language. In this regard, a complete understanding (Creswell, 2014) of the types of errors and their causes can be identified easily. Thus, the study

findings obtained from these respondents were analysed statistically to test the study's objective theory; and include responses available in the written tasks.

#### 4.2.1 Quantitative research approach

Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. In turn, these variables, can be measured, typically by means of instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative research approach involves the processes of collecting, analysing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study. The purpose of using the quantitative approach was to achieve the research objectives, generate, and interpret the quantifiable data obtained from questionnaires, checklists and written tasks. Biographical data were collected without predetermined responses or controlling variables (Burns, 1999). Thus, this approach was used to identify and quantify the errors committed by respondents in their written tasks based on the use of tenses.

#### 4.2.2 Qualitative research approach

A qualitative research approach refers to a study process that investigates a problem where the researcher conducts the study in a natural setting and builds a complex analysis by way of rich description and explanation, as well as a careful examination of data (Guercini, 2014). It refers to the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purposes of discovering the meanings and patterns of relationships (Berg, 2001; O'Connor & Gibson, 2003; Boeije, 2010). Thus, this approach produces rich, descriptive data that need to be interpreted through the identification and coding of themes and categories, leading to findings that could contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical use.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) postulate that a qualitative approach typically relies on methods for gathering information, including participating in the setting, observing directly, and analysing documents. According to Taher (2011), qualitative approach provides evidence of how much the learner really knows. In this study, learners' errors were collected from the samples of their written production (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) as they reveal learners' grammatical

competence with reference to the use of tenses. As the sample was small, non-random, purposeful and theoretical, the researcher also observed the writing of the learners' compositions.

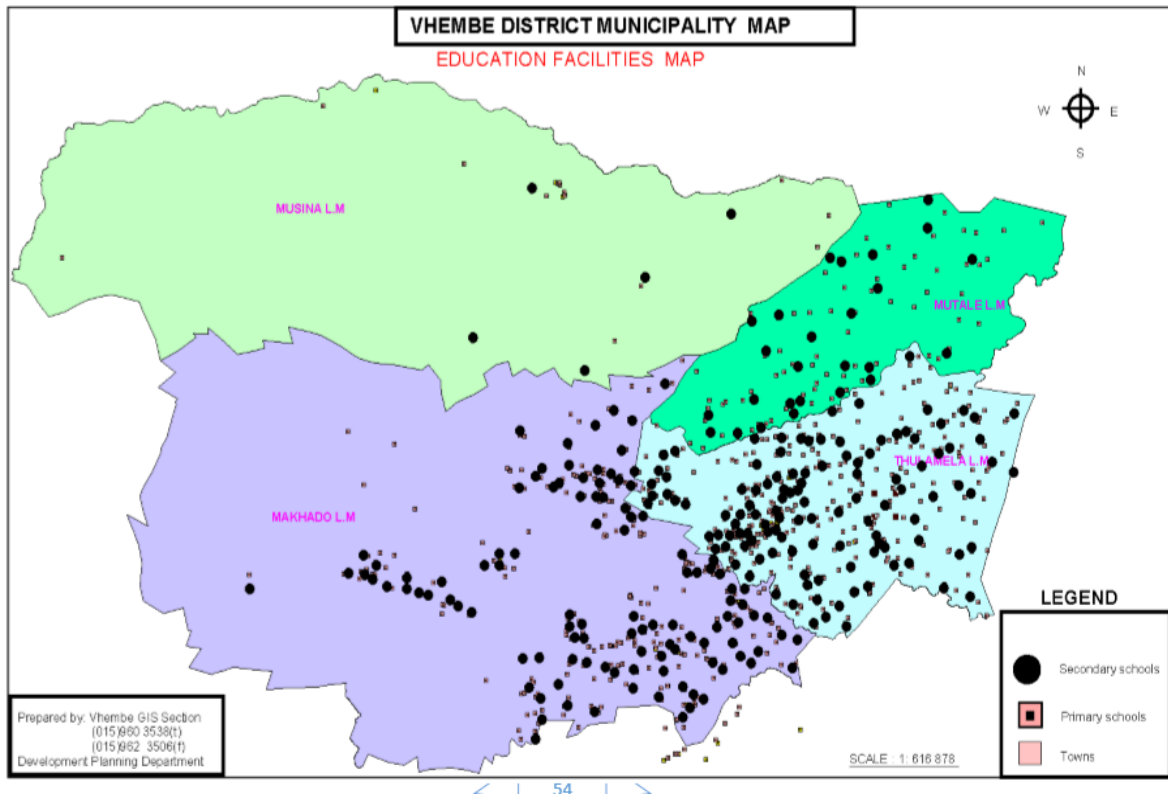
#### 4.3 CASE STUDY

A case study is a type of qualitative research in which in-depth data can be gathered relative to a single individual program or event for the purpose of learning more about an unknown or poorly understood situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). The reason for using a case study was to obtain reliable data from the respondents as the activities were performed in their natural setting through the written tasks. Although a quantitative approach was used, the respondents were allowed to construct their own realities and arrive at their own truths based on their lived experiences; and their own competence in the use of tenses through document analysis. Accordingly, quantitative and qualitative research approaches can provide teachers and researchers with a complete picture of learners' competence in the use of tenses.

#### 4.4 RESEARCH SETTING

A setting refers to the place where the data are collected. In this case, the setting was the Vhumbedzi Circuit located in the Malamulele Cluster. Vhumbedzi is one of the 27 circuits in the Vhembe District, and comprises ten secondary schools of which the majority have Grade 11 and 12 classes. The Vhumbedzi Circuit is located in the deep rural traditional villages that stretch eastwards from beyond the Tshamutshedzi River and forms the border between the Kruger National Park and the Vhembe District. The following map illustrates the distribution of schools within the Vhembe District in South Africa:

Figure 3.8 Schools distribution in the district



**Figure 4.1: Vhembe District Municipality map: School distribution (Thulamela Municipality IDP 2016/17 Financial Year).**

#### 4.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

A population refers to all members of the population known to have similar and binding characteristics that conform to a set of specifications (Polit & Hungler, 1999). It involves the abstract idea of a large group from which a researcher can draw a sample to generalise the results. Sampling, on the other hand, refers to the selection of a subset of persons from a larger population (Vosloo, 2013). It is a practical way of collecting data when the population is infinite or extremely large, thus making a study of all its elements impossible (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee 2006). Due to a number of compelling and necessary fundamentals, the researcher decided to work with only a few distinct members of the entire population.

Therefore, as the population of Grade 11 EFAL learners in the Vhumbedzi Circuit comprised 704 learners from five selected secondary schools, the researcher decided to work with a manageable sample of 70 learners to represent the entire population.

#### 4.6 SAMPLING METHOD

Sampling is a practical way of collecting data when the population is infinite or extremely large, thus, making a study of all its elements impossible (Bless *et al.*, 2006). It is a method of sampling that utilises a random selection of respondents to assure that the different units in the population under study, have equal probabilities of being chosen or a fair chance of being included in the sample. A sampling of learners was done according to the acceptable 10% sample population.

As the overall population from five selected secondary schools consisted of 704 learners (the sampling frame), the researcher multiplied this number by ten and divided the result by 100 to get 70 respondents ( $704 \times 10 / 100 = 70$ ). Although the study dealt with 70 sampled respondents in the quantitative research stage, further sampling was done by taking a 10% of the sample population. All wrote, then the researcher divided learners scripts into groups of 10; and from each group a single script was taken for qualitative research analysis. The study was mainly quantitative because of 90% population were sampled, while qualitative had only 10% of the sample.

#### 4.7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

According to Yaya (2014), a research instrument refers to measurement tools such as questionnaires for the collection of learners' biographical data to establish the respondents' age, sex, grade; and dwelling place. In turn, Punch (2006) explains that a research instrument answers the question regarding to how the data can be collected. The researcher used written tasks to gather the research data, so that a comparison could be made across studies, and also with different populations (Monette, Sullivan, & De Jong, 2008). In this case, relevant and supportive quantitative data were collected for analytical purposes by means of a questionnaire.

The questionnaire that was used for the quantitative part of the study was divided into the next three sections, namely:

Section A: The purpose of this section was to obtain the respondents' biographical details so that the researcher could compile a profile of them. The respondents were instructed to tick or put a cross in the spaces provided in this section.

Section B: This section consisted of questions concerning the respondents' daily lives and perceptions about learning English. In this section, no explanations or elaborations were expected from the respondents since they were given a chance to select answers from those in brackets.

Section C: This section was used to obtain qualitative data from the respondents' written essay entitled: **The most favourable sport since creation** so that the researcher could obtain a true reflection of learners' competence in the use of tenses.

In this case, the time allocated for the respondents to complete both the tasks was 45 minutes so that they could provide sufficient data. After having collected the quantitative data from the respondents, they were also given a chance to write a composition from which qualitative data were collected. In qualitative research, the researchers typically participate in the setting, observing directly; and analysing documents and material culture (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Therefore, a qualitative approach analysis offers authentic study findings from the respondents' creativity in the form of written compositions.

The purpose of using a qualitative approach was to corroborate the findings obtained from the quantitative approach and to establish new findings undiscovered by the latter.

#### 4.8 DEVELOPMENT OF THE TASKS

The researcher developed the tasks based on competence in the use of the simple present, the simple past; and the present perfect and the past perfect tenses. Both tasks were given to English Curriculum Advisors (ECA) for moderation and standardisation. These ECA have been delegated the authority to set examinations

and tests for continuous assessment (CASS) for both grades in the General Education and Training and the Further Education and Training bands in the Vhembe District, South Africa.

#### 4.9 DATA COLLECTION

Polit and Hungler (1999) explain that data collection is the gathering of the information needed to address a research problem and is a mechanism which provides valid information that could help the researcher (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003) to answer the research questions. The geographical location of the five selected secondary schools and the amount of time allocated to the teaching of Grade 11 EFAL, influenced the collection of data from the respondents. Accordingly, the data collection process was carried out with instruments such as questionnaires and document analysis. Furthermore, the observation of the learners was done during the writing of the tasks with the purpose of collecting valid and reliable information based on the learners' competence in the use of tenses in the Vhumbedzi Circuit in South Africa.

During data collection, every member of the sampled population was given an equal opportunity for participation in the data collection process, as it was done randomly through probability sampling. Permission to collect data was sought and obtained from the Vhembe District Regional Offices of Education in Thohoyandou, the circuit manager, the respondents, and the school principals who have the final authority for the research to be conducted at their respective schools. In addition, consent to participate in the research process for the respondents who were still underage, was obtained from their parents or guardians.

The researcher, together with the assistant, travelled to the selected secondary schools and administered the tasks to the respondents. Data were collected from the respondents who filled in their biographical information to identify themselves to the researcher. The respondents chose the correct answer from the alternatives given within the brackets, and finally wrote compositions so that the researcher could identify the type and causes of tense errors committed with the use of tenses.

Afterwards, the written tasks and confirmation letters from the parents/guardians were collected as soon as the respondents had finished writing.

The marking of the questions supplied in the questionnaire was done using a marking memorandum, while the compositions were marked against the themes identified in the literature review. After the writing of the tasks, the types of errors in the responses from the respondents in the quantitative research approach were identified, quantified, scrutinised, and grouped by the statistician for the statistical analysis. After grouping the types of errors from the respondents, data were computed to determine the ranges, means and frequencies by the researcher so that comprehensive and valid information could be collected. The respondents' responses from their own creative writing in compositions were analysed by the researcher himself. After the conclusions had been formulated, recommendations for further research were made.

#### 4.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis refers to a search for patterns in data recurrent behaviours, objects or body of knowledge (Monette *et al.*, 2008). In turn, according to Manzar (2015), it is the process of extracting, compiling, and modelling raw data to obtain constructive information that can be applied when formulating the conclusions of the study. According to Monette *et al.* (2008), once a pattern is identified, it is interpreted in terms of a social theory or the setting in which it occurred. In this case, the information was used for predicting outcomes or supporting decisions in this systematic search for meaning in its natural setting.

The data were placed in numerical order and manipulated in terms of arithmetic properties to derive the meaning for validity and reliability. Accordingly, the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed by using responses obtained from the respondents' written tasks. The data were analysed with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 to ensure a good interpretation of the findings. Figures and tables were subsequently used in the analysis of the data. Descriptive statistics were also presented in tables dealing specifically with standard error deviations, and standard errors of the mean for "comparison purposes between the sample mean, and the population mean"

(Nicholas, 2006). Therefore, the quantitative data were analysed through the use of figures and tables, while the qualitative data were analysed using the researcher's judgment with reference to the themes identified in the literature review.

#### 4.11 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity refers to the accurate measurement of the instruments in research, while reliability entails the stability and consistency of the research. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport, (2005) and Mohajan (2017), reliability and validity are the fundamental features used in the evaluation of the measurement instrument or tool for good research. Therefore, they are used to ensure that measurement procedures and instruments have acceptable levels beforehand in order to avoid bias.

##### 4.11.1 Validity

According to Babbie (2008) and Kuzmanic (2009), validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure reflects the concept it is intended to measure accurately. Therefore, in this study, the validity of empirical measures was ensured by the researcher when interpreting the findings and preconceptions of the study.

##### 4.11.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the measurement seen in the same variable measured under the same conditional procedures identical or nearly identical (De Vos *et al.* (2005). Hence, in this study, reliability of the written tasks was obtained by administering a pilot study to the respondents the actual tasks were administered.

#### 4.12 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study refers to a preliminary trial run of the major study to be conducted in advance. The purpose for undertaking a pilot study is to identify and eliminate potential areas of challenges regarding the suitability of the instrument as well as ensuring the instrument validity and clarity of instructions and items (Coyote, 2008; Casper, Peytcheva & Cibelli, 2011). Thus, it guarantees the credibility of the

research, gives a chance for making corrective changes before actually collecting the data, suggests meaningful approaches that can be used; and evaluates the instrument's capacity to collect the desired data.

A pilot study was conducted twice on seventy respondents in quantitative approach; and 7 in qualitative approach. The results from the pilot study and the accompanying comments were used to revise the instrument before distributing them to the respondents for perusal. However, the respondents in the pilot study were not included in the actual investigation.

#### 4.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations refer to the system of “getting an informed consent” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) from the different stakeholders with regard to the study. Although ethical considerations are usually ignored in research, the ethical standpoint of the researcher ensures the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings. Therefore, in this study, the following ethical considerations were applied to engage respondents according to the code of the Department of Education in the Vhembe District:

##### 4.13.1 Informed consent

Informed consent entails telling the respondents about the aspects of the research that might reasonably influence their decision to participate (Monette *et al.*, 2008) in the research. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the researcher's expectations, voluntary participation, the absence of remuneration, and that the assessment tasks would not form part of their promotion to the next grade. Thus, permission to conduct the research was also obtained from the Vhembe District Regional Offices of Education in Thohoyandou, the circuit manager, the principals of the schools, the respondents, and the parents or guardians of the respondents who were underage.

#### 4.13.2 Right to privacy: anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity refers to the non-disclosure (De Vos *et al.*, 2005) of the identity of the respondents. According to Gray (2009), no information must possibly be linked to any individual member of the sample, accordingly, the researcher used numbers to represent the names of schools and respondents. Furthermore, the researcher ensured them that there would be no revelation of confidential information without having obtained prior permission from them. In addition, the collected information and the study findings were kept in a safe place for reference or for clarity's sake. In this situation, the standards of confidentiality and anonymity were maintained strictly throughout the entire process.

#### 4.13.3 No harm to respondents

Harm to respondents entails posing physical and psychological damage (Bryman, 2016) to their mind or physique, loss of self-esteem, and stress. Hence, they were never placed in a situation where they could have been at risk of harm.

#### 4.14 SUMMARY

Chapter 4 dealt with the research methodology by explaining the research approaches and all its components. It has detailed the research methodology and motivation, which the study aimed to adopt in pursuit of the objectives outlined in Chapter one of this study. It has also outlined how the research methodology related concepts would be applied for valid, reliable and credible findings. Chapter 5 deals with the research findings and discussions.

## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research findings, and discussions based on the data gathered with the use of questionnaires and the document analysis derived from the respondents' written tasks. Accompanying tables and figures/graphs with comprehensive numerical details were used to obtain an immediate and better understanding of the collected data as well as their interpretation. The research problem was explored by identifying the types of errors and by describing and evaluating them, and establishing their causes.

The data analysis was aimed at the exposition of the following research topic: 'Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit in South Africa', and its related research questions:

- What types of errors are committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?
- How can errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses be described and evaluated?
- What are the causes of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?
- What are the possible remedial measures for the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?

### 5.2 RESPONDENTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (QUANTITATIVE)

The biographical information was used to define the conformity of the respondents to the standards set for the quantitative reliability and validity of the research project. Although the findings of the study may not answer the questions directly in relation to the objectives of the study, the researcher's observations may, however, instil confidence and credibility to the expected answers. The biographical information

was obtained from a case study involving five selected secondary schools, namely, the Mpandeli, Milton Mpfumedzeni, Tondalushaka, Randogwana and Funzwani Schools, respectively.

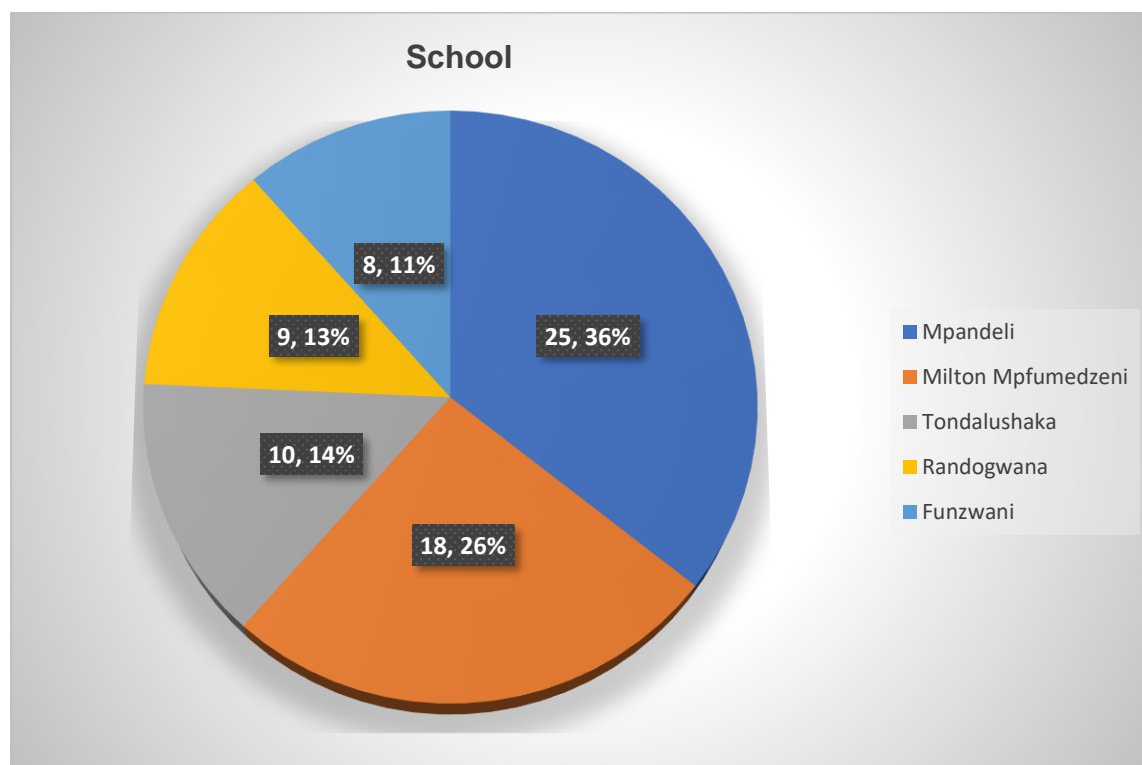
**Table 5.1: Biographical information of respondents**

Variables		Frequency	Percent
<b>School</b>	Mpandeli	25	35.7
	Milton Mpfumedzeni	18	25.7
	Tondalushaka	10	14.3
	Randogwana	9	12.9
	Funzwani	8	11.4
<b>Age</b>	15-16	5	7.1
	17-18	44	62.9
	19-20	21	30
<b>Gender</b>	Female	36	51.4
	Male	34	48.6
<b>Years in Grade 11</b>	1	53	75.7
	2	16	22.9
	3	1	1.4
<b>Dwelling place</b>	Deep rural	66	94.3
	Urban	4	5.7

Table 5.1 presents all the integrated biographical data pertaining to the respondents by schools (n=70), age (n=70), gender (n=70), years in Grade 11 (n=70) and dwelling place (n=70). The purpose of placing all the components of the biographical data in the same table, is to collate data for quick and easy accessibility from the onset. Therefore, the advantage of this technique lies in placing

the biographical data in isolation, since it would otherwise require the reader to go through the whole chapter looking for the tables that led to the formulation of a particular graph or figure.

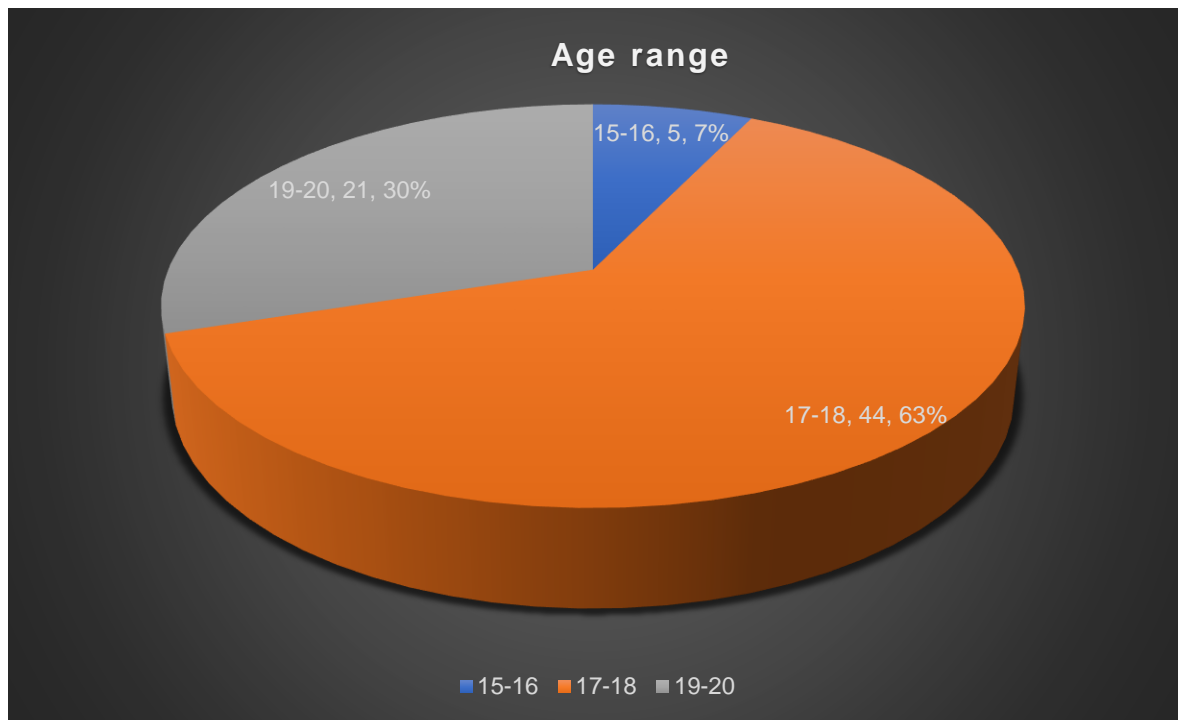
## 5.1 Secondary schools



**Figure 5.1: Respondents by 'school' (n = 70)**

Figure 5.1 shows that the Mpandeli Secondary School had the highest enrolment of 25 respondents accounting for 36% of the total, while Funzwani had the lowest enrolment of eight respondents accounting for only 11%. The other three secondary schools: Milton Mpfumedzeni (18; 26%), Tondalushaka (10; 14%), and Randongwana (9; 13%) fell between the highest and the lowest category of the learner enrolment. However, the lowest or highest enrolment did not constitute poor competence in the use of tenses. The findings imply that many learners were studying EFAL; and that the proportion of learners differed from school to school.

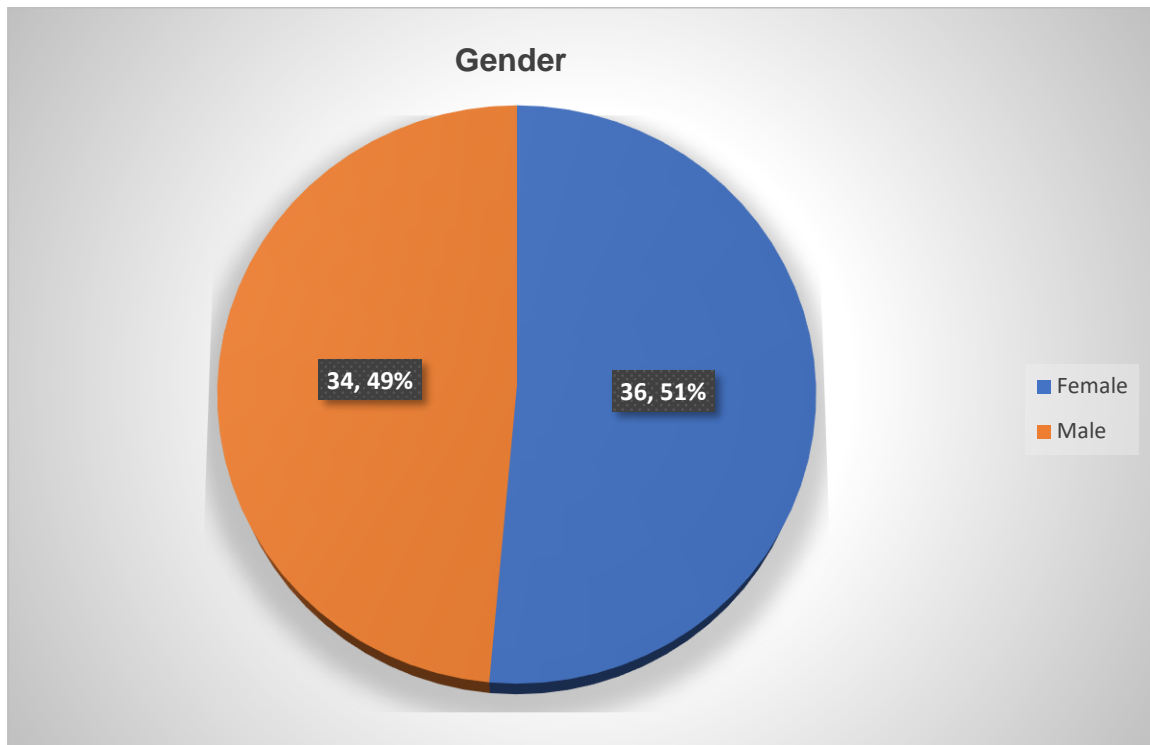
## 5.2. Age range



**Figure 5.2: Respondents by 'age' (n = 70)**

In Figure 5.2, the findings revealed that the ages of respondents ranged from 15 to 20. However, the majority of the respondents were in the age group, 17 to 18, accounting for 44, 63% of the total sample. The age group, 19 to 20, accounts for 21,3%, while the age group, 15 to 16, accounts for 5,7% of the respondents. The respondents' age-ranges were in line with the projected ages (of between 17 and 20 years) depending on the different ages at which the learners started schooling. This finding is in line with the suitability criteria benchmarked on particular conditions for the respondents' inclusion in the study. The next figure represents the gender of the respondents in five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa:

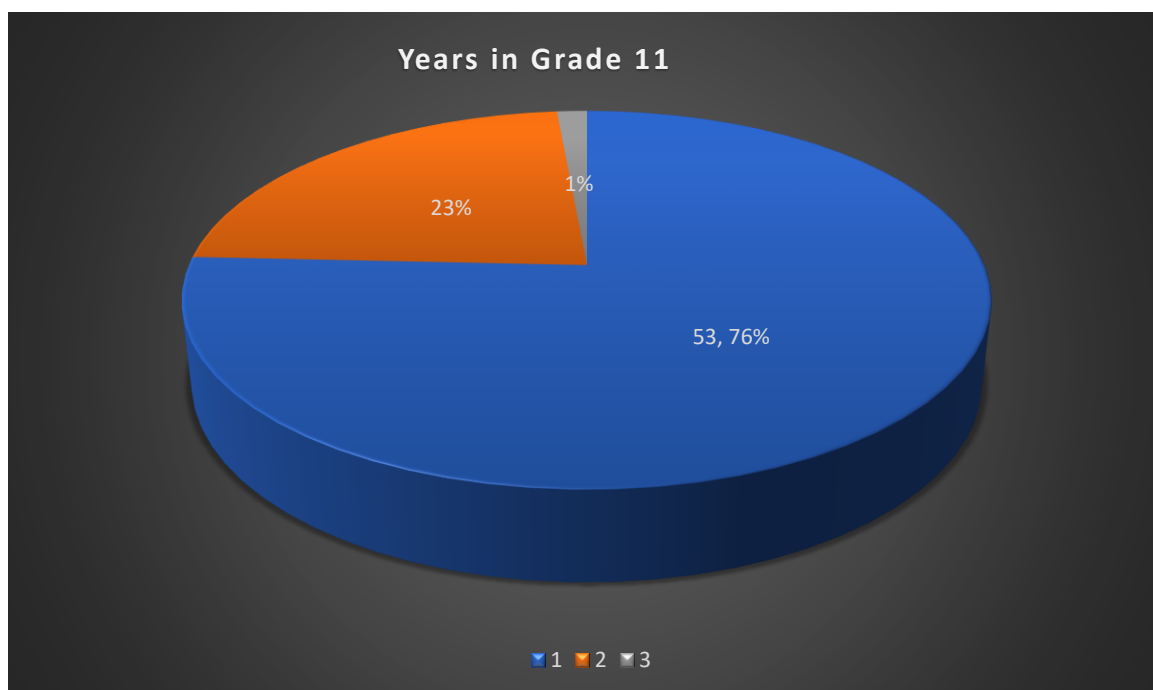
### 5.3 Gender



**Figure 5.3: Respondents by 'gender' (n = 70)**

This study found that there were 34 males accounting for 49%; and 36 females accounting for 51% as depicted in Figure 5.3. The deliberate choice of the respondents in this study was twofold: to conform to the “probability sampling” procedure where all the respondents, namely, males (51%) and females (49%) had a fixed chance of being included in the sample. However, the male percentage is not in proportion with the population in the Vhembe District as it comprises of ‘more females than males’ (Schedule,2012). Thus, the percentage of the male respondents in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa, particularly with Grade 11 EFAL learners is contrary to the belief of the majority of the population.

## 5.4 Years in Grade 11

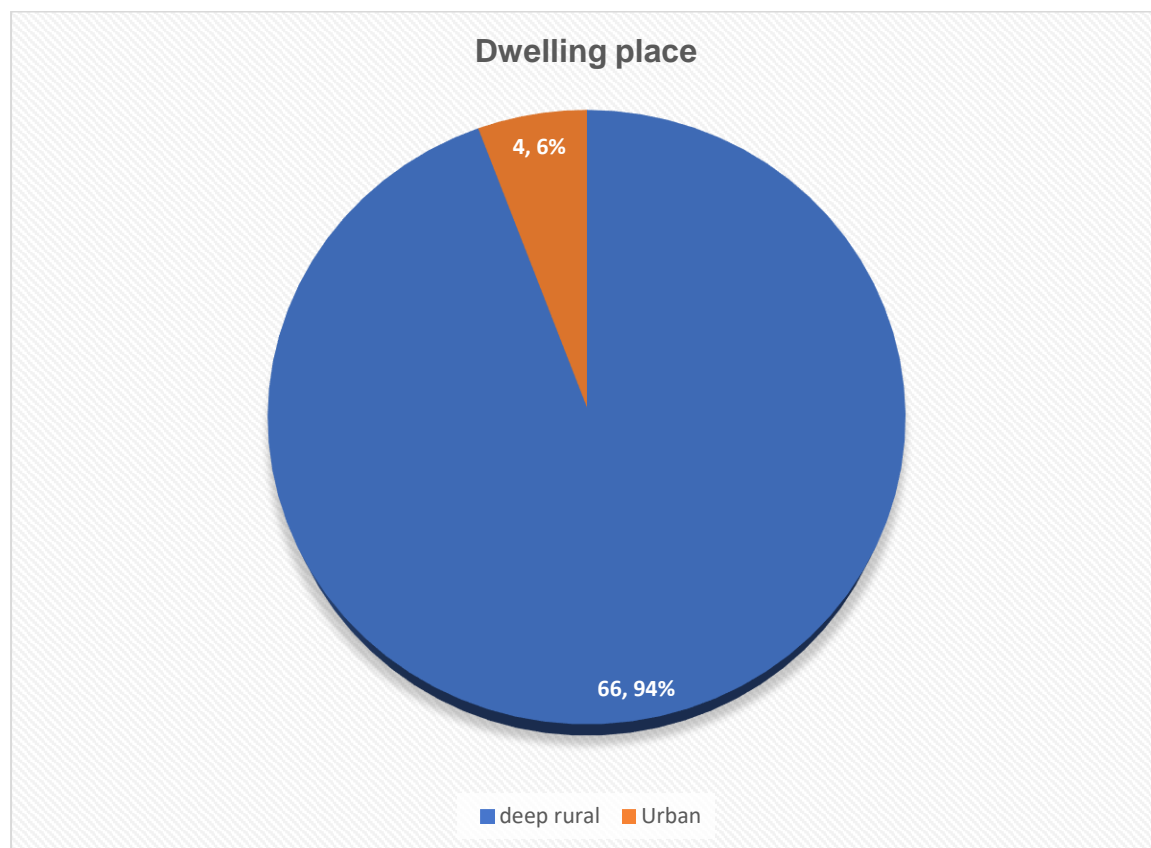


**Figure 5.4: Respondents by 'years in Grade 11' (n = 70)**

Figure 5.4 depicts that the study found that 53 respondents accounting for 76%, had spent only one year in the same grade. According to this figure, 23% of the respondents had spent two years in Grade 11, while only 1% of the respondents had spent three years in the same grade. According to the accompanying figure, the majority of the respondents were between 15 and 17 years of age, while those who fell within the age range between 18 and 19 years were the second largest group. The last group consisted of learners who belonged to the age range of between 20 and 21 years of age bracket.

This age-ranges fit in with the projected ages of between 17 and 20 years at which most learners, based on the different ages started schooling and other circumstances which might have aggravated them to repeat some grades along with their transition to Grade 11. These findings are in line with the suitability criteria, which are benchmarked on particular characteristics for inclusion in the study.

## 5.5 Dwelling place



**Figure 5.5: Respondents by 'dwelling place' (n = 70)**

In Figure 5.5, it is shown that the study found that the majority of the respondents, namely, 94% resided in deep rural traditional villages. However, only 6% of the respondents resided in urban areas. The finding implies that the majority of the respondents as a population sample may all have had a lack of exposure to the EFAL by virtue of residing in the same deep rural traditional villages at the same time in the Vhumbedzi Circuit in South Africa.

### 5.3 DATA ON THE USE OF TENSES: CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS

This section deals with what was researched with regard to the Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses. The researched information was obtained through the following four steps for EA Approach proposed by Corder (1974) cited in Lennon (2008): a collection of samples of learner language, identification of the errors, a description and evaluation of the errors, and an explanation of the causes of errors. In addition, both quantitative and qualitative

research approaches were used to collect data. The procedures involved in collecting data from the respondents with each method and the relevant evidence that can be given are detailed in the subsequent sections.

### 5.3.1 Quantitative research approach analysis

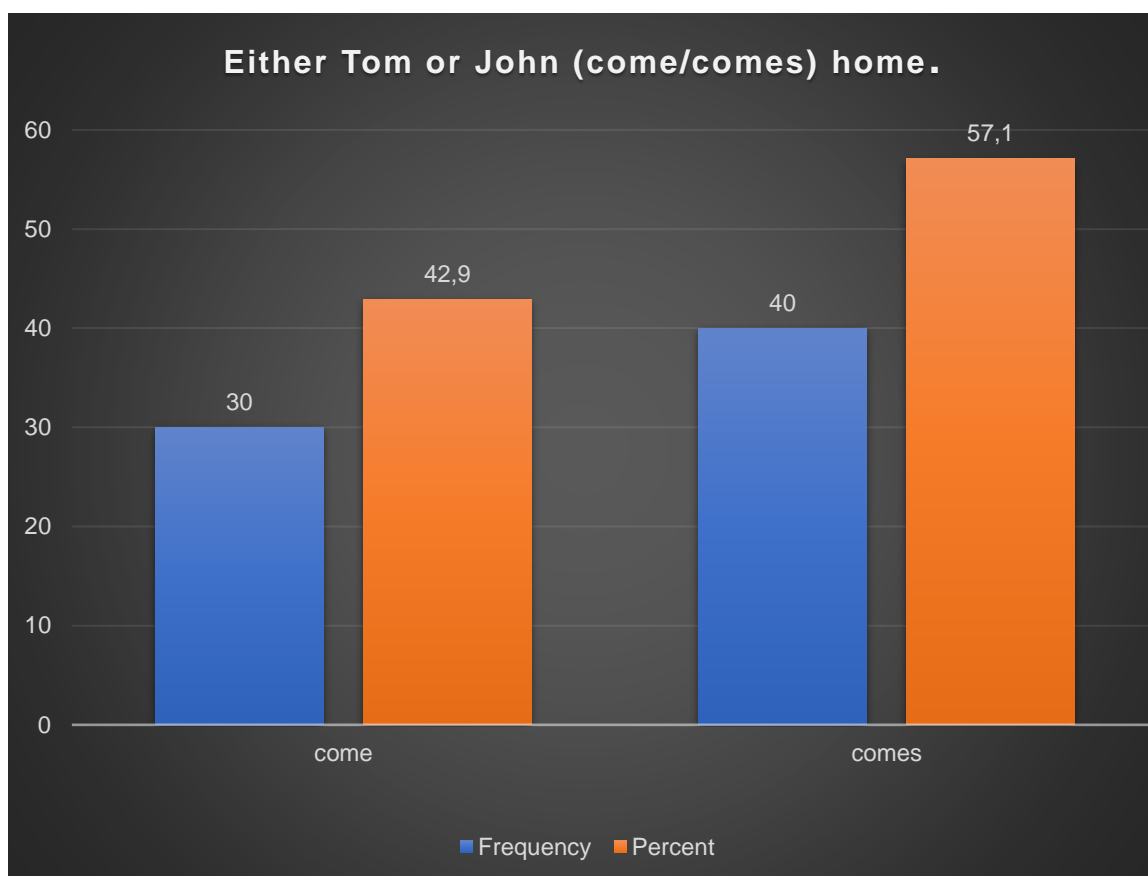
As the quantitative research approach analysis uses data to provide answers, which can be expressed numerically (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003) in this section, the presentation of the analysis is accompanied by the illustrated tables and figures with comprehensive numerical details. EA Approach was used to investigate Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses. Thus, in this study, the types of errors were identified, described and evaluated, their causes explored, and the necessary remedial measures were suggested for the errors committed.

#### 5.3.1.1 *Types of errors, their descriptions, and causes*

The findings with regard to the measured objectives and questions are presented and discussed based on Lado's (1957) and Corder's (1965) suggestions, according to the information found in this study. These questions were determined based on the investigative questions, their sub-questions, and study objectives regarding learners' competence in the use of tenses. The questionnaire supplied answers with regard to the analysis in section 5.3.1.

##### (a) Simple present tense

Concerning this tense, the EA of the respondents' tasks was based on the objectives from the background of the study and the literature review in accordance with the research approach analyses. As a discussion involving the "collection of the sample of learner language" (Corder, 1981) according to the nature and distribution of errors has already been provided, the following step deals with the sub-questions as illustrated in the next graph:

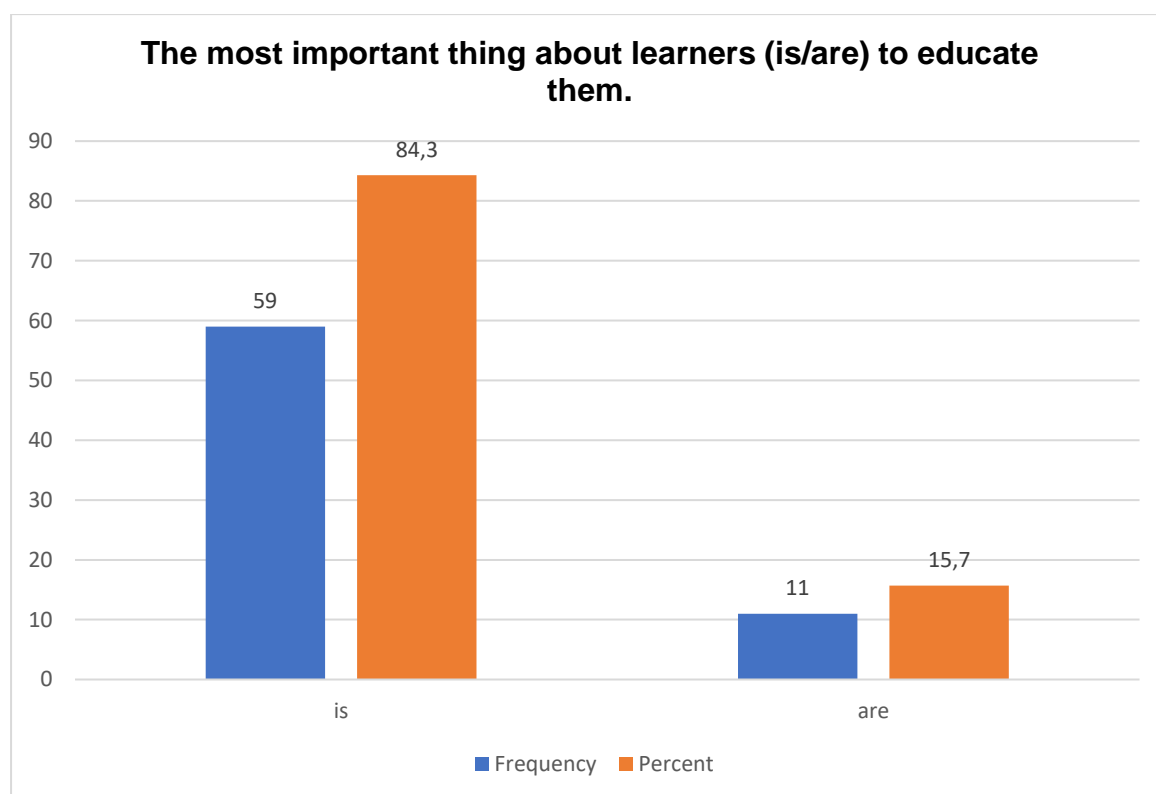


**Figure 5.6: Proximity principle: nouns closest to verbs**

Figure 5.6 shows that 57,1% of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense, while 42,9% were not. The finding implies that the majority of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense, because they were aware of the fact that when two singular subjects are connected by 'either...or', the verb is informed by the individuality of the independence of the subjects. The finding is in support of (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Straus & Kaufman, 2014) who suggested that the singular verb is determined by the singular subject; and that in the correlatives 'either... or', the verb should only agree with the second of the two subjects in the simple present tense. In this regard, the respondents reflected good grammatical competence (Chomsky, 1965), which is an element of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Therefore, even though two people were referred to in this case, only one of them is engaging in the action of *coming home*; and therefore, the verb that follows should be singular.

However, the number of respondents who did not do well is concerning. The respondents, in this case, may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the coordinated subjects. They could have been misled by the coordinating conjunction *or*; and concluded that they were dealing with two people who were both performing an action of coming home, and so they decided to use the plural verb *come* instead of *comes*. It can be deduced that the respondents in this context may have confused the singular inflectional marker ‘-s’ on the verb with a plural inflectional marker ‘-s’ on the nouns as it could change the singular nouns into plural form.

The cause of this error can be explained in terms of Lado’s (1957) overgeneralisation as Subasini, and Kokilavani (2013) suggested that some learners overgeneralise to find an easy way out to reduce their linguistic burden.



**Figure 5.7: Proximity principle: nouns not closest to verbs**

Figure 5.7 shows that the majority (84,3%) of the respondents were competent with regard to dealing with a simple present tense statement/or sentence containing the subject, which is not the closest to the verb. In this regard, the respondents’

competency is congruent with the suggestion (Peters, 2013) that even when the subject is located far from the verb, the verb should agree with an actual subject to produce grammatically correct sentences. The respondents may have taken the language structures apart (Thorne, 1993) to determine how effective communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) can be carried out. Therefore, in this context, the majority of the respondents were able to select the answer required by this question, although the subject was far from the verbs in brackets.

However, the minority (15,7%) of the respondents were unable to deal with the statement, in which its subject is lost. This is inconsistent with what Bock and Miller (1991) and Lester and Beason (2013) have suggested, namely, that in the simple present tense, when the subject is long and complicated, the actual subject gets lost. In this regard, the matching between the subject and verb is determined by the closest subject.

The respondents who did not do well in this question may have been confused by the appearance of the phrase *about learners* between the subject *thing* and the verb *are*. Therefore, as the subject *thing* is singular, the verb *is* was also necessary. The closeness of the plural noun *learners* may also have influenced the respondents to select the plural verb *are*. The prepositional phrase *about learners* may have influenced them to conclude that the verb should be plural.

The cause of an error committed by the respondents, in this case, may have been caused by Lado's (1957) overgeneralisation as suggested by Wen (2013), namely that some learners may disrupt their grammatical competence (Chomsky, 1965) by working their own answers out. In this context, communicative competence formulated by Hymes (1972) is interrupted. Thus, the respondents construct their own sentences, which are ungrammatical and quite meaningless.

**Table 5. 2: Coordinative apposition**

Questions	Respondents' responses	
	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
1) Waiting and talking (results/result) in stress.	62,9%	37,1%
2) Your house, car and dining room (is/are) in an excellent condition.	85,7%	14,3%
3) His son and heir to his throne (attend /attends) the party.	41,4%	58,6%
4) The Minister and member of the senate (answers/answer) calls.	54,3%	45,7%
5) A fork and a knife (is/are) good for eating rice.	24,3%	75,7%

In Table 5.2, question 1 shows that the majority (62,9%) of the respondents were competent with regard to choosing or identifying the correct form of the present. The finding is in line with what Balwit (2017) has suggested, namely, that when acting as the subjects of a sentence, gerunds require singular verbs. The respondents were able to select the answer: *results*, even though a coordinative apposition was used in the sentence; or where the person was involved in one action, but was (apparently) described as two by the presence of the coordinating conjunction *and*.

However, 37,1% of the respondents were not competent in the use of the simple present tense. Despite the minimal percentage of the incorrect answer, the reasoning behind this phenomenon is cause for concern. The presence of the coordinating conjunction *and* would have misled the respondents into concluding that the sentence in context, is a compound sentence, which would require a plural verb. If the coordinating conjunction *and* connects two or more subjects, the plural verb must be used in a sentence regardless of the presence of the singular subjects.

Even though *and* is a coordinating conjunction, which should go with a plural verb, there are some exceptions to this rule. When *and* is used to connect two simultaneous actions: *waiting and talking* done by the same person in coordinated subjects, the subjects should be considered as one or singular, and should result in a singular verb *result*. The context of the sentence suggests that it is one person who is waiting while talking. Hence, a singular verb should be considered. The fine

details of the exception about the conjunction *and* are what these respondents could have missed.

Question 2 shows that the majority (85,7%) of the respondents were competent, because they demonstrated informed knowledge about the fact that when group nouns are connected by the conjunction *and* in the simple present tense, the plural verb agrees with the plural subject, as in *Your house, car and dining room **are** in an excellent condition*. The finding is in support of what Greenbaum (1991) suggests, namely that when two or more singular subjects are connected by the coordinating conjunction *and* to act as a plural subject, the plural verb agrees with it because group nouns are regarded as individual entities comprising two or more separate entities within a single unit.

However, the number of those who could not do well (14,3%) in the simple present tense is a challenge. The singularity of the nouns listed in the sentence, which include those that form the subject: *your house, car and dining room* and the object of the sentence *condition* could be the cause for this confusion. The respondents may have thought that the verb of the sentence in this context, should agree with each of the singular preceding listed nouns.

Question 3 shows that the majority (58,6%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense in contrast with 41,4% that were competent. Surprisingly, question 4, which is almost identical to question 3 with regard to the construction, presents the direct opposite findings as 54,3% were competent, while 45,7% were not. In question 3, the finding is congruent with what Lester and Beason (2013) suggest, namely, that the singular verb should be used even though the compound subjects joined with the coordinating conjunction *and* refer to the same person or entity. Nevertheless, the results in question 4 are incongruent.

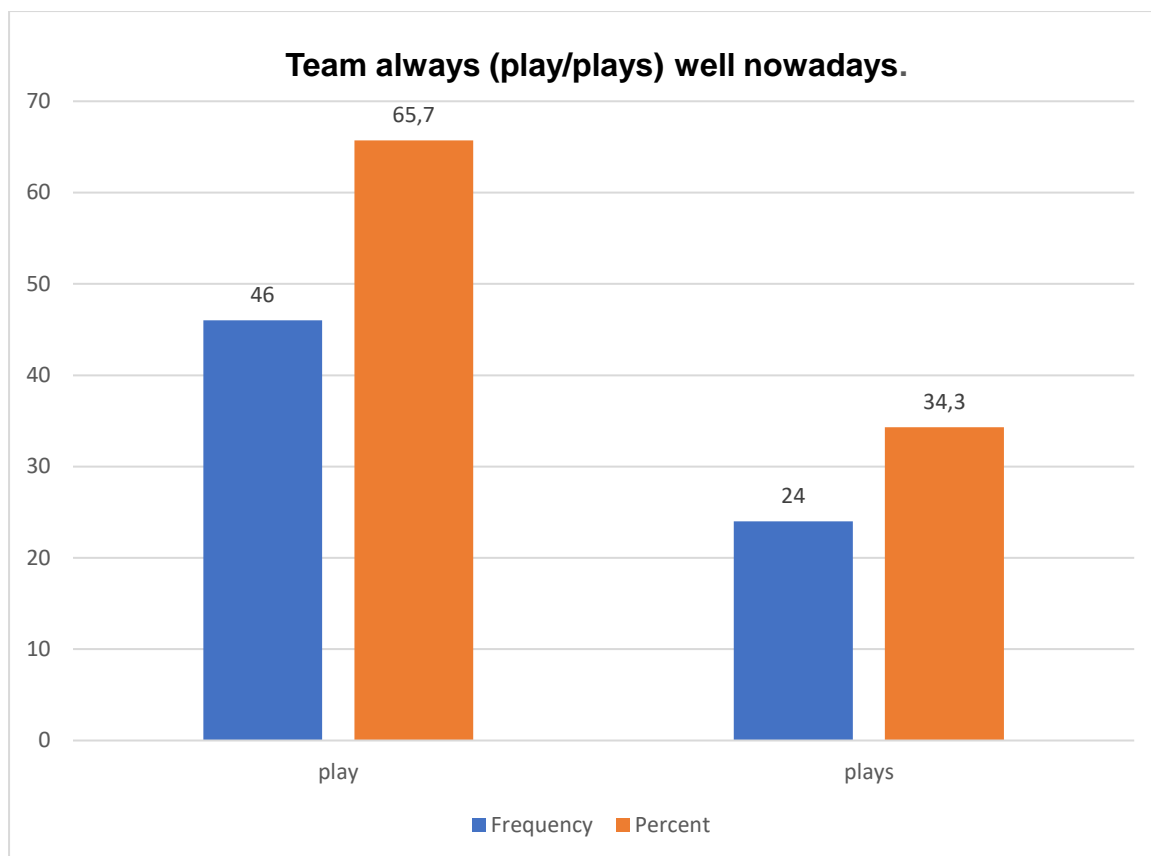
On the face value of the nature of the sentences, they should have yielded the same results, which should have been either positive or negative. In questions 3 and 4 dealing with the coordinative apposition *son and heir*, and *minister and member*, refer to the same person in their respective sentences, and they are both singular requiring singular verbs. However, if *son* and *heir*, and *minister* and *member* were preceded by the same or different determiners, they would have

been plural subjects, which would have called for plural verbs *attend* and *answer* respectively. The two opposite responses to the sentences question the consistent application of the rule pertaining to the use of the coordinating conjunction. It could suggest that the responses might have emanated from a mere guess with no profound bases. The coordinating conjunction has been applied with no consideration of the individuality of the subjects in context.

Question 5 shows that the majority (75,7%) of the respondents were incompetent, while the minority (24,3%) were competent in the simple present tense. The finding is in line with Chele (2015) and Muhsin (2016) who suggested that the second learners found difficulties with the quantifiers, such as *each and every* represented by *a knife and fork* in this regard, because grammar is difficult to handle because of the lack of well-developed writing skills. Thus, the coordinated subjects: *a fork and a knife* are associated with eating etiquette and the singular form of the verb is used, despite the use of the coordinating conjunction *and*. *A fork and a knife* are eating utensils that are used simultaneously by a person. Therefore, their concurrent use does not suggest the plurality of the subject of a sentence. The respondents in this regard, seldom use *a fork and a knife when* eating depending on the environment in which they live in the deep rural traditional villages of the Vhumbedzi area, South Africa.

Coordinating conjunctions join independent sentences, which can stand on their own and remain meaningful. In the sentence given, the separation of the two nouns does not result in two meaningful independent sentences. The respondents may not have tried to test the autonomy of the nouns, the breakdown of which would have suggested a different response.

Therefore, there is a pervasiveness of Lado's (1957) overgeneralisation of the application of the coordinating conjunction *and* across all the antecedent questions without analysis of the context of the individual sentences.



**Figure 5.8: Collective nouns**

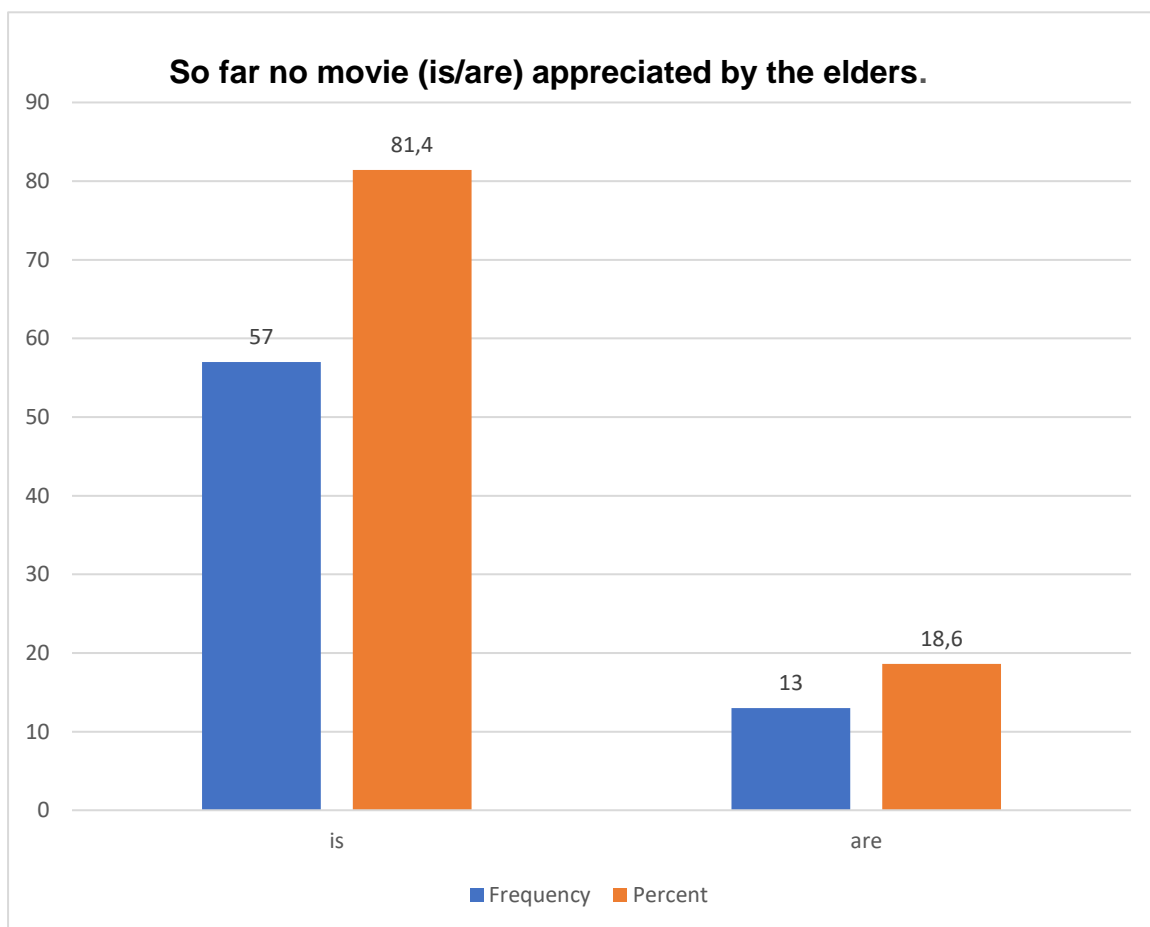
Figure 5.8 shows that the majority (65,5%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense. The finding is congruent with what Johansson (2018) has suggested, namely, that collective nouns give rise to problems, because they cannot be perceived cognitively as semantically different by different people. The noun *team* refers to a group of people made up of many individual members, but each member forms a collective regarded as a single unit, which requires a singular verb *play*.

The respondents may not have been familiar with the rule that collective nouns fall into a grammatical subclass with distinctive characteristic occurring in the singular subjects. It can be assumed that respondents know that ‘*team*’ is a collective noun, which consists of many individual members. However, these respondents may not have been aware that all these members are regarded as a unit. The word ‘*team*’ could have been interpreted to mean individuals who stand on their own; hence, the choice of the plural verb *play*.

It can be inferred again that respondents may not have realised the difference between singular and plural verb formations. The singular '-s' inflectional marker on the verb *plays* may have been the reason for the confusion. They should have thought that the collective noun *team* would collocate with the verb *plays*, which appears to be plural by virtue of the presence of '-s' in the verb. The inclusion of the adverb *always*, may have been another challenge for the majority of the respondents, who could have regarded it as a verb in the sentence.

This can be linked to the two suggested streams of incompetent responses: (a) those who regarded the *team* as singular would have thought that *always* should be the singular verb for the sentence; and (b) for those for whom the *team* is plural, *always* could have been the correct plural match. In the context. The cause of this error may be a false concept hypothesised (Lado, 1957), pertaining to the use of collective nouns. Therefore, these respondents may have developed incorrect assumptions about the target because of an incorrect understanding of the different grammatical rules.

In this question, 34,3% of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense because they were aware of the fact that, in most cases, the collective subject noun should be followed by a singular verb. This finding is congruent with the views of Anderson (1954) and Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) who suggest that if a subject contains a plural feature, the verb must have the same feature to make the sentence grammatically acceptable. In this instance, although the subject *team* consists of separate individual members, it can be regarded as a single collective unit which should be used with a singular verb. Hence, this may be the reason that made the respondents competent in the use of the present tense because they could select the singular verb *plays* instead of *play*.



**Figure 5.9: Indefinite pronoun (determiner ‘no’)**

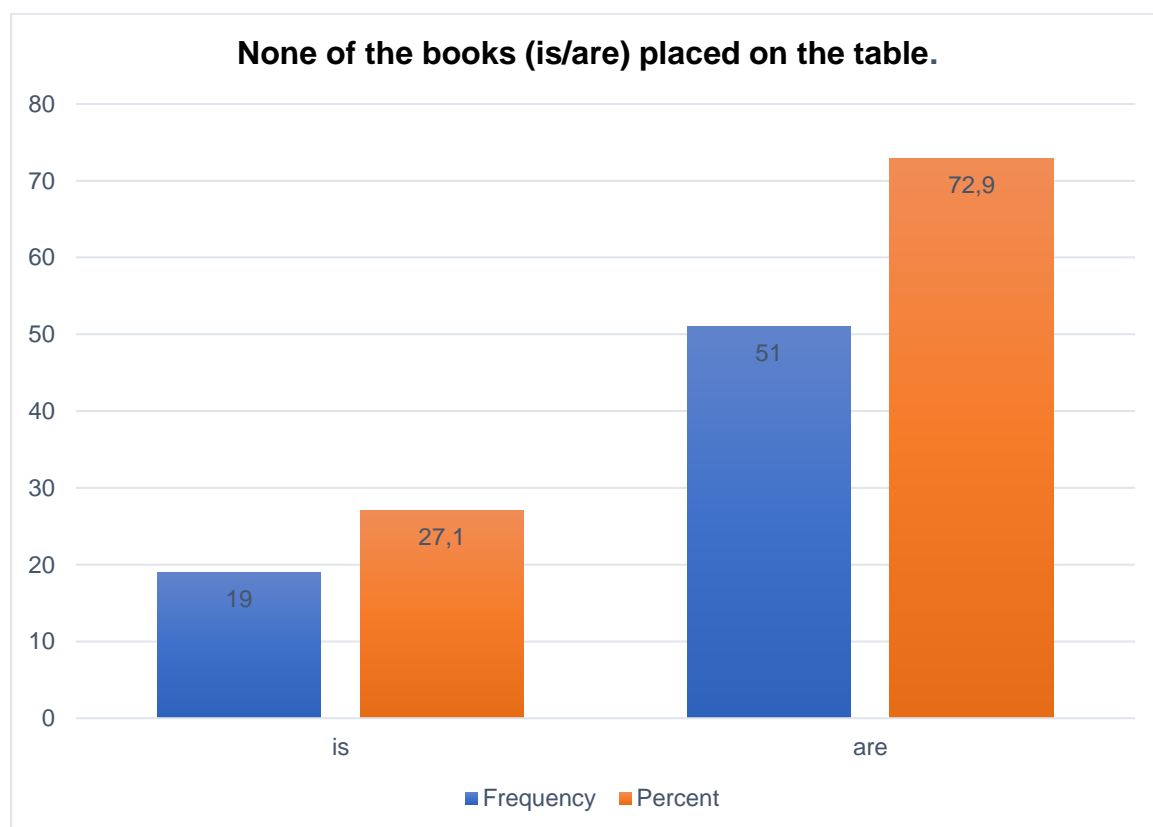
This figure shows that 81,4% of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense. The finding is in support of the explanation by Lester and Beason (2013), that singular verbs can be used if the notion behind the quantifier is in the singular form to replace countable and uncountable nouns. However, it is incongruent with Stapa (2010) who discovered that students commit most errors with indefinite pronouns. Thus, the respondents were aware of the fact that the subject *so far, no movie* is singular, and should be followed by the singular verb *is*.

In this case, the word *no* in the quantified subject *so far, no movie* fronted the singular noun *movie* and is preceded by a phrase *so far* (suggesting a certain limited extent) is used as a singular determiner indicating negation. Although the determiner *no* could be used with plural nouns, which should suggest plural verbs, in this regard, *no* (which can be associated with the determiners of amount and quantity), is used with a singular noun, and, accordingly, it calls for a singular verb.

Sound knowledge of negative determiners could have directed the application of the determinative rule, calling for the respondents to choose the singular verb *is*.

However, the minority of the respondents (18,6%) were incompetent in this question, because they were not familiar with the application of the determinative rule in the simple present tense. In this case, the respondents could not have considered the in-depth determination of the singularity and plurality of subjects and verbs with reference to the determiner *no*. Hence, they may have concluded that the plural verb *are* can be used with the singular subject *movie*.

The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957) ignorance of rule restrictions in the sense that the respondents may have committed this type of error, because of the faulty analogy, rote learning, or limited exposure to the L2. The respondents may have confused the linking verb rule, which states that the subject pronouns that come after the linking verbs would determine the singularity and plurality of the verbs that precede them. Thus, the respondents may have mistaken the *elders* for the subject of the sentence, which should dictate the use of the plural verb *are*.

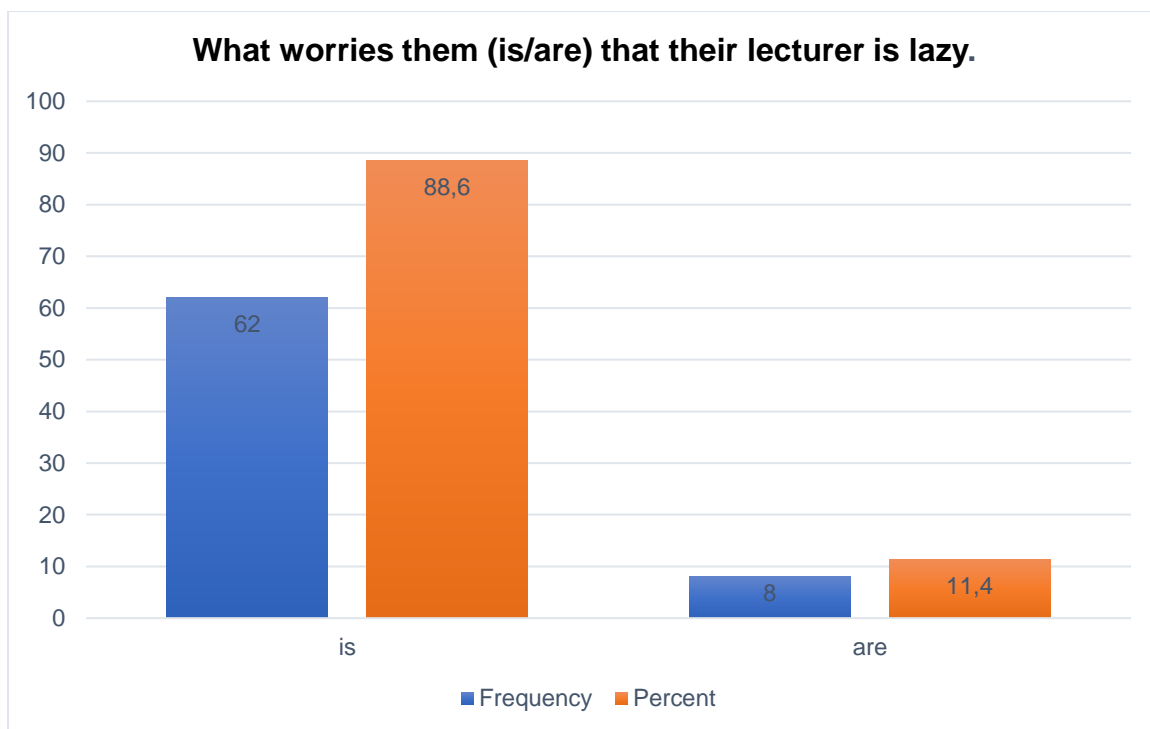


**Figure 5.10: Indefinite pronoun (determiner 'none')**

Figure 5.10 shows that the majority (72,9%) of the respondents were incompetent with regard to using the simple present tense. Despite the flexibility of the determiner *none*, which can be used with both singular and plural verbs, determination of the correct choice of verb depends on the meaning inferred in the particular sentence. The finding is inconsistent with the explanations of Brenner (2014; Drennan (2009); Peters (2013) and Chele (2015), namely that the determiner *none* takes a plural verb irrespective of the fact that it can be used with a singular verb when the subject is singular. Where the sentence implies *any of*, the verb should be plural, whereas, in *not a single one*, the verb should be singular. In this case, the subject phrase *none of the books* implies *not a single one*, and a singular verb is a requirement.

It appears that the cause of this error could have been overgeneralisation of the rule that states that the negative determiner *none* could take a plural verb without consideration of the context of the sentence in question (Lado,1957). The respondents in this context could not deduce that when dealing with the verbs, the marker *none* cannot be the sole determiner of the appropriate verb; but the collocation of the subject phrase. However, although indefinite pronouns can be conceptually plural, they present a potential conflict when they are grammatically and syntactically singular.

However, 27,1% of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense as they can determine the idea behind the use of the singular verb *is*. They were aware of the fact that the determiner *none* should be used with the preposition *of* before the article *the*, demonstratives (*this, that*), possessives (*my, your*) or pronouns; and when the meaning behind the sentence refers to *no one* or *nobody*.



**Figure 5.11: Relative clause antecedents**

Figure 5.11 shows that the majority (88,6%) of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense because they can use the relative pronoun antecedent *what*, which appears near the front of this sentence. The finding is in support of what Karim *et al.* (2015) and Chele (2015) have suggested, namely that relative pronouns do not pose many problems for the respondents in terms of their usage in sentences, although some respondents may face a few difficulties in this regard. Thus, the respondents may have developed a detailed idea of the rule pertaining to the use of a *what-clause* with verbs in sentences.

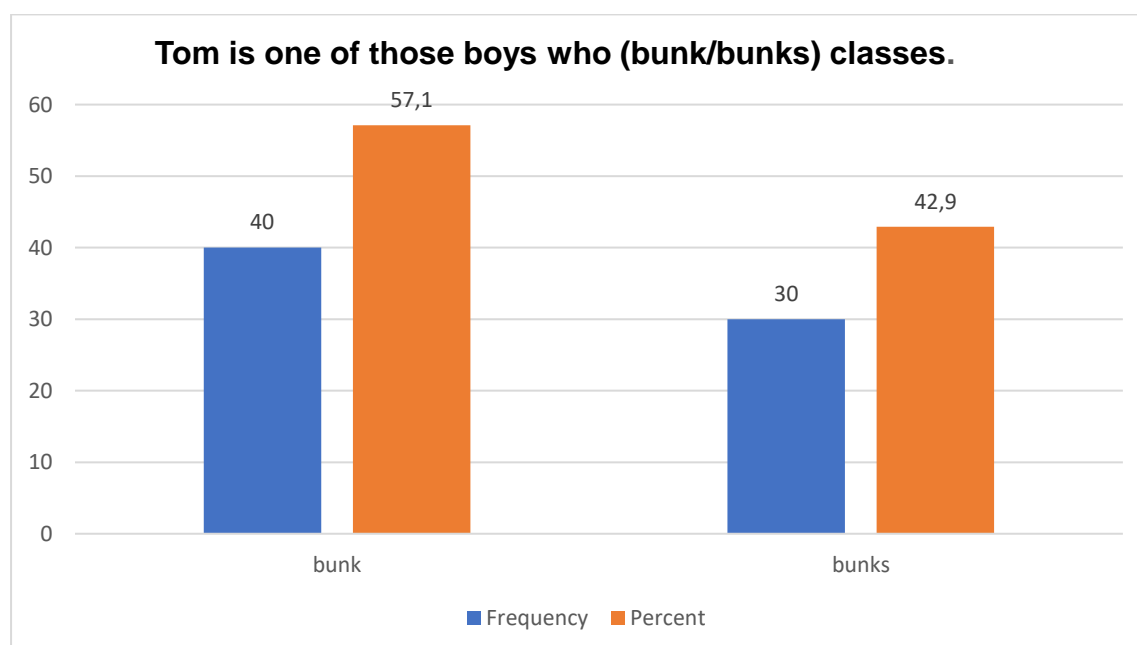
However, the minority (11,4%) of the respondents were incompetent, because they were unable to apply the rule that a singular subject should be used with a singular verb when dealing with the relative clause antecedents. It could be deducible that the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of verbs in the simple present tenses. This rule states that the an '-s' ending should be added to the verbs during the inflection of regular verbs.

In this context, the respondents may have concluded that the inflectional marker '-s' can be added to the basic verb *worry* to form the verb *worries* to conform to their own rule of verb formation without having analysed the status of the subject in

context seriously. This kind of application of the respondents' own rules is ultimately unacceptable in the simple present tense. This confusion could have emanated from the fact that the same morphological process could have been used to distinguish two distinct properties (singular verbs and plural nouns).

Some respondents may have taken the verb *worries* as the subject of the sentence, which calls for the plural verb *are*. In addition, the respondents in this situation may also have been confused by the inclusion of the objective pronoun *them*, and may have thought that they could be dealing with many people, since the objective pronoun *them* is in the plural form. In this context, the respondents may have thought that if they chose the verb *is*, they could demonstrate their inability of using the relative clause antecedents in the simple present tense.

The cause of this error could have been Lado's (1957) incomplete application of rules, which occurs when the respondents have not mastered the correct structures of grammar fully such as the relative clause antecedents usable in the production of an appropriate sentence construction. Thus, the overgeneralisation of the rule pertaining to the inflection of the marker '-s' with regard to the verb with a plural inflectional marker '-s' on the nouns could have been another source of errors.



**Figure 5.12: Relative pronoun ('who')**

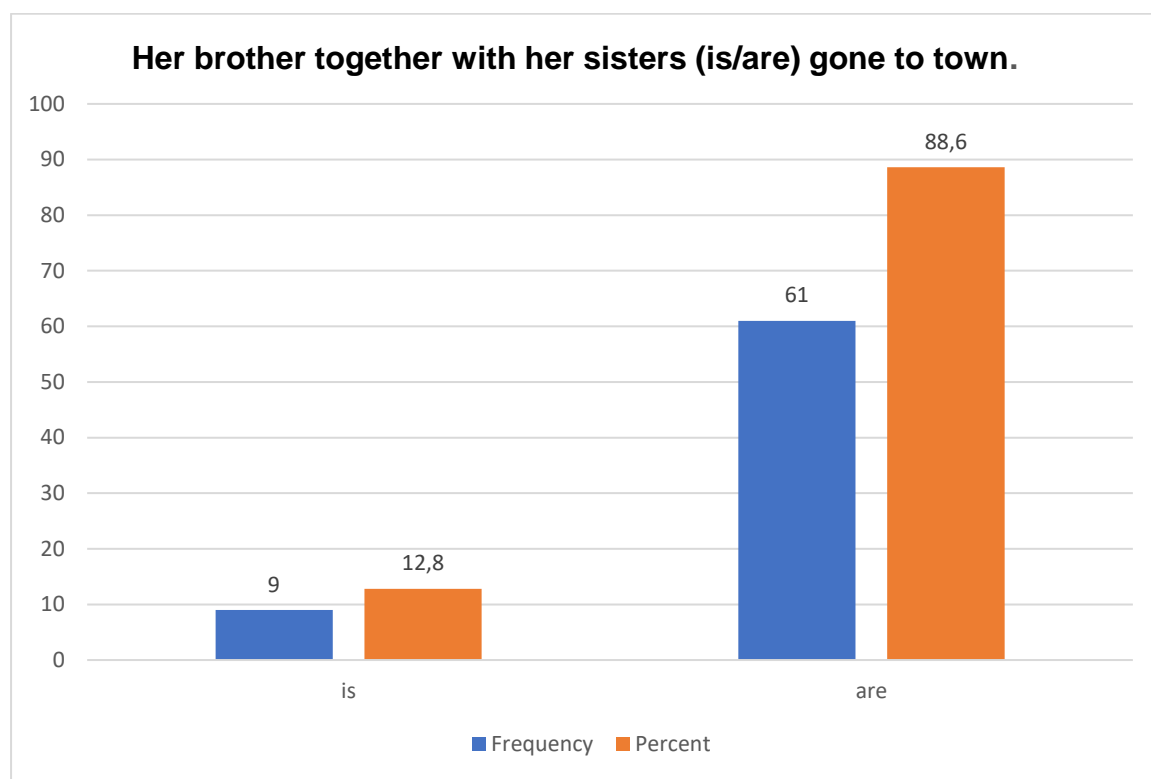
Figure 5.12 shows that 57,1% of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense as far as the relative pronoun is concerned. The finding is in contrast with the suggestion (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Eng & Heng, 2005; Duffield, 2012) that respondents experience the most difficulties with using the relative clauses in sentences although the subject of a sentence with the relative pronoun *who* (Straus & Kaufman, 2014) should be used with the plural verb in the simple present tense. In this context, the respondents reflected a good mastery of the use of the simple present tense through the inclusion of *those* and *boys* with the plural verb *bunk* instead of *bunks*.

However, it is a point of concern that 42,9% of the respondents were incompetent because they did not understand how the relative pronoun *who* was used to indicate the appropriateness in the simple present tense. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the ending ‘-s’ to the verbs. The respondents may have been confused by the nominal phrase *Tom is*, and concluded that a singular verb is a requirement as it is in line with the verb *bunks*.

The respondents may also have been confused by *one* in the prepositional phrase *one of*, which is used to avoid countable nouns; and to indicate that a thing or person, such as *Tom* in the subject phrase *Tom is one of those boys* belongs to the same group. In this context, the respondents may have concluded that they could be dealing with one person of which a singular verb is a requirement. Even though the demonstrative pronoun *those* and the noun *boys* are present in this context, these respondents could not select the plural subject and only concentrated on the subject noun phrase *Tom is one of* for the selection of the answer *bunks*.

The cause of this error could be Lado’s (1957) ignorance of rule restrictions as the respondents may have committed this type of an error due to the false analogy, rote learning, and limited exposure to the target language. This analogy may have occurred when the respondents thought that the presence of the noun *Tom*, the main verb *is*, and the prepositional phrase *one of* could have been a considerable

indicator of the singularity of a verb. Hence, the selection of the answer *bunks* instead of *bunks*.



**Figure 5.13: Quasi-coordinators**

Figure 5.13 shows that the majority (88,6%) of the respondents were incompetent in the simple present tense. It is, therefore, a point of concern that the respondents could not apply the rule regarding the use of quasi-coordinators in sentences. The finding is incongruent with the suggestion that a singular subject joined with the complex preposition *with*, for example, *together with*, or *as well as* should take a singular verb (Greenbaum, 1991; Drennan, 2009). However, the finding is congruent with the suggestion that errors may arise when a phrase comes between the subject and verb as an interrupting statement (Anderson, 1954; Kirszner & Mandell, 2006). Thus, a lack of knowledge of these grammatical dynamics: quasi-coordinators can result in grammatical errors.

The respondents, may not have been aware of the fact that in the simple present tense, the singular subject should be used with a singular verb irrespective of the presence of the quasi-coordinators in sentences. In this case, the respondents may have concluded that the quasi-coordinator *together with* could be indicating the

plurality of the subject in this regard; hence, the selection of the answer *are* instead of *is*. The meaning of the word *together* indicates two or more things joined for a single purpose. However, to the respondents, these could have meant a plurality of the subjects calling for the plurality of the verbs. The noun *sisters* in this case may have been another problem that made the respondents to select the answer, which is not in line with the meaning of the sentence.

The fact that the noun *sisters* is closest to the given alternatives might have encouraged the respondents to pick inappropriate answer. The presence of the word *together* might have been confused to a conjunction which joins the nouns *brother* and *sisters*. In this instance, the respondents could have viewed the two nouns as plural subject of the sentence requiring the plural verb *are*. These respondents may have been confused by the presence of the quasi-coordinators *together with*, and the dependent clause *her sisters* and decided to select the answer *are* instead of *is*.

A false concept hypothesised could have been one of the causes of this error as suggested by Lado in 1957, namely that the respondents could make wrong assumptions about the target language. An incorrect understanding of different grammatical rules (Lambani & Nengome, 2017) in the target language can make these respondents commit a ‘false concept hypothesised’ error. Thus, another cause of this error could be ‘ignorance of rule restrictions’ as the respondents may have been mistaken by a false analogy, rote learning, and limited exposure to the target language.

However, the minority (12,8%) of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple present tense with reference to the non-intervention principle dealing with the quasi-coordinators. They were aware of the fact that the presence of quasi-coordinators did not alter the meaning of the sentences. Even if these coordinators are not available in sentences, the meaning can still be brought forward to listeners or readers.

In the following descriptive statistics, colour fills were used for clarity purposes. The *yellow* colour represents the variables with the maximum mean values and their

standard deviations for the female respondents, while *blue* is for the male respondents. Therefore, the *yellow* and *blue* colours indicate a good performance for both males and females. The *green* colour is for variables with minimum mean values. However, the letter *N* represents the number of respondents, while *Std* represents the word standard.

**Table 5.3: Descriptive statistics (simple present tense)**

SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE	Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
	1. Either Tom or John (come/comes) home.	Female	36	1,5278	0,50631
	Male	34	1,6176	0,49327	0,08460
2. The most important thing about learners (is/are) to educate them.	Female	36	1,1389	0,35074	0,05846
	Male	34	1,1765	0,38695	0,06636
3. Waiting and talking (results/result) in stress.	Female	36	1,3333	0,47809	0,07968
	Male	34	1,4118	0,49955	0,08567
4. Your house, car, and dining room (is/are) in excellent condition.	Female	36	1,9167	0,28031	0,04672
	Male	34	1,7941	0,41043	0,07039
5. His son and heir to his throne (attends/attend) the party.	Female	36	1,5556	0,50395	0,08399
	Male	34	1,6176	0,49327	0,08460
6. Minister and member of the senate (answer/answers) calls.	Female	36	1,4444	0,50395	0,08399
	Male	34	1,4706	0,50664	0,08689
7. A knife and fork (is/are) good for eating rice.	Female	36	1,6667	0,47809	0,07968
	Male	34	1,8529	0,35949	0,06165
8. Team always (play/plays) well.	Female	36	1,3611	0,48714	0,08119
	Male	34	1,3235	0,47486	0,08144
9. So far no movie (is/are) appreciated by the elders.	Female	36	1,1667	0,37796	0,06299
	Male	34	1,2059	0,41043	0,07039
10. None of the books (is/are) placed on the table.	Female	36	1,6667	0,47809	0,07968
	Male	34	1,7941	0,41043	0,07039
11. Tom is one of those boys who (bunk/bunks) classes.	Female	36	1,4167	0,50000	0,08333
	Male	34	1,4412	0,50399	0,08643
12. What worries them (is/are) that their lecturer is lazy.	Female	36	1,0556	0,23231	0,03872
	Male	34	1,1765	0,38695	0,06636
13. Her brother together with her sisters (is/are) gone to town.	Female	36	1,9167	0,28031	0,04672
	Male	33	1,8485	0,36411	0,06338
<b>MEAN GRAND TOTAL</b>			<b>14, 5875</b>		

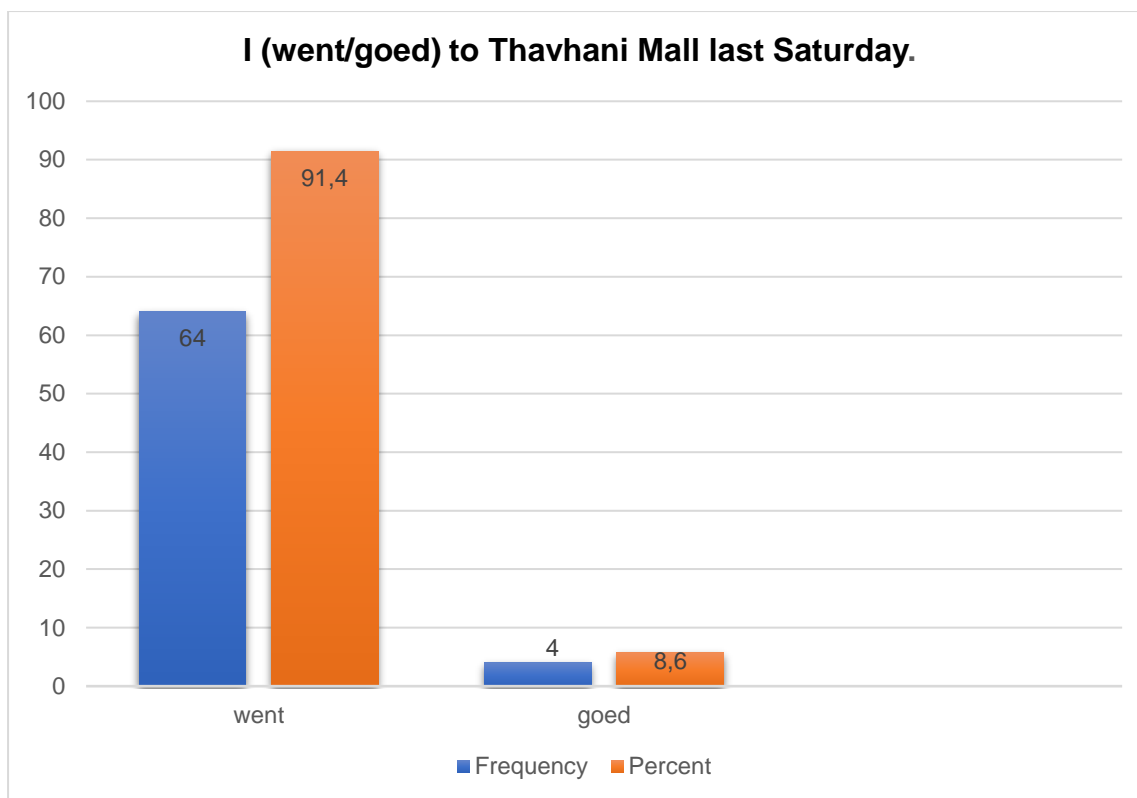
Table 5.3 shows that the maximum mean value for male respondents is 1,8529, while the standard deviation is 0,35949 for the question: *A knife and fork (is/are) good for eating* (coordinative apposition). The mean for the female respondents is

1,9167 with a standard deviation of 0,28031 for both the questions: *Your house, car and dining room (is/are) in excellent condition* (coordinative apposition); and *Her brother together with her sisters (is/are) gone to town* (quasi-coordinator) respectively. Since the study is coded Yes =1 and No =2, it is expected that the minimum mean value (1) represents areas of competence, while the maximum mean value is (2) for incompetence.

The table reveals that the variable with the minimum mean value for the male respondents is 1,1765, while the female respondents have a mean of 1,0556 with regard to the variable: *What worries them (is/are) that their lecturer is lazy*. Therefore, the respondents were competent with regard to the relative clause antecedents, but were incompetent with regard to both the coordinative apposition and the quasi-coordinators where an urgent strategic intervention is required. This table further shows that in the simple present tense, the female respondents were more incompetent than the males.

(b) Simple past tense

In the simple past tense, the following questions were used to explore the learners' competence in the use of tenses: suppletion, terminal consonants phone changes, the ablaut and zero-marking. Although these questions are presented in the form of graphs, some of them are be presented jointly by means of tables where the questions were placed differently from their arrangement in the questionnaire.



**Figure 5.14: Suppletion**

Figure 5.14 shows that the majority (91,4%) of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple past tense because they understood that the root morpheme could be replaced by a phonologically unrelated form to indicate grammatical contrast. In addition, the respondents could have known that during the replacement of one stem with another, an allomorph having no phonological similarity to the other allomorphs could be formed.

This finding supports the suggestion that some respondents can realise that the entire stem /go-/ has to be replaced by a different stem to effect a total change within a paradigm. (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011; Helmie & Hum, 2012; Smith, Moskal, Xu, Kang, Bobaljik, 2018). Therefore, the stems of the verbs in the past tense should undergo a morphological process by replacing them with a morpheme that has no morphological relationship with the two phonologically unrelated realisations, as in *am*, *is*, and *are* which can be transformed into *was* and *were*.

However, the minority (8,6) of the respondents were not competent in the realisation of the morphological processes involving the replacement of the stem with another stem in the simple past tense. The respondents may have been

confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ which states that regular verbs should receive this suffix to form the past tense form of verbs. It can be deduced that although the respondents may have had sufficient knowledge of the irregular verbs, they were unable to demonstrate their knowledge of the process of suppletion of the irregular verb *went*.

The cause of this error can be fossilisation as suggested by Lado, in his CAH, in 1957 as the respondents were incompetent in the inflection of the irregular verbs; and overgeneralisation of the rule involving the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ to regular verbs.

**Table 5.4: Terminal consonants phoneme changes**

Questions	Respondents’ responses	
	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
1) She (became/becomed) bored in the movie.	71,4%	28,6%
2) The cows (overfed/overfeded) themselves in the lawn.	65,7%	34,3%
3) We (fell/felled) the trees an hour ago.	58,6%	41,4%
4) They (prefered/preferred) coffee to tea.	31,7%	62,9%
5) The man (runned/ran) helter-skelter around the pole.	60%	40%

Question 1 reveals that the majority (71,4%) of the respondents were competent in the simple past tense, because they were familiar with the rule pertaining to the inflection of irregular verbs. The finding is incongruent with Patterson *et al.*’s (2001) suggestion that learners reflect a marked and deficiency-modulated deficit with regard to irregular verbs. In this context, the respondents could identify the correct form of the irregular verb *became* from the word *becomed*. It is apparent that the respondents were skilled in modifying the vowel ‘-o’ to ‘-a’ when forming the irregular verb *became*.

However, 28,6% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they could not select the wrong answer from the two alternatives in brackets. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the formation or inflection of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The

rule states that the ending ‘-ed’ can be added to irregular verbs to form verbs in the past tense. The respondents may have thought that the inclusion of the word *becomed* would not make it ungrammatical.

Question 2 shows that the majority (65,7%) of the respondents were competent because they could apply the rule that when forming the irregular verbs, one of the vowels should be removed so that the remaining verb can be in the simple past tense. The findings are in line with Patterson *et al.* (2001), and Ntombela (2008) who have found a deficit in the use of irregular verbs. Thus, in terminal consonants’ phoneme changes, the irregular past tense verb *overfed* was formed through the removal of the vowel ‘-e’ from *overfeed*.

However, 34,3% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they were not familiar with the formation of irregular verbs. The respondents may have been confounded by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ in the simple past tense. These respondents may have concluded that they could form a past tense verb by removing the vowel ‘-e’ from the irregular verb *overfeed*, and simply adding the suffix ‘-ed’ to form *overfeded*. Besides, the respondents may have realised that the addition of the suffix ‘-ed’ would produce the meaningless and ungrammatical word *overfeeded*.

Question 3 reveals that 58,6% of the respondents were competent in the simple past tense because they were able to distinguish between the irregular verb *fell* and *felled*. The finding is incongruent with Patterson *et al.* (2001), who suggested that learners demonstrate a deficit with regard to irregular verbs during the inflection of verbs. In this regard, the respondents could understand the fact that when the simple past tense verbs are formed, one of the possible ways of forming them is by adding the suffix ‘-ed’ to the verbs in the terminal consonants’ phoneme changes.

However, it is a point of concern that almost 41,4% of the respondents were incompetent in dealing with the consonants’ phoneme changes in the simple past tense. The respondents were not familiar with the rule pertaining to the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense as they did not realise that the irregular

verb *fell* should be changed into the verb *felled*. Thus, the respondents' incompetency is evidenced by their selection of the answer *fell* instead of *felled*.

Question 4 shows that the majority (62,9%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they may not have been familiar with the rule pertaining to the doubling of the last consonants before the inflection of the suffix '-ed' in terminal consonants' phoneme changes. The finding is in support of Patterson *et al.* (2001) who state that learners reflect a deficit during the inflection of irregular verbs. The irregular verb *prefer* can be changed into the simple past tense verb by doubling the last consonant 'r' as in *preferred* before the adding the '-ed' ending.

However, 37,1% of the respondents were competent because they were aware of the fact that when the simple past tense verbs are formed, there is a doubling of the last consonants to some irregular verbs. They were also aware that some irregular verbs double their last consonant when irregular verbs are changed in the simple past tense, while others do not double them. With regard to this aptitude, the respondents' mastery of the language is evidenced in their selection of the irregular verb *preferred*.

Question 5 shows that the majority (60%) of the respondents were competent because they were able to display their ability to form the past tense irregular verbs through modification of the vowel 'u' to 'a' in terminal consonants phoneme changes. The finding is in line with Nzama's (2010) comment that learners become competent in the second language by understanding the irregular verb inflection, amongst others, In this case, the respondents could turn the irregular verb *run* into *ran* simply by modifying these vowels.

However, it is of concern that 40% of the respondents were incompetent in terminal consonants phoneme changes in simple past tense. The respondents in this context, were unable to demonstrate their ability to form irregular verbs in the simple past tense. These respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple past tense where the ending '-ed' is added to the irregular verbs. Hence, the selection of the ungrammatical and meaningless word *runned* instead of *ran*.

In all the questions relating to the terminal consonants' phoneme changes in the simple past tense, there is a generality of fossilisation of rules, as suggested by Lado (1957) in his CAH, pertaining to the modification of vowels from one form to another; and overgeneralisation of the suffix '-ed.' In accordance with the ablaut principle, four questions grouped together in one table according to the similar pattern of vowel modification; and the complete stem change. Therefore, the causes of errors committed by the respondents in each question are finally presented together at the end of their presentation.

**Table 5.5: Ablaut principle**

Questions	Respondents' responses	
	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
1) A bone (stuck/sticked) in his teeth.	65,7%	34,3%
2) It (began/begun) to rain two days ago.	60%	40%
3) Sarah (sought/seeked) for happiness all day long.	34,3%	65,9%
4) She (undid/undone) her homework last night.	42,9%	57,1%

Question 1 shows that the majority (65,7%) of the respondents in the sample were competent in the use of the simple past tense because they were aware of the rules dealing with the ablaut principle. The finding is in line with Crystal (2008) who suggests that there is a sound change within a word indicating a grammatical inflection, to irregular verbs; and that such a change is exemplified as the internal vowel alternations that produce the words: *sing, sang, sung, song*. The respondents could differentiate between the variants given in brackets because they were aware of the fact that the verb *stuck* as can be formed by changing the vowel '-i' to '-u' from *stick*.

However, it is concerning that 34% of the respondents were incompetent with regard to the simple past tense. They could not indicate that they were familiar with the point that the regular inflexion '-ed' is not the only way of forming the irregular past tense from the given nonce verbs. The respondents in context may have been confused by the rule that maintains that the past tense verb can be formed by

adding the suffix ‘-ed.’ Hence, the selection of the answer *sticked* instead of *stuck* although it is a word that can affect communication competence.

Question 2 reveals that the majority (60%) of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple past tense. The finding is in support of Plag and Schneider’s (2000) explanation that there are other ways of forming irregular verbs from the simple present to the simple past tense apart from the regular inflexion ‘-ed’. The respondents could identify the relationship between *began* and *begun* in the context. They were aware of the fact that when forming the past tense verbs from words that have the first vowel ‘i’, the rule is that it is modified into the vowel ‘a.’

However, it is a point of concern that almost 40% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense as far as the vowel gradation is concerned. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of verbs in the past perfect tense. Therefore, these respondents ought to have been aware of the fact that the irregular verb *begun* could be formed by the modification of the vowel ‘a’ in *began* to ‘-u’ in *begun*; and ‘-a’ in *began* from ‘-i’ in *begin*.

Question 3 shows that the majority (65,9%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense, because they could not differentiate between the two words *sought* and *seeked*. The finding is in line with Plag and Schneider (2000) who suggested that there can be other ways of forming the irregular verbs from the simple present to the simple past tense apart from the inflection of the ‘-ed’ ending.

The respondents were not aware of the fact that the irregular verb *sought* is the artefact of a complete stem change from a morphological process involving the verb *seek*. They may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of the regular past tense verbs in the simple past tense requiring the addition of the ending ‘-ed’. Thus, this error may have caused the respondents to select the word *seeked* simply because it contained the suffix ‘-ed’ ending even though it is ungrammatical and meaningless.

However, 34,3% of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple past tense because they were aware of the fact that the irregular verb *seek* could be

changed into its past tense form *sought* by changing the whole stem from present to past tense. Although regular verbs can be formed by the suffix ‘-ed’ in the simple past tense, the respondents were conversant with the fact that the ending ‘-ed’ was not the only way of forming the irregular past tense verbs in the simple past tense. Hence, the choice of the past participle verb *sought* in this question.

Question 4 reveals that the majority (57,1%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they may have thought that the irregular verb *undid* could not be the a answer. The finding is incongruent with Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (1975 and Crystal, 2008) that point out that vowel gradation involves a systematic variation of vowels in the same affixes. Therefore, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the affixation of the parts of speech where the prefix ‘un-’ is used to indicate negation.

However, 42,9% of the respondents were competent in the use of vowel gradation as they were aware of the fact that regardless of the presence of the prefix ‘un-’ in the verb *undid*, does not have a negative impact on the formation of the verb *undid*. The findings are congruent with Plag and Schneider (2000) who indicate that irregular verbs can be formed in different ways apart from adding the suffix ‘-ed.’ Thus, the respondents have a thorough understanding of the fact that the verb *undone* is the past participle of the irregular *undo*, which, in this case, could not be a reliable answer.

With zero-modification, questions are also grouped together in a single table according to their similarities in terms of the irregularisation of verbs as suggested by Corder (1967); and as a result, the causes of errors committed by the respondents in each question are presented simultaneously at the end of their presentation.

**Table 5.6: Zero-marking principle**

Questions	Respondents’ responses	
	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
1) He (hit/hitted) a snake that swallowed the chicken.	35,7%	64,3%
2) He (lit/litted) the candle when the lights went off.	14,3%	85,7%
3) The news was (broadcast/broadcasted) last night.	28,%	71,4%

Question 1 shows that the majority (64,3%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense, because they may not have been aware that in zero marking, there is no inflectional change to the stem when irregular verbs are formed. This finding is incongruent with Crystal (2008) who notes that some irregular verbs lack regular phonological correspondence with other forms. Therefore, the respondents may have been confused by the rule that when forming regular verbs in the simple past tense, the ending '-ed' should be added to the verbs; whereas in zero-making the stem of the verbs should not be changed.

Accordingly, the respondents selected the word *hitted* as the answer, which can indicate the respondents' understanding of the zero marking principle. The presence of the past tense verb *swallowed* could have been another source of confusion because the respondents in this context may have concluded that the ending '-ed' attached to the verb *swallows*, calls for the adjustment of the verb *hit* into *hitted*. Therefore, these respondents may not have been aware of the fact that the verb *hit* retains the same form in the simple present, the simple past, and the past participle form.

However, 35,7% of the respondents were competent in the use of the simple past tense because they were aware that during the irregularisation of verbs, the whole stem of the verb should retain its original form. This is deducible from the word *hit* that was selected as the respondents' positive response. In its entirety, the irregular verb *hit* belongs to the group of words that do not need any stem or vowel change when they are changed into the simple past tense.

Question 2 shows that the majority (85,7%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense. It is concerning that the respondents may not have been aware of the rules pertaining to the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The rule states that verbs should remain in their basic forms during the irregular verb inflection as there is no modification of the consonants or vowels. The finding is in contrast with Kosch (2004), and Patterson *et al.* (2001) who point out that there is no phonological substance in the regularisation of irregular verbs in terms of the zero marking principle as there is an unusual phonological correspondence with other forms. Thus, the respondents may have

been confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ to verbs in the simple past tense.

The confusion may have been brought forward by the respondents’ inability to distinguish between regular and irregular verbs. The respondents may not have been aware of the fact that, although regular verbs require the regular way of forming the simple past tense verbs, it is not a requirement in terms of the zero-marking principle. In this regard, the constant patterning of verb formation does not prevail when forming irregular verbs in the simple past tense. In this question, the presence of the past tense verb *went* could have been another source of confusion to the respondents in context because they might have drawn the conclusion that its presence requires the adjustment of the verb *lit* into *litted* by adding the ending ‘-ed’ so that a state of uniformity could be reached. These respondents might not have been aware of the fact that the verb *put* also retains the same form in the past tenses.

However, the minority (14,3%) of the respondents were competent in the simple past tense, because they were conversant with the formation of irregular verbs in terms of the zero-marking principle. These respondents could differentiate between verbs in the simple present, the simple past and the past participle forms. When confronted with the challenge of addressing the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past or the past participle forms, these respondents actually found it easy to add the ending ‘-ed’ to the irregular verb *lit* so that they can form *litted* as their correct response.

Question 3 also reveals that the majority (71,4%) of the respondents were not competent in the simple past tense. The fact that these respondents were unable to differentiate between the two variants: *broadcast* and *broadcasted* supplied in the brackets, is concerning. The respondents may not have been aware of the fact that there is no morphological change to the stem of the word during the formation of irregular verbs. The finding is incongruent with what (Kosch, 2004) indicates, namely, that irregular verb formation entails no phonological substance. Accordingly, the respondents in this context may also have been confused by the rule concerning the formation of regular verbs by adding the ending ‘-ed’ to the stems of verbs.

The inability to differentiate between the irregular verb *broadcast* and the word *broadcasted* could have been another cause of confusion. The respondents may not have been conscious that the word *broadcast* remains the same in the simple present, the simple past, and the past participle forms. The adverbial phrase of time: *last night* might have been another factor that influenced the respondents in context to conclude that the ending ‘-ed’ could be added to verbs as it indicates the action that took place in the past.

In this instance, the respondents could have been convinced that there should be an inflection of the irregular verb *broadcast* to ensure the uniformity of this verb and the adverbial phrase of time. Since the irregular verb *broadcast* looks different from the other verbs by virtue of its combination of the words *broad* and *cast*, therefore, the respondents might have thought that it could not remain plain, hence the addition of the suffix ‘-ed’ to form the verb *broadcasted*.

However, 28,6% of the respondents were competent in the simple past tense because they were aware that in zero-marking, the formation of the irregular verbs calls for the plain form of the basic word. Although the words *broad* and *cast* were joined together into a single word *broadcast*, these respondents were not confused when selecting the right answer. Therefore, they were aware of the fact that the word *cast* calls for no morphological adjustment of the irregular verb *broadcast*, even though it is attached to the adjective *broad*.

There is a pervasiveness of the fossilisation of rules pertaining to the morphological inflection of the stem of irregular verbs as well as the overgeneralisation (Lado, 1957) of the rule pertaining to the inflection of the ‘-ed’ across all the preceding questions.

**Table 5.7: Descriptive statistics (simple past tense)**

SIMPLE PAST TENSE	Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
	14. She (became/becomed) bored in the movie.	Female	36	1,2778	0,45426
	Male	34	1,2941	0,46250	0,07932
15. The man (runned/ran) helter-skelter around the pole.	Female	36	1,7222	0,45426	0,07571
	Male	34	1,4706	0,50664	0,08689
16. He (hit/hi,ted) a snake that swallowed the chicken.	Female	36	1,5278	0,50631	0,08438
	Male	34	1,7647	0,43056	0,07384
17. The news was broadcast/broadcasted) last night.	Female	36	1,6389	0,48714	0,08119
	Male	34	1,7941	0,41043	0,07039
18. It (began/begun) to rain two days ago.	Female	36	1,3333	0,47809	0,07968
	Male	34	1,4706	0,50664	0,08689
19. I (went/goed) to Thavhani Mall last Saturday.	Female	36	1,0556	0,33333	0,05556
	Male	34	1,1765	0,45863	0,07865
20. She (undid/undone) her homework last night.	Female	35	2,2000	0,79705	0,13473
	Male	34	2,3235	0,68404	0,11731
21. Sarah (sought/seeked) for happiness all day long.	Female	36	1,6667	0,47809	0,07968
	Male	34	1,6471	0,48507	0,08319
22. We (fell/felled) the trees an our ago.	Female	36	1,4722	0,50631	0,08438
	Male	34	1,7059	0,46250	0,07932
23. They (prefered/preferred) coffee to tea	Female	36	1,4167	0,50000	0,08333
	Male	34	1,3235	0,47486	0,08144
24. A small bone (stuck/sticked) in his teeth when eating.	Female	36	1,5000	0,50709	0,08452
	Male	34	1,4412	0,50399	0,08643
25. The cows (overfed/overfeded) themselves in the lawn.	Female	36	1,3889	0,49441	0,08240
	Male	34	1,2941	0,46250	0,07932
26. He (lit/litted) the candle when the lights went off.	Female	36	1,1944	0,40139	0,06690
	Male	34	1,0882	0,28790	0,04937
<b>MEAN GRAND TOTAL</b>			<b>15, 0725</b>		

Table 5.7 shows that the maximum mean value for the male respondents was 2,3235, with a standard deviation of 0,68404 for the question: *She (undid/undo/undone) her homework last night* (the ablaut principle); while the mean for the female respondents was 2,2000, with a standard deviation of 0,79705. The

variable with a minimum mean value for the male respondents was 1,1765, while the value for the female respondents was 1,0556 for the variable: *I (went/goed) to Thavhani Mall last Saturday*. Thus, the respondents were competent with regard to suppletion. Conversely, the respondents were incompetent in the ablaut principle where urgent attention was required. Thus, in the simple past tense, the male respondents were more incompetent than their female complement.

(c) Present perfect tense

In this tense, six items regarding the use of auxiliary verbs *has/have* are grouped together so that the causes of their errors are discussed below the table.

**Table 5.8: Present perfect tense**

Questions	Respondents' responses	
	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
1) We (have water/have watered) the plants.	30%	70%
2) Mid-night news (has alarm/has alarmed) us.	31,4%	68,6%
3) Implements (have been clean/have been cleaned).	28,6%	71,4%
4) Criteria for passing the test (have been give/have been given).	67%	33%
5) Modification (has already been do/has already been done).	64%	36%
6) Measles (has create/has created) a problem.	33%	67%

Question 1 shows that the majority (70%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense because they may not have been aware of the use of the auxiliary verbs with the past participle form of verbs. This finding is incongruent with Lester and Beason (2013) who indicate that when the present perfect tense is formed, the auxiliary *has/have* is combined with the verb to form a past participle verb. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of the simple present tense. The rule states that when the simple present tense sentence is formed, the verb should be in the present tense. The respondents could not see that the verb should be *watered* in the verb phrase *have watered*; instead they concluded that the verb phrase *have water* could be the correct form.

The respondents may have thought that could be dealing with the nouns *water* and *plants* in one sentence without recognising that the word *water* is not noun, but a verb in this context. They may also have thought that since the concrete and uncountable nouns do not belong to tenses, there is, therefore, no need to add the ending ‘-ed’ to the word *water*. The respondents may also have thought that as they could be dealing with the possession of the objects, the ending ‘-ed’ could have been added intentionally to confuse them. In this case, they might have been convinced that the word *water* should not have the ending ‘-ed,’ hence, the selection of the answer *have water* instead of *have watered*.

Nevertheless, 30% of the respondents were competent in the present perfect tense as they were conscious of the fact that the word *water* in this regard is a verb and not a noun. These respondents know that in the present perfect tense, the presence of the auxiliary *have* calls for the inflection of the ending ‘-ed’ to the verb. That is why they could select *have watered* instead of *have water*. They were also aware that the present perfect tense could be used when the speaker does not know the time at which something happened, does not want to be specific; or used when the specific time is not important.

Question 2 reveals that that the majority (68%) of the respondents were competent in the present perfect tense because they could use the auxiliary *has* with the verbs to form the past participle form of verbs. The adjective *midnight* in the adjectival phrase of time *midnight news* also cautioned the respondents to conclude that the verb *alarm* should be in the past participle form. Lester and Beason (2013) explain that that the present perfect tense is formed by combining *has/have* + *past participle* of the verb. Therefore, the respondents were also conscious of the fact that the presence of the auxiliary verb *has* calls for the inflection of the ending ‘-ed’ to the verb *alarm*, hence, the selection of the verb phrase *has alarmed*.

However, it is a point of concern that 31,4% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of the simple sentences where the sentence consists of the subject/subject noun phrase and one main verb with or without the

object of a sentence. The respondents may have concluded that the word *has* should be joined with the suffix ‘-ed’ to form the verb *alarmed*.

The respondents in context may not have been conversant with the rule pertaining to the formation of the present perfect tense. They may have lacked the knowledge that in the present perfect tense, the inclusion of the auxiliary *has/have* is a prerequisite in sentences requiring the past participle form of verbs. The presence of the adjectival phrase, the *midnight news*, may have been viewed as something that frequently occurs because of the presence of the ending ‘-s,’ which may have meant that they could be dealing with the simple present tense, and, thus, no changing of the verb into the past participle form. In this regard, the respondents selected *has alarm* instead of *has alarmed* as the answer that could constitute the right selection.

Question 3 shows a major concern as almost the majority (70%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense as they were not conversant with the rules pertaining to the formation of the present perfect tense. This rule states that the auxiliary verb *has/have* should be matched with the past participle form of verbs. This finding is supported by Leech & Svartvik (1994) who suggest that some respondents could view the rules pertaining to the use of tenses as troublesome, and that the errors made could be regarded as a slip of the tongue. Thus, the respondents in this context may have viewed the application of this rule as confusing and difficult to understand.

In this question, the respondents may have been confused by the application of the rule pertaining to the inflection of the ending ‘-ed’ to the verbs, requiring the turning of the verbs into their past participles, when the auxiliary verb *has* or *have* is added in the sentence. The verb phrase *have been clean* may have been viewed as the correct form of the past participle form of verbs, while *have been cleaned* in contrast, could have been inappropriate to them.

Nevertheless, 30% of the respondents were competent in the use of the present perfect tense as they could assimilate the rule pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs properly, because the selected verb phrase, *have*

*been cleaned*, instead of *have been clean*. The respondents in this situation did not understand the application of the verb inflection involving the addition of the ending ‘-ed’ to form the past participle form of verbs in sentences.

Question 4 shows that 67% of the respondents were competent in the use of the present perfect tense. The respondents in this context demonstrated their skills and related abilities regarding the use of the present perfect tense as they could use the auxiliary *has* with the ‘-ed’ ending to the verb phrase *have been given*. The finding supports Lester and Beason (2013) who signify that the present perfect tense is formed by using the auxiliary *has/have* with the past participle form of verbs. Thus, it was not accidental that the respondents chose the rightful answer in the context, but it was because these respondents had acquired the level of experience required regarding the formation of the past participle form of verbs.

However, it is of concern that 33% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of present perfect tense as they could not illustrate the understanding of the rule pertaining to the application of past participle form of verbs and the auxiliary *has* or *have* in this context. These respondents may have been confused by the rule concerning the simple present tense as they may have thought that the plural verb *give* should not be turned into the past participle form. They then decided to leave the verb *give* in its plural form in the simple present tense, which is a violation of the rule regarding the formation of the past participle form of verbs in the present perfect tense.

Question 5 shows that 64% of the respondents were competent in the use of present tense because they also displayed their skills and knowledge of dealing with the past participle rules. The finding is in line with Sherman *et al.* (2010) who explain that the present perfect tense is formed by combining the auxiliary *has/have* with the past participle form of verbs. Thus, the respondents were aware of the fact that the auxiliary verb *has* requires a verb which is in its past participle form.

The respondents were aware of the fact that to indicate an occurrence that has just taken place or is continuing to happen, the present perfect tense should be used; and that the auxiliary *has* or *have* should be used with the past participle form of

verbs. Thus, in this question, the respondents selected the verb phrase *has already been done* because they knew that the verb *do* should not be left as it is, but the whole stem has to be converted into *done* to meet the requirements of terminal consonants phoneme changes in the simple past tense in morphology.

It is concerning that 36% of the respondents were not competent in the use of the present perfect tense. These respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the simple present tense where the verb should remain in its simple form. They could not apply the rule that deals with the terminal consonants phoneme changes during the verb inflection in morphology. They may not have been aware that some irregular verbs require a complete stem change during the verb morphological processes. Thus, they selected *has already been do*, which is quite ungrammatical.

Question 6 shows that the majority (67%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense, because they could not indicate their understanding of the formation of the past participle form of verbs. This finding is congruent with Leech's and Svartvik (1994) observation that some respondents could find rules dealing with the perfect tenses troublesome, and tend to make accidental errors in this regard. These respondents may have ignored the applicable rule or selected the answer *has create* unknowingly instead of *has created* in this regard, although the present perfect tense can be formed by using *has/have* + past participle form of verbs.

However, 33% of the respondents were competent because they were aware of the fact that if the auxiliary *has* or *have* is used, verbs in sentences should be placed in their past participle forms. The respondents in this context were conscious that the verb phrase *has create* could result in an ungrammatical and meaningless sentence, which may end up confusing the listener/addressee. Based on this insight, the respondents selected the answer *has created* to stay polite and meaningful in their proposition, thereby conforming to the rule pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs.

The cause of errors in all the preceding questions could be the fossilisation of rules, as suggested by Lado (1957) in his CAH, pertaining to the formation of the past

participle form of verbs. The other cause could be the false concept hypothesised as the respondents could not conceptualise the rules pertaining to the use of the past participle form of verbs together with a helping verb *to have*.

**Table 5.9: Descriptive statistics (present perfect tense)**

PRESENT PERFECT TENSE	Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
	27. We (have water/have watered) the plants.	Female	36	1,9167	0,28031
Male		34	1,8235	0,38695	0,06636
28. Mid-night news (has alarm/ has alarmed) us.	Female	36	1,7500	0,43916	0,07319
	Male	34	1,6176	0,49327	0,08460
29. Implements (have been clean/have been cleaned).	Female	36	1,2500	0,43916	0,07319
	Male	34	1,3529	0,48507	0,08319
30. Criteria for passing the test (have been give/ have been given).	Female	36	1,6389	0,48714	0,08119
	Male	34	1,6176	0,49327	0,08460
31. Modification (has already been do/ has already been done).	Female	36	1,3611	0,48714	0,08119
	Male	34	1,3529	0,48507	0,08319
32. Measles (has create/has created) a problem for all of us.	Female	36	1,6667	0,47809	0,07968
	Male	34	1,6765	0,47486	0,08144
<b>MEAN GRAND TOTAL</b>			<b>15, 8536</b>		

Table 5.9 reveals that the maximum mean value for the male respondents is 1,8235 with the standard deviation of 0,38695 for the question: *We (have water/have watered) the plants* (the use of *has/have* with the first person plural subject); while female respondents have 1,9167 with the standard deviation of 0,28031. The variable for the minimum mean value for male respondents is 1,3529, while the variable for female respondents is 1,2500: *Implements (have been clean/have been cleaned)* with regard to the use of *has/have* with a singular subject. The male respondents' mean had a similar minimum value of 1,3529 for the question: *Modification (has already been do/has already been done)*, involving the use of *has/have* with a singular subject, thereby signifying that they were competent in the use of *has/have* with singular subjects. The male respondents, in particular, were competent with regard to the answer *has already been done*. However, the respondents were incompetent in the use of *has/have* regarding the

first person plural subject. Significantly, this table further reveals that female respondents were more competent than the males.

(d) Past perfect tense

The findings from six questions on the past perfect tense, are presented in a single table, due to their similarity in the use of the auxiliary *had*.

**Table 5.10: Past perfect tense**

Questions	Respondents' responses	
	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
1) I (had never be/had never been) there.	74,3%	25,7%
2) After she (had move/had moved) out I found her crib notes.	74,3%	25,7%
3) If we (had call/had called) ahead she would not have died.	59%	41%
4) I did not say anything until she (had finish/had finished) writing.	44,3%	55,7%
5) The bus (had already leave/had already left) when I arrived.	44%	56%
6) By the time she entered, the light (had long been switch/had long been switched) off.	27,1%	72,9%

Question 1 shows that the majority (74,3%) of the respondents were competent in the use of the past perfect tense, because they were conversant with the application of the rule pertaining to the use of the auxiliary, *had* with verbs to form the past participle form of verbs. The findings support Nzama's (2010) statement that the auxiliary *had* could be used with the past participle form of verbs in sentences. Thus, they were aware of the fact that during the formation of the past perfect tense, the negativity of the sentence by the presence of the word *never* has nothing to do with the changing of the verb *to be* into *been*.

However, 25,7% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense in this question. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the *verb to be* in the simple present tense, where the verb should retain its present tense form. They could have thought that the word *be* in the verb phrase *had never be* should stay in its simple present form. The respondents in this question illustrate their unfamiliarity with the verb *been* and its

origin in sentences involving the perfect tenses, hence, the selection of the verb phrase *had never be* instead of *had never been*.

Question 2 reveals that the majority (74,3%) of the respondents were competent in the use of the past perfect tense. It is surprising that the respondents obtained similar scores in the preceding question as in the present question under discussion, although they are two different questions. The finding is in line with Ntombela (2008) who notes that the auxiliary *had* is a requirement of the formation of past participle form of verbs in the past perfect tense. Therefore, this similarity indicates that the respondents have developed a similar understanding of the past participle verb inflection.

However, 25,7% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of past participles in the perfect tense. These respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of the simple present tense verbs in which verbs should remain in their basic forms. The prepositional phrases preceding the verb phrases call for the '-ed' inflection of verbs. In this question, *after she* as the prepositional phrase calls for the ending '-ed' for the plural verb *move*, but the respondents selected the verb phrase *had move*, which resulted in the ungrammaticality of the sentence. The respondents should have selected the verb phrase *had moved* to maintain an understanding of the rule pertaining to past participles form of verbs in the use of the past perfect tense. The predicative part of this sentence: *I found her crib notes*, suggests what is confirmed of the subject *after she*, and that it should be logical. Thus, the verb *move* that follows this subject requires the inflection of the suffix '-ed.' Therefore, the phrasal verb should not have been *had move* to maintain consistency of the subject and the predicative part of the sentence. Thus, the selection of the verb phrase *had moved*, could have been an appropriate gesture of success in this question.

Question 3 shows that 59% of the respondents were competent in the use of the past perfect tense, because they indicate their understanding of the use of the auxiliary *had* with the verbs to form past participle form of verbs in order to indicate that something had already taken place before a particular action occurred in the past. This finding is in line with Lester and Beason's (2013) statement that the

auxiliary *had* should be used for the past participle form of verbs in the past perfect tense. In this situation, it means that the person *had already died*, when they decided to give her a call.

However, a point of concern is that 41% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense because they could not use the auxiliary *had* with the verbs to form past participle form of verbs. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense where the verb should retain its basic form to form this particular tense. Thus, the plural verb *call* in the verb phrase *had call* should have been *had called* instead of *had call*. The respondents in this context, may also have been confused by the use of the conditional phrase *if we*, therefore, they could have concluded that the application of the conditional tense could be different from the past perfect tenses; and that it could not be used with the past participle form of verbs. Therefore, the respondents selected the verb phrase *had call*, which lacks the inflection ending ‘-ed,’ instead of the verb phrase *had called*.

Question 4 shows that the majority (55,7%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense. The point may be that they may not have been aware that the past participle tense should be formed by using the auxiliary *had* with the verb to form the past participle form of verb in the past perfect tense. The finding is congruent with the suggestion that the majority of L2 learners are unable to use *had* with certain prepositions (Taher, 2011). Accordingly, these respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense where the plural verb should stay in its present form.

Even though the negative statement *I did not say anything*, paved the way for the respondents to realise that the correct verb should possess the past tense form, the respondents made the wrong decision by selecting *had finish* instead of *had finished*. In this sentence, the presence of the prepositional phrase *until she finish* calls for the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ with regard to the verb *call*. The respondents did not realise that the statement *I did not say anything* suggests what is confirmed about the subject, and should be in line with the predicative part of the sentence in context. Thus, the correct answer should have been *had finished*.

However, 4,3% of the respondents were competent in the use of the past perfect tense because they could demonstrate their understanding of the formation of the past perfect tense. The respondents were aware of the fact that the negative statement *I did not say anything*, which is in the past tense, calls for the addition of the suffix “-ed” to the verb *finish*. Hence, the selection of the answer *had finished*, instead of *had finish*.

Question 5 reveals that it is concerning that the majority (56%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense. The problem with the respondents in context may be the fact that they were not conversant with the formation of the past participle form of verbs in the past perfect tense. The finding concurs with Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman’s (1999) observation that learners usually commit tense errors in the relative clauses. Thus, the respondents could not use the auxiliary verb *had* with the past participle form of verbs.

The respondents were confused, because of the rule that deals with the simple present tense where the verb of a sentence remains in its present form. In this situation, the verb *leave* should have been placed in its past participle form *left*. Due to the lack of proper knowledge governing the formation of past participles in the past perfect tenses, the respondents did not realise the importance of the inflection of the ‘-ed’ ending.

However, 44% of the respondents were competent in the use of the past perfect tense because they could use the auxiliary *had* with the past participle form of verbs in the simple present tense used to indicate that one action has already taken place before the other one begins. Therefore, the relative clause *when I arrived* indicates that the action of leaving has already been done by the bus when the speaker or writer arrived. Hence, the choice of *had already left* instead of *had already leave*.

Question 6 shows that it is of serious that the majority (72,9%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense because they may not have been familiar with the use of the auxiliary *had* and the past participle form of verbs. The respondents may have been confused in this regard by the rule pertaining to

the use of the simple present tense. The rule states that the verb should be in its basic form when sentences are formed in the simple present tense.

The problem may have arisen from a faulty understanding of the perfect tense rules in relation to the simple present tense because the respondents could have presumed that the simple present tense form of verbs can be a marker of the past perfect tense in all circumstances. The finding is congruent with the suggestion (Dela Cruz, 2012; Dacumos, 2016) that the biggest challenge for learners is when they are faced with demonstrating their understanding of the use of tenses. They may have concluded that this sentence has already been in the past tense form because of the presence of the adverbial phrase *by the time*. Thus, the verb *switch* should be positioned in its present form.

However, 21,7% of the respondents were competent because they managed to conform to the rule pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs in the past perfect tense because they were aware of the fact that when it is used, the verb should be placed in its past tense form by inflecting the ending ‘-ed’ for the present tense verb to form the past tense of the verbs. Hence, the respondents selected *had already been switched* to conform as their answer.

The cause of errors in all the preceding questions could be the fossilisation of rules as suggested by Lado (1957) pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs; and the false concept hypothesised as the respondents may not have conceptualised rules pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs. Therefore, their grammatical competence could be affected so much that communicative competence is disrupted.

**Table 5.11: Descriptive statistics (past perfect tense)**

PAST PERFECT TENSE	Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
33. I (had never be/had never been) there.	Female	36	1,1944	0,40139	0,06690
	Male	34	1,3235	0,47486	0,08144
34. After she (had move/had moved) out I found her crib notes.	Female	36	1,3889	0,49441	0,08240
	Male	34	1,4412	0,50399	0,08643
35. If we (had call/had called) ahead she would not have died.	Female	36	1,5556	0,50395	0,08399
	Male	34	1,6176	0,49327	0,08460
36 I did not say anything up until she (had finish/had finished) writing.	Female	36	1,3611	0,48714	0,08119
	Male	34	1,5294	0,50664	0,08689
37. The bus (had leave/had left) when I arrived.	Female	36	2,0000	3,97133	0,66189
	Male	34	1,5882	0,49955	0,08567
38 By the time she entered, the light (had long been switch/had long been switched) off.	Female	36	1,7778	0,42164	0,07027
	Male	34	1,6765	0,47486	0,08144
<b>MEAN GRAND TOTAL</b>			<b>15, 3785</b>		

Table 5.11 shows that the maximum mean value for the female respondents was 2,0000 with the standard deviation of 3,97133 for the question: *The bus (had leave/had left) when I arrived* involving the use of *had* with the relative pronouns; while the male respondents had a mean value of 1,6765 with the standard deviation of 0,47486 in the question: *By the time she entered, the light (had long been switch/had long been switched) off* involving the use of *had* with the prepositional phrase: *by the time*.

For the variable *I (had never be/had never been) there* involving the use of *had* with the first person singular subject; the minimum mean value for male respondents is 1,3235; while female respondents had a score of 1,1944. The respondents were competent in the use of *had* with the first person singular subject. The male respondents were incompetent in the use of *had* with the prepositional phrases, while the female respondents were challenged by the use of *had* with the relative pronouns. As exploring Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses was carried out by means of quantitative and

qualitative analyses, the findings from the former research approach may have left a gap that requires corroboration and triangulation of the findings from the latter approach.

### 5.3.2 Qualitative research approach analysis

After administering the quantitative questions to the 70 respondents, the researcher gave them a qualitative task to test their creativity in a written composition. Although this study has already described the 70 sampled respondents included in the quantitative approach, further sampling was done during the qualitative phase of this study to create a manageable volume of data. An acceptable sample was created by multiplying 70 by 10% and dividing by 100. Thus, document analysis was done of seven respondents' written compositions. Qualitative approach analysis offered the respondents an opportunity to demonstrate their authentic language usage to the researcher.

The analysis of errors was guided by the scope of the study in the simple present (the proximity principle, compound subjects, collective nouns, indefinite pronouns, relative clause antecedents, and quasi-coordinators), the simple past (suppletion, terminal consonants phoneme changes, the ablaut and zero-marking), the present perfect (the use of *has/have* with the past participle); and the past perfect (the use of *had* with the past participle) tense. However, errors that were not committed in this study were captured for recording's sake, while new errors established by the study were unfolded.

#### 5.3.2.1 *Types of errors, their descriptions, and causes*

The findings with regard to the measured objectives and questions are presented and discussed based on Lado's (1957), Chomsky's (1965), Corder's (1965) and Hymes' (1972) suggestions. The respondents' essays were also determined based on the investigative questions and the study objectives regarding learners' competence in the use of tenses. The essays supplied the respondents' own productive writing skills with regard to section 5.3.2

(a) Simple present tense

In this tense, the study presents the findings based on the proximity principle, compound subjects, collective nouns, indefinite pronouns, relative clause antecedents, and the quasi-coordinators.

(i) Proximity principle

In terms of the proximity principle, the respondents committed the following errors in their written compositions: *\*Football was one of the popular sports these days*, *\*Nowadays they made speed ball*, and *\*No one wanted to miss the chance to play this time*.

The error *\*Football was one of the most popular sports these days* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense, because some of their sentence constructions had errors with regard to the proximity principle. The respondents may have been confused about the rule pertaining to the construction of simple sentences. This rule states that when simple sentences are constructed in the past tense, the main verb should be in the past tense form.

The finding is incongruent with what Thompson and Martinet (1982) state, namely that the main use of the simple present tense is to express habitual action, or information that takes place regularly; and can be seen by the present tense form of the verb. The respondents may not have been aware of the fact that the main verb *was* in this sentence indicates that in the time past, football was one of the sports played and enjoyed by many people in the whole world.

The respondents should have used the singular verb *is* instead of *was* to conform to the singular subject *netball*, which is closer to the main verb. The adverbial phrase *these days* is used to indicate something that is currently taking place in the simple present tense, and the sentence in which it is found should be in the present tense. In this case, the respondents may not have realised the importance of this phrase when they constructed this sentence. Therefore, the respondents were incompetent because their sentence was grammatically incorrect and meaningless by virtue of placing two different time references in a single sentence.

The error: *\*Nowadays they made speed ball* divulges that the respondents were not proficient in English as a subject because they could not construct a grammatical and meaningful sentence. The finding is in contrast with what is indicated by Woodward English (2018) that the simple present tense is used to describe regular actions in the present time period, and which are also true or normal. Thus, the respondents may have been perplexed by the rule pertaining to terminal consonants phoneme changes for the simple past tense, which states that the consonant ‘-k’ in the verb *make* should be converted into ‘-d’ to form the verb *made*.

The respondents may have been confused by the adverbial *nowadays*, which indicates the present day events, and calls for the plural verb *make*. In this regard, the respondents may not have been aware of the usage of the word *nowadays* and the appropriate plural verb. The respondents may have been unable to relate *nowadays* to the verb *made*. The respondents in context would have noticed that the two words cannot be used together in a sentence when one would like to construct a grammatical and meaningful sentence, which expresses habitual actions. Importantly, they would not have constructed the sentence: *Nowadays they made speed ball* instead of *Nowadays they **make** speed ball*.

The error: *\*No one wanted to miss chance to play this time* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense. The finding is in contrast with Thompson and Martinet (1982) who note that although it does not show whether or not the action is being performed at the moment of speaking, the main use of this tense is to express actions occurring regularly. The cause of this error could be the fossilisation (Lado, 1957) of rules. Thus, the respondents could not construct meaningful sentences as they may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple past tense where the verbs should be in the past tense form.

The respondents may not have realised that the verb *wanted* in the dependent clause *wanted to miss a chance to play this time* indicates that the actions took place in the past; and, in this context, it is not a requirement because the sentence

is referring to that which is taking place presently. Thus, the respondents may also have been confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix '-ed' for verbs, may also have caused them to select *want* instead of *wanted*.

The demonstrative *this* in the phrase *this time* might have also confused the respondents because they may not have been aware of the fact that this phrase refers to something or actions relating to the current issues pertaining to the *missing to chance to play*. The presence of the phrase *this time* in this sentence calls for the present tense verb *wants*. The cause of this error could be the fossilisation of rules as purported by Lado (1957) in his CAH. Thus, the respondents should have constructed the sentence: *No one **wants** to miss the chance to play this time* to indicate that as the determiner *no one* is singular so should the verb be singular.

#### (ii) Compound nouns

With regard to compound nouns, the study found no incompetency in the use of tenses in the respondents' written compositions. These errors may have been due to the informed knowledge of the application of the rules pertaining to the use of the coordinating conjunction *and*. Therefore, the respondents may have been unable to use the compound nouns pertaining to the innate and subconscious knowledge (Chomsky, 1965). This type of error can be ascribed to the fossilisation of rules suggested by (Lado, 1957) in CAH. Thus, this kind of knowledge may have been used to improve the respondents' grammatical competence.

#### (iii) Collective nouns

Regarding collective nouns, the respondents committed tense errors, which include *\*People loved soccer and it entertains them*, *\*Soccer team bringed people together*, and *\*Every weekend, the football committee discussed sports matters*.

The error: *\*People loved soccer and it entertains them* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they did not recognise that the sentence in context was ungrammatical, meaningless and not in line with Chomsky's (1965) grammatical competence. The finding is incongruent

with Uchiyama's (2006) explanation that the simple present tense entails the actions that are generally and habitually true. In this case, these respondents may have been confused by the rule that states that the suffix '-ed' should be added to regular verbs in the simple past tense.

Furthermore, regarding this theme, the statement *people love soccer* preceding the dependent clause *and it entertained them* is a clear indication of the fact that the following sentence should have a verb that is in its present tense form. The respondents did not write the verb *entertains*, instead, they decided to write *entertained*. The respondents in context may have been confused by the use of the coordinating conjunction *and*, which, joins things of the same degrees. They should have noticed that given the fact that the plural verb is *love* in the preceding statement, the verb that should be on a par with it.

The error: *\*The soccer team bringed people together* shows that the respondents were not competent in the simple present tense. The respondents may not have lacked an understanding of the fact that the statement that consists of a singular subject, should have a singular verb in sentences. This finding is incongruent with what is advocated by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), Senn and Skinner (2001) and Grammar Bytes (2019), namely that that collective nouns take a singular verb inflection. The cause of this error can be the overgeneralisation of rules suggested by Lado in 1957. Thus, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the collective nouns stating that collective nouns take a plural verb when the noun referent is not thought of as a collective.

The respondents concluded that the verb *bring* should stay in its plural form because the noun could have been thought to be comprised of separate members. In this sentence, the respondents should have thought that the emphasis is not placed on the noun *team*, but on the adjective *soccer* which *calls* for a singular verb. The collective noun *people* might have directed the respondents to use the plural verb *bring* to conform to the number of people. In this regard, the respondents may also have been confused by the fact that all the verbs except 'be' consist of the '-s' form, used for the third person singular and the singular noun phrases; and the 'base form' for all other subjects including *I we, they, and you*.

The error: \**Every weekend the football committee discussed sports matters* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they were not aware of the fact that collective nouns may be singular or plural depending on the meaning of sentences. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the regular verb inflection in the simple past tense where the ending ‘-ed’ is added. The cause of this error could be ascribed to Lado’s (1957) overgeneralisation and fossilisation of rules. Based on this insight, this rule states that regular verbs can be given this kind of the ending if the sentence is constructed in the simple past, the present perfect or the past perfect tenses.

The findings are incongruent with what is indicated by Richards and Schmidt (2010) and Johansson (2018), namely that singular verb is regarded as a single whole and is used when the noun referents are regarded as a collective in sentences. In this context, the respondents could not recognise that the collective noun *committee* called for a singular verb, and, instead, constructed a sentence that consisted of the basic form of the verb *discuss*.

The respondents did not recognise that the regular verb *discussed* was incorrect in this sentence. The adverbial phrase of time *every weekend* shows an action that takes place habitually. The verbs used with such adverbial clauses should be placed in the present tense form. The cause of this error can be Lado’s (1957) fossilisation of rules. Therefore, the respondents realise that they should use the basic form of the verb *discuss* to be consistent and grammatically correct. Hence, they could not construct an ungrammatical sentence.

#### (iv) Indefinite pronouns

The respondents were incompetent with regard to the use of the indefinite pronoun as they produced the following tense errors: \**These days soccer was very important*, \**Some players received a great income nowadays*, and \**All of us usually watched soccer games*.

The error, \**These days soccer was very important* reveals that the respondents in this context were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they

could not differentiate between the present and past times. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to suppletion in the use of the simple past tense. The finding is incongruent with Sherman's *et al.* (2010) explanation that the simple present tense is used to describe an action that is regular, true or normal including repeated or regular actions in the present time period. Similarly, the present tense shows the unchanging, repeated, or reoccurring action or situation that exists only at the present moment of speaking.

In this case, the respondents could not indicate their understanding of the fact that the past tense irregular verb *was* is the product of an irregular verb formed by means of suppletion, and could have been dealt with by the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The cause of this error could have been be the fossilisation of rules suggested by Lado in 1957. Although the presence of the demonstrative word *these* in the phrase *these days* suggests that the actions occurs regularly at the current time, the respondents did not realise that the verb should be in the present tense form *is* to conform with the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense.

The error: *\*Some players received a great income nowadays* reveals that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they may not have been aware of the fact that the simple present tense calls for the present tense form of verbs. This finding is in contrast with Brenner's (2014) explanation that the singularity of the verb determines the notional agreement when the subject is singular. Lado's (1957) overgeneralisation and fossilisation could be the cause of this error. Thus, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple past tense in which the verbs should be changed into their past tense forms.

The respondents did not know when the verb *received* should be used to refer to the action that took place in the past. They may have been influenced by the inflection of the '-ed' ending to the verb *receive* to form *received* when they constructed a grammatically incorrect sentence. In this context, the verb that could have been used in a meaningful sentence should have been *receive* instead of *received*.

The presence of the adverb of time *nowadays* is self-explanatory as it suggests something that takes place at the present moment, and calls for the present tense form of the verbs. In this context, the respondents may have used this adverb without taking cognisance of the fact that it would only be meaningful if the sentence were grammatically correct. They may also have thought that if *nowadays* is used, the reader or listener would infer that the sentence is in the present tense; whereas it is not always the case. The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957) fossilisation of rules. Therefore, they could not construct the correct sentence: *Some players receive great income nowadays*.

The error: *\*All of us usually watched soccer games* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense. Therefore, the respondents could not construct a sentence that complied with the correct grammatical etiquette. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the regular verb inflection in the simple past tense. The rule states that when the simple past tense is formed, verbs should receive the '-ed' suffix. The finding is in contrast with Chele's (2015) statement that as far as the indefinite pronoun *all* is concerned, the traditional prescription maintains that singular verbs function grammatically as singular subjects and call for singular verbs in sentences.

Therefore, the respondents might be further confused regarding the use of the indefinite pronoun *all* which generally sounds like referring to a plural noun. In this case, the indefinite pronoun *all* represents a singular subject and calls for a singular verb *watch* instead of the past tense verb *watched*. In accordance with this theme, the presence of the adverb *usually* shows that the respondents in context would have liked to indicate that this action occurs almost every time. The verb *watched* should have been retained in its basic form. Accordingly, the respondents' error could have developed from the fossilisation of rules (Lado, 1957). Accordingly, the respondents may have decided to add the suffix '-ed' to the main verb *watch* even though they were making the wrong assumption due to a faulty understanding of the rules.

(v) Relative clauses/pronouns

In this theme, the majority of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense as they constructed the following ungrammatical sentences: *\*The teams which always putted the game at the top are rewarded, \*People who were lazy to play are usually expelled from the teams, and \*Soccer is a sport that everyone loved to play these days.*

The error: *\*The teams which always putted the game at the top are rewarded* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they were unable to utilise the relative clauses in sentences. The respondents may have been confused by the rule, which deals with the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The finding contrasts with Straus and Kaufman's (2014) advice, namely that if the antecedent is singular, the pronoun is also singular and, thus, takes a singular verb. The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957) overgeneralisation and fossilisation. Accordingly, the rule in context states that the suffix '-ed' can be used to form the past tense and the past participle form of verbs in English.

The respondents may have been confused by the inflection of the suffix '-ed' to the verb cut and confused the 'consonants phoneme changes' rule with the zero-making principle. The respondents may not have been aware that the past tense of the past participle verb *cutted* in this context, is not a requirement because the verb itself should have retained its basic form. The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957) overgeneralisation and fossilisation of rules. Thus, they should have taken notice of the adverb *always* and the auxiliary verb *are*, which both call for the plural verb *put* in this sentence. However, they could not construct the sentence: *The teams which always **put** the game at the top are rewarded.*

The error: *\*People who were lazy to play are usually expelled from the teams*, divulges that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they may not have been aware of the usage of the relative pronouns. The cause of this error could be (Lado's, 1957) overgeneralisation and fossilisation. In this context, the respondents may have been confused by the rule

pertaining to the use of the simple past tense which requires the past tense form of verbs. This finding is congruent with Chele's (2015) injunction that the relative pronouns *which*, *who*, and *that* take the singular or plural verbs depending on the meaning of the sentence in context. Therefore, these respondents could not have realised that the verb *were* should have been used in its present tense form *are* to indicate that the situation is taking place regularly. Thus, the use of the adverb *usually* also indicates that the respondents wanted to construct a sentence which is in the present tense form. However, a lack of the basic knowledge of the use of the simple present tense may have led to the respondents committing the tense errors.

The error: *\*Soccer is a sport that everyone loved to play these days*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they demonstrated challenges with regard to the use of relative clauses. The finding is congruent with what is propounded by Eng & Heng (2005), namely, that relative clauses are a source of difficulty for the second language learners as it is not easy to recognise and produce appropriate relative clause constructions. Therefore, the respondents in this regard may also have been confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix '-ed' to the verbs in order to turn them into the past tense form.

The verb *loved* indicates that the sentence in context should be in the simple past tense form. Nevertheless, in this sentence the presence of the verb *is* and the demonstrative pronoun *these* show that the respondents were eager to construct a sentence that would have been meaningful, but might have been perplexed by the regular verb inflection of the ending '-ed' to the verb *love* in order to form the past tense verb *loved*. The past tense verb *loved* could also be used as an attributive adjective behind the nouns. In this context, the cause of this error could also be the fossilisation (Lado, 1957) of rules. Thus, respondents may also have been confused by its presence in the sentence and concluded that it would be right to use *loved* in its past tense form, even though the sentence required a present tense verb *love* to indicate a habitual action or actions that take place regularly.

(vi) Quasi-coordinators

In terms of the quasi-coordinators, this study found no incompetency in the use of tenses in the respondents' written essays. There was no indication of the lack of informed knowledge regarding the application of the rules pertaining to the use of quasi-coordinators, including *as well as*, and *together with*. In this case, the respondents may have been unable to use the compound nouns due to their lack of innate and unconscious knowledge with regard to grammatical competence.

The simple present tense is used to express actions including what happens at the present moment, planned actions, making a statement clear, intention, future action, a dramatic narrative in plays and public functions quoting; and in newspaper headlines, used with the adverbs (often, usually, always or generally); however, the study shows that some respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense. Thus, their grammatical competence could have affected communicative competence negatively.

There is a pervasiveness in the causes of errors as they could all have been due to the incomplete application of rules (Lado, 1957) as the respondents may not have mastered the proper application of tense rules fully. The overgeneralisation of rules pertaining to the inflection of the marker '-s' and/or '-ed' of the regular verbs; and the other markers with regard to the irregular verbs.

(b) Simple past tense

In the simple past tense, the study reveals that respondents were incompetent in the use of tenses with regard to the following themes: suppletion, terminal consonants phoneme changes, ablaut or vowel gradation, and zero marking/modification.

(i) Suppletion principle

This theme pertains to the fact that the respondents committed the following errors in their compositions: *\*Even when I am still so young, I loved soccer*, *\*In the past*,

*many players go to a soccer academy for training, \*A long time ago they are skilled in playing soccer and \*In the olden days, the football is made of plastic.*

The error *\*Even when I am still so young I loved soccer*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense with regard to suppletion. They did not realise that the irregular verb *am* should have been *was*, and were confused regarding the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense. In this context, the main verb *am* should not have been used with the pronoun *I* in the sentence.

The noun phrase *so young* in the dependent clause, *even when I was so young*, and the independent clause *I loved soccer* may have caused the respondents to think that an action that took place when someone was still a minor, requires a past tense verb. The finding is congruent with Helmie and Hum (2012) who have found that second language speakers encounter challenges as suppletion requires replacing the stem of the verb with a phonologically unrelated form to indicate a grammatical contradiction. The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957) fossilisation. In this instance, the respondents were challenged by suppletion as a theme requiring a complete stem change in irregular verbs.

The error: *\*In the past, many players go to soccer academy for training* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple present tense because they constructed a sentence that shows the respondents' incapability of applying the suppletion principle. The findings are incongruent with what Helmie and Hum (2012) explain regarding suppletion, namely that the stem can be replaced with an unrelated phonological form, and it can affect some forms within the paradigm. Therefore, the respondents may have been confused by the rule that states that the verb *go* can be used with the plural subjects.

The respondents in this context were not aware of the fact that the dependent clause *in the past*, paved a way for them to stick to the past tense. They should have changed the irregular verb *go* with a completely new stem *went* to indicate that people in context used to attend the *soccer academy* to acquire the skills that they could use when playing soccer. The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957)

fossilisation. Consequently, the respondents could not construct grammatically correct sentences consciously.

The error: *\*A long time ago they are skilled in playing soccer* reveals that respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they could not demonstrate their familiarity with regard to suppletion principle. The respondents in context might not have made in-depth analogy of the adverbial phrase of time to view its purpose in the sentence of this nature. They may have been confused by the rule that deals the formation the present tense where the verb are should be used with the plural subjects.

The finding is line with the suggestion (Lester & Beason, 2013) that suppletion effects a total change within a paradigm. The adverbial phrase a *long time ago* could suggest that the respondents wanted to indicate that the action took place somewhere in the past, but they were unable to change the verb *are* into its past tense form. The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957) overgeneralisation and fossilisation. In this regard, the respondents should have written the verb *were* instead of *are*.

The error: *\*In the olden days football is made of plastic* also reveals that the respondents were not really competent in the use of the simple past tense. The respondents could not construct a meaningful sentence in their written compositions. The respondents may have been confused by the rule that deals with the use of the singular verb *is* with singular subjects. The finding is incongruent with Aronoff and Fudeman (2011), who point out that the whole word changes because there is a lack of any regular phonological correspondence with other forms. In this situation, the dependent clause *football is made* may have confused the respondents by the presence of the verb *made*, which is in past tense.

The respondents may have thought that if the verb is already in the past tense, there is no further need to turn the verb into its past tense form. These respondents were not aware of the fact that the adverbial phrase *in the olden days* suggested that the action verb should be placed in its past tense form, instead, they constructed a sentence with the verb *is* instead of *was*. This error could have been

caused by Lado's (1957) fossilisation and the false concept hypothesised due to the incorrect assumption of the rules pertaining to using the simple past tense.

(ii) Terminal consonants phoneme changes

The respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense as they were unable to construct error-free sentences. In the process, the vowel modification took place in different categories from one form to another. The errors committed by the respondents in this theme include: *\*Soccer come in 1910*, *\*People have the same speed in the past*, and *\*Many people enjoy watching the South African World Cup in 2010*.

The error *\*Soccer come in 1910* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they may not have been conversant with the use of terminal consonants phoneme changes. The finding is congruent with Jacobson and Schwartz (2005) who indicate that second language learners are more accurate with regular verbs than with the irregular verbs. Thus, these respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense where the verb remains in its basic form.

One of the challenges in this sentence is the plural verb *come* which is in its present tense form. Present tense verbs should always be changed into the past tense forms when dealing with the terminal consonants phoneme changes in the simple past tense. In this case, the respondents may have concluded that using the present tense verb in its present state would result in a meaningful sentence.

With regard to this sentence, the respondents may have been confused by the presence of the adverb of time *1910* that is used to indicate a period of time long past. When the users want to construct sentences that have adverbs of time, the verbs should, accordingly, be in their past tense forms. Therefore, the presence of this adverb of time indicated to or directed the respondents that they should change the verb *come* into its past tense form to conform to the rules of using the simple past tense. The cause of this error can be Lado's (1957) fossilisation. However, the respondents left the verb *come* in its present tense form instead of changing it into past tense.

The error *\*People have the same speed in the past* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they could not demonstrate their understanding of the formation of the past tense verbs. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense where the verbs are used to show the present state of events when constructing sentences in the simple past tense, verbs should be turned into their past tense forms.

The finding is in line with what Greenbaum (1991) and Grammar Bytes (2016) suggested that the simple past tense always has just one part and does not need any auxiliary verb. In this instance, the respondents may have been confused by the position or forms of the main verbs in sentences. The main verbs can stand alone in sentences. The respondents were not aware of the fact that the verb *have* is not an auxiliary, and that it could stand on its own as the main verb of the sentence.

Apart from standing alone in a sentence, the respondents should have an idea that when forming the simple past tense, the main verb *has/have* should be turned into the verb *had*. Thus, the respondents concluded that the verb *have* should remain in its present state hoping that they could still demonstrate the appropriate grammatical competence.

The respondents may have been confused by the presence of the adverbial phrase of time *in the past*, which indicates the condition or state of events that could have taken place somewhere in the past. When using the past tense phrases, the verbs should also be placed in their past tense forms. In this case, the respondents may have concluded that the sentence in context could still be meaningful even without it having been turned into its past tense form. The cause of this error could be Lado's (1957) fossilisation. Hence, the use of the present tense verb *have*, instead of the past tense verb *had* in this sentence.

The error, *\*Many people enjoy watching the South African World Cup in 2010*, reveals that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense as they could not construct a meaningful sentence. The finding is incongruent with McIntosh's (2017) explanation that the simple past tense verbs show actions that

happened in the past. Accordingly, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of the present tense forms, which indicates that verbs should be placed in their basic forms when sentences are constructed.

*The South African World Cup* is an event or sporting code that took place once in South Africa. In this case, the respondents may have been confused by the presence of this noun phrase. The fact that this event took place in the past could have meant that the listeners or readers would infer the time at which the event took place. Therefore, they may have concluded that the turning of the verb into the past tense at this juncture was not necessary, since the event happened a long time before in South African History.

The respondents may not have been aware of the fact that, in the past tense, regular verbs call for the regularisation of verbs with the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed.’ The cause of this error could be fossilisation (Lado, 1957) of rules to the regular verbs. In this context, the regular verb *enjoy* calls for the regular inflection of the past tense form of the verb *enjoy* into *enjoyed* to conform to the rule pertaining to the regularisation of verbs in the simple past tense.

### (iii) Ablaut principle

With regard to the ablaut principle, the respondents registered poor competence in their use of the simple past tense because they committed errors such as *\*Many years ago they give attention to the football rules*, *\*Football broughted get-together*, and *\*They even builted large buildings in those years*.

The error, *\*Many years ago they give attention to the football rules*, reveals that respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense. They could not construct a sentence that demonstrated vowel gradation. The finding contradicts what R’aczs et al. (2014) inform us, namely, that the vowels change as follows ‘-a’ to ‘-i’, ‘-i’ to ‘-u’, or ‘-i’ to ‘-o’) in terms this principle. Thus, the problem may have been caused by the rule pertaining to the formation of irregular verbs; and stating that the ‘-ed’ ending should be inflected to the irregular verbs as well.

The respondents may have been confused by the use of the adverbial phrase of time, *many years ago*, which could have led the respondents to conclude that the action occurs *many times*, and, therefore, the verb *give* remains in its present form. Accordingly, in this sentence the respondents should have noticed the importance of changing the vowel 'i' into 'a', so that the plural verb became *gave* instead *give*. The cause of this error could have been Lado's (1957) fossilisation of rules. In this case, there should have been conformity between the adverbial phrases of time and the verbs in context.

The error, *\*Football broughted a get-together*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense because they could not understand the formation of past tense forms that entailed applying the vowel gradation principle. The respondents may not have been aware of the fact that when changing the verbs from the present to the past tense, sounds change within a word to indicate the verb inflectional process that should occur in irregular verb formation when sentences are constructed.

The finding is inconsistent with the Merriam-Webster' Dictionary's (1975) explanation that indicates that the vowel gradation involves a systematic variation of vowels in the same root or in related roots or affixes. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the formation of irregular verbs through inflection of the ending '-ed' in the past tense. The cause of this error can be the overgeneralisation and fossilisation of rules as suggested by Lado in 1957. The word *brought* should not have had an '-ed' ending, because it was already in the past tense of the verb *bring*.

The error, *\*They even builted large buildings in those years*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the simple past tense, because they may not have been aware of the fact that a correct internal vowel modification should take place to indicate the difference between the present and the past tense. The respondents may have been confused by the rule that deals with the inflection of the suffix '-ed' to the verbs in order to change them from the present to the past tense forms.

The finding is in contrast with Crystal (2008) who indicates that the vowel gradation is associated with the relationship between verb forms. The respondents may also not have been familiar with the inflection of irregular verbs in the past tense. When irregular verbs are formed, the usual pattern of adding the ending ‘-ed’ is not the only way of forming the past tense verbs. However, there are other verbs that do not exhibit the same pattern of verbs in these tenses, as in *fight/fought/fought* and *keep/kept/kept*, similarly, the verb *build* should have been turned into *built*.

The respondents may also not have been aware of the fact that the demonstrative pronoun *those* indicates a period of time long past, which calls for the past tense form of a verb. The respondents may not have been aware of the fact that the ending ‘-ed’ should not be added to a verb that is already in its past tense form, hence, they committed both error overgeneralisation and the fossilisation of rules (Lado, 1957). In addition, they were not conversant with the formation of the verb *build* from the present to the past tense; and the formation of the verb *builded* instead of *built* in this sentence.

#### (iv) Zero-making principle

With regard to the zero-marking principle, the respondents were not competent in the use of the simple past tense. Accordingly, a single tense error was committed, as in *\*It is possible for them to be hurted* instead of *It is possible for them to be hurt*. This finding is not in line with Kosch (2004) and Crystal, (2008) who indicate that, in terms of zero marking, there is no phonological substance in the regularisation of verbs. Thus, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of adding the ending ‘-ed’ to irregular verbs, when past tense verbs are transformed from the present tense forms.

The respondents were not aware of the fact that irregular verbs in zero-marking could not be formed by any vowel or consonant modification. They may not have known that irregular verbs have neither a suffix nor a stem change and could be identified as verbs with no inflectional change whether used in the present, past or past participle forms. Therefore, the respondents in this context, should have known that this type of verb marking is caused by the lack of any regular phonological correspondence with other forms. Therefore, the respondents may

have lacked the knowledge that the verb *hurt* does not have any inflection, and that it is associated with the past tense morphemes ‘-t’ and ‘-d’ requiring the formation of the word *hurted* instead of *hurt*.

Across all the themes discussed in the preceding paragraphs, Hamid and Qayyimah (2014) point out that there is a universality of Lado’s (1957) fossilisation of rules pertaining to the irregular verb inflectional morphemes. Thus, the overgeneralisation of the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ occurs with regard to the stems of verbs.

(c) Present perfect tense

In the simple present tense, the respondents were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense because they may not have known that the present tense entails an action or state of affairs that happened at an indefinite time in the past and continues in the present. The respondents committed the following tense errors: *\*Football is the most favourable sport since creation*, *\*Nowadays things have change*, *\*Sport has bring people together* and *For over two years, some players were banned from playing soccer*.

The error, *\*Football is the most favourable sport since creation*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense, although it is used in a number of actions including talking about things that started in the past, continue up to the present, may continue in the future, happened at an unspecified time in the past; or events viewed as possibly recurring. The finding is incongruent with Lester and Beason’s (2013) explanation that the present perfect tense is formed by joining the auxiliary verb *has/have* with the past participle of the verbs. Hence, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense, which states that the singularity and plurality of verbs depend on those of the subjects; and it is evident that they could not understand the formation of the present perfect tense.

The respondents used the main verb *is* thinking under the impression that they could still be meaningful in their proposition, however, they could not construct a good sentence in the simple present perfect tense. Even though the respondents

used the Biblical timeline *since creation*, they could not construct a meaningful sentence in the present perfect tense to indicate that something started from the beginning of creation. The cause of this error could be the fossilisation of rules as suggested by Lado in 1957. In this context, the respondents should have used the verb phrase *has been* instead of *is*.

The error, *\*Nowadays things have change*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the present perfect tense because they were unable to prove their expertise in dealing with this tense. The finding is incongruent with Sherman's *et al.* (2010) explanation that the present perfect tense is formed by combining *has/have* with the past participle of the verbs in a sentence. In this situation, they may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense, which states that when constructing sentences, verbs should remain in their present tense form. In this context, the respondents did not change the verb *change* into its past participle form.

The word *nowadays* refers to the current time, and it may have been used to refer to the simple present tense. In this context, the respondents may have thought that in dealing with the present perfect tense, the verb *change* should stay in its present tense form. The cause of this error can also be the fossilisation of rules as suggested by Lado in 1957. However, the inclusion of the auxiliary verb *have* in this context calls for the inflection of the suffix '-ed' to the word *change* to conform to the rule governing the formation of the simple present tense.

The error, *\*Sport has bring people together*, also shows that the respondents in context were not competent in the use of the perfect tense. The respondents could not form a well-constructed present perfect tense because they were unable to demonstrate the use of the auxiliary *has/have* plus the past participle form of verbs in their own sentences. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple past tense, which states that the verbs should receive the suffix '-ed' to form past participle form of verbs. The cause of this error can be Lado's (1957) fossilisation of rules. Hence, the formation of the verb *broughted* instead of *brought* disrupted learner's competence in the use of tenses.

The finding is not in line with McIntosh (2017) who indicates that the auxiliary verb *has/have* should be used with past participle form of verbs in the present perfect tense. The respondents used the verb phrase *has bring* in their attempt to form a grammatical and meaningful present perfect tense sentence. They may not have been aware of the fact that when forming sentences in the present perfect tense, the auxiliary verb *has/have* should be joined with the past participle form of verbs. Hence, the respondents should have turned the verb *bring* into brought instead of *boughted*.

The error: *\*For over two years, some players were banned from participating in the soccer tournament* reveals that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the present perfect tense because the respondents could not construct meaningful sentences. The finding is incongruent with Petchtae's (2011) clarification, namely, that in forming the present perfect tense, the auxiliary *has/have* should be used with the past participle form of verbs. Therefore, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple past tense. The respondents may not have been aware of the importance of the auxiliary verb *were* as second person singular past, plural past, and the past subjunctive of *be*; and that it can also be used with the past tense verbs in sentences. Thus, the respondents should have known that even though the auxiliary verb *were* can be used with the past tense verbs, it is worthwhile recognising its usage in the present perfect tense.

The respondents may not have been aware of the adverbial phrase of time *over twenty years*, which indicates a period until now. They did not realise that this adverbial phrase of time calls for the inclusion of the auxiliary verb *has/have + been* and that the past participle verb *banned* should be in line with the correct use of the present perfect tense. Thus, the verb *banned* could also have been formed by the inflection of the ending '-ed' to the plural verb *ban*, so that the correct verb phrase could have been *have been banned* instead of *were banned*.

The present perfect tense can also be useful when speakers want to stress their actions at some indefinite time in the past, or want to talk about things that have happened during a time period that is not finished. It can be used with *today* or *this morning* only up to about one o'clock, since after this period 'this morning' becomes

a completed period; and the actions occurring during this time, must be placed in the simple past tense form. It is important to consider that 'at 11:00,' the correct proposition must be in the acceptable form. However, this morning 'at 02:00,' is acceptable in English, similarly 'at 16:00,' the speakers could make an acceptable proposition since 'this afternoon' ends 'at about 17:00.' 'At 18:00' can be used because it is acceptable.

The present perfect tense can be used with *already* in the affirmative sentences only if the speaker wishes to talk about the events that happened some time before now, and with 'not yet' to talk about events that have not happened before now. The present perfect tense can therefore be used with 'yet' in questions to find out if something has happened before now.

In addition, the present tense can be used with *ever* to ask questions as it refers to any time up until the present, with *never* that talks about that which has never happened, with *just, late, this month, lately or recently* to emphasise that something happened very recently, that began in the past; and was finished at an indefinite time, but is closely related to the present or future; or can be used with *so far, since, for, up to now, last hour, last day, last week, or the last year* to imply that something began in the past and continues to the present and may continue to the future. The cause of an error committed by the respondents in all the themes could be fossilisation (Lado, 1957) of rules even after the extended exposure of English second language learning as there is a pervasiveness of the error committed.

#### (d) Past perfect tense

The respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense (pluperfect) because they committed the following errors: *\*In the olden days, football was already made a popular sport, \*For a long period, netball games were enjoyed, \*They had already play soccer, and \*Prisoners had manage to escape through the ceiling of the ward.*

The error: *\*In the olden days, football was already made a popular sport* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense because they formed sentences that were grammatically unacceptable. The respondents

may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple past tense, which states that when a sentence is formed in the simple past tense, the verb should be in the past tense form. The finding is incongruent with Lester and Beason's (2013) pronouncement that the past perfect tense is formed by using *to have* followed by the past participle verb. The cause of this error can be the fossilisation of rules as suggested by Lado in 1957. Hence, the respondents may have lacked the understanding that the auxiliary *had* + past participle form of verbs are used when sentences are formed in the past perfect tense.

The adverbial phrase of time *in the olden days* indicates the period of time that belongs to the past. The respondents may not have been aware of the fact that this phrase should be used when one would like to talk or write about the action that took place in the past. In this case, the respondents may not have been conversant with the rule that the auxiliary *had been* should have been used with the past participle verb *made* in this sentence. In this regard, the adverb *already* should have fronted the form of the verb *be* (been) so that the sentence could be: *In the olden days, football **had already been made** a popular sport.*

The error: *\*For a long time, netball games were enjoyed* reveals that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense because they could not form sentences that represent both good knowledge and an understanding of English. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the passive voice, which states that when sentences are constructed in the past tense, the auxiliary verbs should be placed before the main verbs. This finding is incongruent with Sherman *et al.* (2010) who note that the past perfect tense is formed by using *had* + past participle form of verbs. However, the auxiliary *had* + the form of *be* (been) and the past participle form of verbs are used when sentences are formed in the past perfect tense.

The verb *enjoyed* indicates an action that started somewhere in the past and stopped at an unknown period of time. The respondents may have been unfamiliar with the fact that the past participle form of verbs should be used when one would like to indicate an action that started somewhere in the past and ended before another action began. In this regard, the action can be well formed by the inclusion of the auxiliary *had* + *been* (the form of *be*) and the past participle verb *enjoyed*.

The phrase *for a long time* indicates something that began in the past and it was still continuing to an indefinite period in the past. The challenge for the respondents in context may have been the fact that they did not know that the words *for* and *since* require that the verb should be perfected by using the auxiliary *has/have* or its past (*had*) and the form of *be* (*been*) plus the past participle form of verbs. The cause of this error can be the fossilisation of rules as suggested by Lado in 1957. In this case, the respondents should have formed the sentence: *For a long time, netball had been enjoyed.*

The error, *\*They had already play soccer*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense. The respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple present tense, which states that when sentences are constructed, the main verbs should be placed in their present form. However, the auxiliary *had* + the form of *be* (*been*) and past participle form of verbs are used when sentences are formed in the past perfect tense.

The finding is incongruent with what Soanes and Stevenson (2006) and Hornby (2015) state, namely that the past perfect tense can be formed by adding *had* + *been* and the past participle form of verbs. The respondents might not have been known that the past participle form of verbs should be used indicate an action that had begun in the past and stopped before another action began. Instead, they used the basic form of the verb *play* hoping that they would be meaningful to the listeners or readers. To construct a meaningful past perfect tense sentence, *had* + *been* and the past participle should be used.

The dependent clause *they had already*, shows that something had taken place long before the occurrence of a particular action in context, and there is no possibility of it taking place in the future. The respondents in context may not have been familiar with the fact that this dependent clause calls for the inclusion of the auxiliary *had* with the past participle form of verbs in sentences. The cause of this error could also be the fossilisation of rules as suggested by Lado in 1957. Nevertheless, the ungrammatical sentence was constructed, instead of *They had already played soccer* to indicate that players or people in context had played soccer before a certain event took place.

The error: *\*Prisoners had manage to escape through the ceiling of the ward* reveals that the respondents were incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense because they could not construct grammatically correct sentences that would meet the requirements of Chomsky's (1965) grammatical competence. This finding is incongruent with McIntosh's (2017) explanation that the past perfect tense can be formed by using *had* + been and the past participle form of verbs in sentences. Therefore, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the present tense where the main verb should retain its basic form.

The verb *managed* is in the past participle form and is used to indicate an action that took place in the past. To indicate the action that had taken place before the action spoken about in this sentence, the auxiliary *had* should be placed before the verb *managed*. In this context, the respondents may have been challenged by the plural verb *manage*, which was supposed to have been placed in the past participle form by means of the inflection of the ending '-ed' to form the verb *managed*.

The causes of errors pervade across all the themes in the past perfect tense including Lado's (1957) fossilisation of rules pertaining to the formation of the past participle form of verbs; and the false concept hypothesised as the respondents may have presumed that the past participle form of verbs could not be a marker for the past perfect tense in all situations.

Although the qualitative research analysis was limited to the themes identified in the literature review, the study found that some new errors (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) that turned up, were not predicted in this study and were subjected to empirical tests. These errors include: the substitution of tenses, and the use of the infinitive marker *to*, which may also play a role in the development of tense errors:

(e) Substitution of tenses

The respondents were incompetent in the use of tenses by substituting one tense for another. In the process, the respondents committed the following tense errors: *\*They were wearing shorts* instead of *They **wore** shorts*; and *\*When we were growing up, we used to play soccer* instead of *When we **grew** up. we used to play soccer*. In both the sentences, the respondents may have been confused by the

rule pertaining to the use of the past continuous tense. This rule states that when the past continuous tenses are constructed, the aspect ‘-ing’ should be inflected in the main verbs.

The finding here is congruent with Petchtae’s (2011) assertion that the respondents sometimes resort to using one tense in place of another. In this context, the past continuous tense was used in place of the simple past tense. The challenge was that in the former sentence, the word *wearing* was used instead of *wore*, while in the latter case, *grow* was used instead of *grew*.

The cause of this error can be false concepts hypothesised where there is a faulty understanding of the rules pertaining to the use of tenses. The other cause may have been the overgeneralisation of rules as noted by Lado (1957), namely that a learner can apply a construction in one context; and then applies its use to other contexts where it should not apply.

(f) The use of the infinitive marker *to*

With regard to the use of the infinitive marker *to*, this study shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of tenses because they committed the following errors: *\*People liked to had exercises*, *\*He used to ran home*, and *\*Soccer was difficult to played*.

The error: *\*People liked to had exercises* shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of tenses. The respondents could not construct a grammatically correct sentence. The finding is congruent with what Matrood (2010) and Muhammad Ahmed (2012) have found, namely that second language learners experience problems with knowing when to use the infinitive marker *to* with certain verbs; and that the infinitive ‘to’ must not be followed by the inflection of the morpheme ‘-s’, ‘-ed’ or ‘-ing’ in written or spoken sentences.

The word *liked* may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the inflection of the suffix ‘-ed’ to the verb *liked* in the simple past tense. The rule states that the suffix ‘-ed’ should be added to the verbs when the past tense verbs are formed. On

this basis, respondents in this context may have concluded, since the word *liked* is in the past tense, the verb *had* should also be in the past participle form.

The error: *\*He used to ran home*, shows that the respondents were incompetent in the use of tenses. They may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the simple past tense where the verb should have been in its past tense form. The finding is incongruent with Matrood's (2010) finding that the infinitive marker *to* confuses the use of the full infinitive, which refers to the basic form of a verb. The respondents may have experienced difficulties with the use of the infinitive marker *to* as a verb complement with other verb forms, such as the bare infinitive or the past participle. The cause of this error could be identified as what Lado (1957) calls the fossilisation of rules. In this regard, the verb *run* should have remained in its present tense form after the infinitive marker *to*.

Error: *\*Soccer was difficult to played* shows the incompetency of the respondents because they could not conform to the rule of forming the simple past tense. The finding is incongruent with Sherman's *et al.* (2010) explanation that past perfect tense can be formed by using *had* + past participle form of verbs. Thus, the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the past tense, which states that the verb should be in the past tense form in a simple past tense sentence.

With regard to the infinitive marker *to*, the usage of the auxiliary verb *was* done without having considered the fact that it indicated the past action that should have been noticed or used accordingly by the respondents in the simple past tense. Instead, the respondents concluded that they should add the verb *played* immediately after the infinitive marker *to*. In this regard, the inflection of the suffix '-ed' to the verb *play* disrupted the grammaticality of the sentence in context.

In this type of usage, there is a consistency in the causes of errors regarding this theme. This cause could have been Lado's (1957) false concept hypothesised due to the dependency on the different grammatical rules. In addition, overgeneralisation of the rules pertaining to the inflection of the suffix '-ed' might have been another cause of the errors committed by the respondents.

## 5.4 SUMMARY

With the aid of data presented in figures and/or tables, this chapter has presented the research findings and their interpretations. Comprehensive discussions have also been provided as a way of attaching meaning to the findings. However, where relationships between the findings and the presented literature were established, such relationships were explained and where contradictions and parallels were found their causes were identified, while the necessary details were provided.

## CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE STUDY, SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes this thesis by providing an overview of the whole study, summary, conclusion, limitations and recommendations. The specific aim of this thesis has been to explore Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses. This thesis was grounded in four objectives listed in the subsequent paragraphs. One of the objectives of this study was to identify the types of tense errors committed by the respondents. To this end, the findings from this study as reflected in Chapter 5 provided information that can be used to prevent errors that challenge learners in the use of tenses. The literature study that was revealed in Chapter 3 of this thesis expounds learners' incompetency in the use of tenses.

The detailed results of the study reported in Chapter 5 provided descriptive answers to the following research questions:

- What types of errors are committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?
- How can errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses be described and evaluated?
- What are the causes of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?
- What are the possible remedial measures for the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses?

The following types of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses and the description and evaluation of those errors gave answers to the first two questions:

- The quasi-coordinator error committed by the respondents such as '*together with*' in the simple present tense as the respondents could have concluded

that this coordinator implies the plurality of the subject requiring the plural verb (Dziamianko, 2008; Örlegård, 2014).

- The zero-marking principle error committed to the irregular verbs which do not require any word modification as in *put/cut* in the simple past tense (Marchman 1997); and
- The past participle form of verbs error committed due to the inability to use the auxiliaries *has/have/had* and the past participle form of verbs when forming the irregular verbs in perfect tenses (Ntombela, 2008; Karim et al, 2015).
- The substitution of tense error committed by the respondents due to confusing the rules pertaining to the application of the past continuous tense in place of simple past (Petchtae, 11); and
- The use of infinitive *to* error committed by the respondents when attempting to use infinitive with verbs (Matrood, 2010; Muhammad Ahmed, 2012).

The cause of the errors committed include overgeneralisation, false concept hypothesised, ignorance of rule restrictions, and inadequate learning (Lado, 1957); and gave answer to the third question.

The following remedial measures for the errors committed gave answer to the last question; and these include:

- Inductive approach – involves an explanation of grammar rules by the teacher;
- Deductive approach – which emphasises learning discovery where learners generalised rules from large amount of underlying examples;
- Teach grammar in context – expose learners to environment where they use English only such as in group work;
- The use of scaffolding – active participation of learners having greater control over their own learning conditions;
- Journal writing – where learners and their teachers communicate on regular basis;
- Teachers to teach grammar according to the following sequence – present, past and perfect tenses; and

- Memorisation – where irregular verbs need to be memorised if found difficult to understand.

The answers provided to the research questions assisted in the achievement of the following study objectives based on Corder's (1967) steps of EA:

- To identify the types of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses.
- To describe and evaluate the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses.
- To explore the causes of errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses.
- To suggest possible remedial measures for the errors committed by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the use of tenses.

## 6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE STUDY

Chapter 1 presented the background to the study and explained the importance of English as an internationally spoken language. Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted the challenges experienced by the non-native speakers of English when they are compelled to use the language irrespective of their grammatical challenges. It also presented a statement of the problem, the aim of the study and the objectives of this study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the delimitation of the study; and the definitions of the operational terms; and ends with the structure of the study.

Chapter 2 presented the theoretical framework of this study, underpinned by Lado's (1957) CAH, Corder's (1967) EA, Hymes' (1972) Communicative Competence; and Chomsky's (1965) Grammatical Competence. As a way of understanding the types of errors, their description and evaluation, the causes, and their possible remedial measures, Corder's four steps usable in the analysis of errors were also discussed.

Chapter 3 provided the literature review comprising of the importance of grammar in the study of a language, the tense debate, the simple present, the simple past,

the present perfect, and the past perfect tenses. It also dealt with the simple present tense, the simple past tense, and the past participle verb inflectional morphemes, the third person singular and plural subjects, and the subject verb agreement.

Chapter 4 presented a detailed description and discussion of the research methodology used in this study. The research approaches, a case study, the research setting, the population size, the sampling method, the research instrument, the development of the test, the data collection methods, the data analysis process, validity and reliability, as well as the pilot study were presented. It also dealt with the ethical considerations: informed consent, the right to privacy; and the assurance that no harm would befall the respondents as the standard and prescriptive way of conducting this research. A professional statistician was employed for the analysis of the questionnaire-related questions, while the researcher analysed the learners' written composition scripts

Chapter 5 discussed the research findings collected by means of questionnaires and a document analysis from the sampled respondents. This chapter presented study findings from quantitative research approach through the use of tables and figures. Additionally, the findings from the descriptive statistics analysis were presented for comparison purposes among the sub-questions, tenses, and between the males and female respondents. Furthermore, the findings from the descriptive statistics analysis are presented for comparison purposes among the sub-questions, tenses, and between the male and female respondents. Besides, findings from the document analysis used to analyse the respondents' written compositions in terms of the qualitative research approach, were presented.

Chapter 6 gives an overview of the entire study, a summary of the study findings, conclusion, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research aimed at improving Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses informed by the realities concerning the types of errors identified in this study. Chapter 6 also presents the strategies that can be used to eradicate tense errors.

Certain salient results and conclusions have come to the fore regarding the topic under investigation. Accordingly, the objectives of the study have to be evaluated

to determine whether or not they have been accomplished because, while it is relatively simple to identify the types of errors, describe and evaluate them, establish their causes; and suggest remedial measures for the errors committed; “it is not that simple to understand, describe and evaluate the ability for use” (Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2007). Hence, the investigation regarding the content and their ability to use the various tenses as well as their degree of competence in the use of tenses in English have to be examined continuously in both the theoretical and empirical fields of research. Therefore, this chapter gives a summary of the findings derived from the data collected from respondents from the five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit in South Africa.

Perhaps the most important motive behind exploring the topic under study is that it should be of benefit to Grade 11 EFAL learners as far as competence in the use of tenses is concerned; it is also about all learners in context in the deep rural traditional villages. The ultimate purpose of this study was to ensure that learners’ competence in the use of tenses adds a significant value to teaching and learning through comprehensive Grammatical Competence in accordance with Chomsky (1962); and Hymes’ (1972) Communicative Competence Therefore, in the next section, a summary of the study findings is presented:

### 6.3 SUMMARY

The research has demonstrated how competence in the use of tenses affects teaching and learning in the five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit in South Africa. The researcher’s analysis was focused on exploring Grade 11 EFAL learners’ competence in the use of tenses by using quantitative and qualitative research approaches, mentioned in Chapter 4 (see paragraphs 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) of this study. In this study, Corder’s (1967) steps for analysing errors are discussed (see Chapter 2 paragraph 2.3) and were manipulated carefully in line with the objectives of this study.

This study has found that across all five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, the respondents committed errors in the use of the simple present, the simple past, the present perfect and the past perfect tenses. For instance, in the simple present tense, the most challenging question was *Her*

*brother together with her sisters (is/are) gone to town* where the majority (88.6%) of the respondents were incompetent in the use of quasi-coordinators (see Chapter 5, Figure 14). This finding is congruent with Ramelan (1992) and Gass and Selinker's (1994) conclusion that errors may arise since second language learners neither master grammar nor understand its rules. The results suggest that quasi-coordinators could not have been taught holistically with an emphasis on the diversity of the subjects in different contexts.

The other challenge was registered in the question that dealt with the coordinated subjects: *Fork and knife (is/are) good for eating rice* found within the compound nouns where the 75% of the respondents were incompetent with regard to coordinated subjects (see Chapter 5, Table 5.2). This finding is incongruent with that of Lester and Beason (2013), who explain that there are exceptions where the use of the coordinating conjunction *and* does not call for a plural verb in a sentence.

The respondents were challenged by the question *None of the books (is/are) placed on the table* relating to indefinite pronouns where 72% of the respondents were incompetent in the use of the determiner *none* (see Chapter 5, Figure 5.11). This finding is incongruent with Peters (2013) and Chele's (2015) finding, namely that the determiner *none* takes a plural verb irrespective of its use with a singular verb when the subject is singular although it can be take a plural verb when the subject is plural depending on the meaning of the sentence. Therefore, this can suggest that the respondents may have been confused by the rule pertaining to the use of the closest nouns.

In the simple past tense, the most challenging questions pertained to zero-marking principle where the majority of the respondents (85,7%) were incompetent as in the question: *He (put/putted) the candle when the lights went off*; and 71% to the question: *The news was (broadcast/broadcasted) last night* (see Chapter 5, 5.6). The findings in both these errors were incongruent with Crystal (2008) and Kosch's (2004) findings, namely that irregular verb formation entails no phonological substance. Therefore, the zero modification provides a bigger challenge to the respondents than any other theme in this study.

Besides, the ablaut principle also challenged the respondents as they obtained 65.9% for the question: *Sarah (sought/seeked) for happiness all day long* (see Chapter 5, Table 5.5). The finding is incongruent with Plag and Schneider's (2000) description, namely, that there could be other ways of forming the irregular verbs from the simple present to the simple past tense, except for the inflection of the '-ed' ending. Thus, the ablaut principle was violated through overgeneralisation of the suffix '-ed' to the irregular verb *seek*.

In the present perfect, the majority (71,4%) of the respondents were incompetent in the question: *Implements (have been clean/have been cleaned)*; and 70% in the *We (have water/have watered) the plants* dealing with the use of *has/have+ past participle* (see Chapter 5, Table, 5.8). The finding is incongruent with Lester and Beason (2013) who explain that the present perfect tense can be formed by adding *has/have* + the *past participle* form of verbs. Hence, the respondents were unable to construct polite and meaningful sentences that demonstrate a good competence in the use of tenses.

In the question, *By the time she entered, the lights (had long been switch/had long been switched off)*, the majority (72,9%) of the respondents were also incompetent in the use of the past perfect tense (also see Chapter 5, Table 5.8). The finding is congruent with Dela Cruz (2012) and Dacumos's (2016) claim that the biggest challenge for learners is when they are faced with understanding the use of tenses in sentences. Therefore, the respondents were challenged regarding the use of the past perfect tense as well as the construction of sentences that are grammatically incorrect.

After providing the findings from some of the tables and figures, the study presents the results based on the comparison of the mean values generated from the individual questions and between the male and female respondents. In the simple present, the maximum mean value for the male respondents was 1,8529 for the question: *A knife and fork (is/are) good for eating*; while females had a mean value of 1,9167 for both the questions: *Your house, car and dining room (is/are) in an excellent condition* and *Her brother, together with her sisters (is/are) gone to town* respectively.

The minimum mean value for male respondents was 1,1765, while the female respondents had a mean value of 1,0556 in the variable: *What worries them (is/are) that their lecturer is lazy*. In this regard, this shows that the female respondents were more incompetent than the male respondents. Thus, the respondents were incompetent in both the coordinated subjects and quasi-coordinators (where urgent strategic intervention is required); and competent in the relative clause antecedents (where less attention/effort is required).

Regarding the simple past, the study reveals that that the maximum mean value for the male respondents was 2,3235 for the question: *She (undid/undo/undone) her homework last night* (the ablaut principle); while the females respondents had a mean value of 2,2000. The minimum mean value for the male respondents was 1,1765. On the other hand, the female respondents had a mean value of 1,0556 for the variable: *I (went/goed) to the Thavhani Mall last Saturday*. Therefore, the male respondents were more incompetent than the female respondents. In addition, the respondents were more incompetent with vowel gradation than with the suppletion principle.

In the present perfect tense, the study reveals that the maximum mean value for the male respondents was 1,8235 for the question: *We (have water/have watered) the plants* (regarding the use of *has/have* with the first person plural subject); while the female respondents had a mean value of 1,9167. The minimum mean value for the male respondents was 1,3529 inclusive of the other variable: *Modification (has already been do/has already been done)* in the use of *has/have* with a singular subject; while the female respondents had a mean value of 1,2500 for the variable: *The implements (have been clean/have been cleaned)*. In this regard, the female respondents were more incompetent than the male respondents. The respondents were incompetent as regards the present perfect tense because they could not use *has/have* properly with the past participle form of verbs with the first person plural subjects.

Regarding the past perfect tense, the maximum mean value for the female respondents was 2,0000 in the question: *The bus (had leave/had left) when I arrived* involving the use of *had* with the relative pronouns; while the male respondents had a mean value of 1,6765 for this question: *By the time she entered,*

*the light (had long been switch/had long been switched) off* regarding the use of *had* with the prepositional phrase: *by the time*. The minimum mean value for the female respondents was 1,1944 for the variable *I (had never be/had never been) there* involving the use of *had* with the first person singular subject; while the male respondents had a mean value of 1,3235. Thus, the female respondents were more incompetent than the male respondents in the use of the auxiliary *had* with the relative pronouns.

Regarding further comparisons, the present perfect had a 15,85% mean value, while the past perfect tense had a mean value of 15,47%), with the difference of 0,38%. On the other hand, the simple present had a mean value of 14,58%; while the simple past tense had a mean value of 15,07% with a difference of 0,49%. As the percentages for the mean values of perfect tenses were much higher, it would suggest that the perfect tenses posed more challenges than the simple tenses for the respondents.

As the third objective of this study was to establish the causes of errors committed by the respondents in their written tasks, Lado's (1957) CAH was used in an attempt to determine the causes of errors committed by the respondents. Thus, this study has found that tense errors may be caused by the overgeneralisation of rules, the incomplete application of rules; and false concept hypothesised.

#### 6.4 CONCLUSION

The main objectives of the current study were to identify the types of errors committed by the participants, to describe and to evaluate the types of errors committed, to establish the causes of errors; and to suggest remedial measures for the errors committed. To achieve the first objective, the study employed exploratory research approach analyses consisting of a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach and a case study through the use of written tasks as strategies for data collection from the sampled respondents. Furthermore, the researcher used questionnaires and document analysis to collate, combine and triangulate the results from the respondents' written tasks.

Although the findings of this study were based on samples collected from the five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa, the findings reveal that the chances of committing tense errors is not only limited to the five selected secondary schools. However, all Grade 11 EFAL learners in the deep rural traditional villages in the Vhumbedzi area have the likelihoods of committing tense errors in their written and/or spoken English. As far as competence is concerned, secondary school learners in the South African rural areas are prone to committing tense errors as there is limited exposure to the English language.

In the literature review section of this study, it was reported that several studies have shown that competence in the use of tenses has been a problem all over the world, as it knows no border among all the English second language learners irrespective of the differences in geographic location, age ranges, sex and years spent in the same grade. It has found that the majority of second language learners are challenged (Taher, 2011) by tense errors in their written productions to the extent that they could not participate properly in communication. The study has also found respondents were incompetent in the use of tenses as they could not apply the rules pertaining to the sentence structures and functions particularly when it comes to the inflection regular and irregular verbs irrespective of the given choice or own creative writing.

## 6.5 LIMITATIONS

The limitations encountered by the study are the sample specifications, since the Vhumbedzi Circuit in South Africa comprised 704 learners, of which only 10% of the entire population was 70 respondents. In this regard, the choice of this geographical location, among others, was influenced by monetary factors that meant that the researcher had to confine his study to this geographical area. In this study, the limited amount of literature available on the subjects being studied also determined the scope of this study. Based on this insight, it is acknowledged that the study could not be exhaustive in terms of content and context.

## 6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, future studies are recommended for research in the Grade 11 EFAL learners' competence in the use of tenses in the deep traditional villages of the Vhumbedzi area to investigate the validity and relevance of both the quantitative and qualitative methods used in the same study. Since both the learners and teachers play a major role in teaching and learning, the following recommendations may be indispensable for providing informed intervention strategies that can be put in place to avoid the further development of errors in the use of tenses:

### **Learners**

Learners should spend most of their times reading English books, newspapers and magazines so that their competence in the use of tenses can be improved. They should use English frequently inside and outside the school premises. Ideal situations for learning the language are created by living among its native speakers. In addition, learners should listen to the English news and other programmes hosted and presented by the native speakers on the radio and television.

When the need arises, learners should also assist with the interpretation of English to develop the proficient speaking and writing skills of the language. They should be encouraged to take minutes in English at their community activities including workshops, political gatherings and church conferences. Learners should participate in school debates and symposia to improve their English proficiency. Learners should be capacitated with regard to making presentations, keeping records and/ or taking notes, and drawing inferences about the incorrect use of tenses for the development of the necessary remedial measures.

As written work forms the core business of English language learning rather than spoken, learners should do regular written exercises, and do corrections of the mistakes made. Learners should engage in such activities as group work, pair work, role-play, self-study and practice, as this can facilitate the proper application of tense rules in any given situation. In their written work, learners should avoid using informal English as it can influence the development of tense errors.

## **Teachers**

As teachers play an indispensable part in learning and teaching, they should attend capacity-building workshops on English grammar regularly to develop modern strategic interventions, which can counteract the development of tense errors. They should always assess learners' competence in the use of tenses by giving them daily class exercises, homework and undertaking quarterly and half year assessments. Teachers should expose learners to multiple strategies including school debates and class presentations, which may stimulate learners' interest in the use of tenses.

Teachers should make sure that learners are made more aware of some tenses that frequently pose challenges to them so that they can avoid the development of errors from the onset. This can possibly be done by introducing a tense awareness from Grade R up to Grade 12. Teachers should explain why some sentence constructions are grammatically acceptable, while others are not, to foster proficiency in the use of tenses. Teachers should encourage teamwork and individual analyses for the identification and correction of errors arising from learners' written tasks.

In addition, teachers should correct the high frequency and general errors more than the less frequent errors to avoid their recurrence, because teachers' efforts in correcting learners' errors is a requirement. Frequent errors and errors affecting a large percentage of learners should receive urgent attention as they may affect the whole class. Errors of omission in the tense markers should be marked more than others. The proper use of the third person singular '-s', and '-ed' markers should be emphasised. Learners should not be singled out for coming from deep rural traditional villages as they are sensitive to ridicule.

## **Future researchers**

Future research should not ignore the views of such stakeholders as Grade 11 EFAL learners, language practitioners and curriculum designers. The study can be extended to the other provinces in South Africa, and even abroad. Lastly, this research can provide ideas for substantial further research on the current topic.

Therefore, the next titles are recommended for further study: *An analysis of written concord errors among Grade 12 first additional language in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province, South Africa, and Error analysis on the use of the simple present tense and the simple past tense in writing essays among TESL college students.*

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## ANNEXURE A: QUESTIONNAIRE

### A1: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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

#### 1. Age

15-		17-		19-	
16		18		20	

#### 2. Gender

Female		Male	
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#### 3. Number of years in Grade 11

1		2		3	
---	--	---	--	---	--

#### 4. Dwelling place

Deep rural		Urban	

Complete the following statements by choosing the correct answer from the alternatives in brackets, and then write your answers to the spaces provided.

**For example:**

STATEMENT	ANSWER
1. Sugar (gives/give) us energy.	gives

<b>SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
1. Either Tom or John (come/comes) home.	
2. The most important thing about learners (is/are) to educate them.	
3. Waiting and talking (results/result) in stress.	
4. Your house, car, and dining room (is/are) in the excellent condition.	
5 His son and heir to his throne (attends/attend) the party.	
6. Minister and member of the senate (answer/answers) calls.	
7. A knife and fork (is/are) good for eating rice.	
8. Team always (play/plays) well.	
9. So far, no movie (is/are) appreciated by the elders.	
10. None of the books (is/are) placed on the table.	
11. Tom is one of those boys who (bunk/bunks) classes.	
12. What worries them (is/are) that their lecturer is lazy.	
13. Her brother together with her sisters (is/are) gone to town.	
<b>SIMPLE PAST TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
14. She (became/becomed) bored in the movie.	
15. The man (runned/ran) helter-skelter around the pole.	
16. He (hit/hitted) a snake that swallowed the chicken.	
17. The news was (broadcast/broadcasted) last night.	
18. It (began/begun) to rain two days ago.	
19. I (went/goed) to Thavhani Mall last Saturday.	
20. She (undid/undone) her homework last night.	
21. Sarah (sought/seeked) for happiness all day long.	
22. We (fell/felled) the trees an hour ago.	
23. They (prefered/preferred) coffee to tea.	

24. A small bone (stuck/sticked) in his teeth when eating.	
25 The cows (overfed/overfeded) themselves in the lawn.	
26. He (lit/litted) the candle when the lights went off.	
<b>PRESENT PERFECT TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
27. We (have water/have watered) the plants.	
28. The midnight news (has alarm/has alarmed) us.	
29. The implements (have been clean/have been cleaned).	
30. Criteria for passing the test (have been give/have been given).	
31. The modification (has already been do/has already been done).	
32. Measles (has create/has created) a problem.	
<b>PAST PERFECT TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
33. I (had never be/had never been) there.	
34. After she (had move/had moved) out I found her crib notes.	
35. If we (had call/had called) ahead she would not have died.	
36. I did not say anything up until she (had finish/had finished) writing.	
37. The bus (had already leave/had already left) when I arrived.	
38. By the time she entered, the light (had long been switch/had long been switched) off.	

**ANNEXURE A2: MARKING GUIDELINE FOR CONTENT RELATED QUESTIONS**

RESEARCH TOPIC: 'Exploring Grade 11 English first additional language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit in South Africa'.

**CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS**

<b>SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
1. Either Tom or John (come/comes) home.	comes
3. The most important thing about learners (is/are) to educate them.	is
3. Waiting and talking (results/result) in stress.	results
4. Your house, car, and dining room (is/are) in the excellent condition.	is
5 His son and heir to his throne, (attends/attend) the party.	attends
6. Each minister and member of the senate (answer/answers) the calls.	answers
7. A knife and fork (is/are) good for eating rice.	is
8. Team always (play/plays) well.	plays
9. So far, no movie (is/are) appreciated by the elders.	is
10. None of the books (is/are) placed on the table.	are
11. Tom is one of those boys who (bunk/bunks) classes.	bunk
12. What worries them (is/are) that their lecturer is lazy.	is
13. Her brother, together with her sisters, (is/are) gone to town.	is
<b>SIMPLE PAST TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
14. She (became/becomed) bored in the movie.	became
15. The man (runned/ran) helter-skelter around the pole.	ran

16. He (hit/hitted) a snake that swallowed the chicken.	hit
17. The news was (broadcast/broadcasted) last night.	broadcast
18. It (began/begun) to rain two days ago.	began
19. I (went/goed/gone) to the Thavhani Mall last Saturday.	went
20. She (undid/undo/undone) her homework last night.	undid
21. Sarah (sought/seeked) happiness all day long.	sought
22. We (fell/felled) the trees an hour ago.	felled
23. They (prefered/preferred) coffee to tea.	preferred
24. A small bone (stuck/sticked) in his teeth when he was eating.	stuck
25 The cows (overfed/overfeded) themselves on the lawn.	overfed
26. He (lit/litted) the candle when the lights went off.	lit
<b>PRESENT PERFECT TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
27. We (have water/have watered) the plants.	have watered
28. The Midnight news (has alarm/has alarmed) us.	has alarmed
29. Implements (have been clean/have been cleaned).	have been cleaned
30. Criteria for passing the test (have been give/have been given).	have been given
31. Modification (has already been do/has already been done).	has created
32. Measles (has create/has created) a problem.	has created
<b>PAST PERFECT TENSE QUESTIONS</b>	
33. I (had never be/had never been) there.	had never been
34. After she (had move/had moved) out, I found her crib notes.	had moved
35. If we (had call/had called) ahead, she would not have died.	had called
36. I did not say anything until she (had finish/had finished) writing.	had finished
37. The bus (had already leave/had already left) when I arrived.	had already left
38. By the time she entered, the light (had long been switch/had long been switched) off.	had long been switched

**ANNEXURE B: ETHICS CLEARANCE (UNIVERSITY OF VENDA)**

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

**Mr FT Nephawe**

Student No:

**8702342**

**PROJECT TITLE: Exploring Grade 11 English first additional language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa.**

PROJECT NO: SHSS/18/ENG/05/0907

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr MN Lambani	University of Venda	Supervisor
Prof EK Klu	University of Venda	Co - Supervisor
Dr MJ Maluleke	University of Venda	Co - Supervisor
Mr FT Nephawe	University of Venda	Investigator – Student

ISSUED BY:

**UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Date Considered: July 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




University of Venda

PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA  
TELEPHONE (015) 962 8504/8313 FAX (015) 962 9060

*"A quality driven financially sustainable, rural-based Comprehensive University"*



## **ANNEXURE C: PERMISSION APPLICATION LETTERS**

**C1:** Vhembe District Director

Enq. FT Nephawe

Tell: 015 962 8661

Cell: 072 442 2922

E-mail: *farisani.nephawe@univen.ac.za*

P.O. Box 1704

Thohoyandou, 0950

24 July 2018

THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Department of Education

VHEMBE DISTRICT

P/Bag x 2250

SIBASA, 0970

Dear Sir/Madam,

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE VHUMBEDZI CIRCUIT**

I am Farisani Thomas Nephawe, a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) 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 project on the topic: 'Exploring Grade 11 English first additional language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa'. I kindly request permission to conduct research at five of the sampled secondary schools selected on the basis of their accessibility and the highest enrolment for the academic year 2016: Randogwana, Mpfumedzeni, Tondalushaka, Mpandeli and Funzwani.

The aim and overall objective of this research is to explore learners' competence in the use of tenses, while the specific objectives are to identify the types, describe and evaluate, explore the causes; and suggest possible remedial measures for the errors committed by Grade 11 learners.

The study will attempt to answer the next questions:

- What types of errors are committed?
- How can errors committed be described and evaluated?
- What are the causes of the errors committed?
- What are the possible remedial measures for the errors committed?

The findings of this study can assist learners, teachers, and material developers to improve teaching and learning by highlighting specific and common tense errors that could have been made by learners in their written work. The study can contribute to the debate on tense errors, and facilitates future research. The next ethical considerations will be adhered to during the study:

*Voluntary participation:* learners will be given an information leaflet and informed consent form inviting them to participate in the research project, and it will be signed as an indication of their acceptance or rejection of the invitation. Learners will be informed that they are free to withdraw from participation at any stage of the research.

*Confidentiality:* I will explain to the learners during a briefing session that the value of the obtained data will be used solely for the research, and that no other person will have access to it. Their identities will be kept anonymous by assigning them identification codes to use during the data collection and recording process.

*Potential risks and harm to learners:* The nature of the research indicates that no harm will be inflicted on learners as the research will be conducted in their classes. Timeframe: the researcher will adhere strictly to the stipulated timeframe of 30 minutes.

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,

-----

FT NEPHAWE [STUDENT: 8702342]

C2: Vhumbedzi Circuit Manager

Enq. FT Nephawe

Tell: 015 962 8661

Cell: 072 442 2922

E-mail: *farisani.nephawe@univen.ac.za*

P.O. Box 1704

Thohoyandou, 0950

1 August 2018

The Circuit Manager [Vhumbedzi Circuit Office]

## REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF YOUR CIRCUIT

I am Farisani Thomas Nephawe, a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student in the Department of English, School of Human Sciences, at the University of Venda. As part of my studies, I am undertaking research on the topic: 'Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa'. I kindly request permission to conduct this research at five of the sampled secondary schools based on their accessibility and the highest enrolment for the academic year 2016: Randogwana, Mpfumedzeni, Tondalushaka, Mpandeli and Funzwani.

The reason for conducting this research is that currently, English is an important language that unifies the whole world into a single unit. Here in South Africa, it is regarded as a superior language as it is widely used in many government sectors and all institutions of learning. Therefore, there is a need for evaluating learners' competence in the use of tenses. I assume that the findings of this research can be beneficial for both teachers and learners, in particular and the Department of Education, in general.

Learners will be given a 30 minute once-off language test and a brief composition to write based on the use of tenses, which will be followed by a short interview. I wish to state categorically, that as a researcher, I will be confined by all the principles that govern a research project. Amongst others, the learners' personal information and their results will not be divulged to anyone whatsoever. After

writing up my research findings, all the information I have collected will be destroyed and a summary of the results will be given to the respondents at their own or their parents' request.

I have attached hereto copies of the Research Ethical Clearance Certificate from the University of Venda, the data collection instrument and also the letter of permission from the Vhembe District.

I will be grateful for your positive cooperation in this regard.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

---

FT NEPHAWE [STUDENT: 8702342]

C3: Principals of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit

Enq. FT Nephawe

P.O. Box 1704

Tell: 015 962 8661

Thohoyandou, 0950

Cell: 072 442 2922

24 July 2018

E-mail: *farisani.nephawe@univen.ac.za*

The Principals [Vhumbedzi Circuit]

## REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH PROJECT AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am Farisani Thomas Nephawe, a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student in the Department of English, School of Human Sciences, at the University of Venda. As part of my studies, I am engaging in a research project on the topic: 'Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa.' I hereby request permission to conduct this project at your institution. Therefore, I am requesting permission to do research with your Grade 11 learners, who are studying English. Regarding gender equity, I would also like to make a request to have equal representatives. During this research, learners will be given a 30 minute once-off language tasks testing the use of tenses, which will be accompanied by a short interview. Finally, I request that I be given the copies of sampled learner's tasks after completion.

The principles which govern a research project will be adhered to. such as learners' personal information and their results. which will not be divulged to anyone. After writing up the research results, all the information collected will be destroyed, however, a summary of results will be given to a child at his/her own or parents' request. I will be grateful for your positive cooperation in this regard.

Yours faithfully,

FT NEPHAWE [Student: 8702342]

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

Enq. FT Nephawe

P.O. Box 1704

Tell: 015 962 8661

Thohoyandou, 0950

Cell: 072 442 2922

24 July 2018

E-mail *farisani.nephawe@univen.ac.za*

Dear Parent/Guardian,

#### REQUEST FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

I am Nephawe Farisani Thomas, a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) 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: 'Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa.' I humbly request you to allow your child to participate in this research project. 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. Besides, as the researcher, I will be confined to 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,

FT NEPHAWE [STUDENT: 8702342]

**ANNEXURE D: GRANTED PERMISSION LETTERS**

D 1: Vhembe District Director



**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**

**VHEMBE DISTRICT**

REF :14/7/R

ENQ : MATIBE M.S

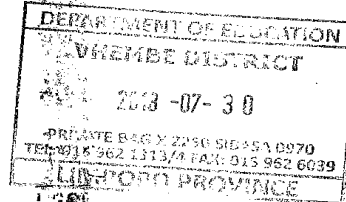
CELL : 082 3004 774

MR F.T NEPHAWE

P.O.BOX 1704

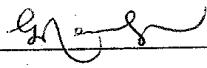
THOHYANDOU

0950

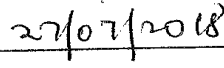


**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT AT VHUMBEDI CIRCUIT**

1. This serves to inform you that your request for permission to conduct research at Vhumbedzi Circuit has been granted.
2. You are expected to ensure that your interactions with learners at the five selected secondary schools will not disrupt teaching and learning activities.
3. We are pleased by your commitment to observe ethical considerations such as confidentiality, voluntary participation and the fact that the research will not pose any risk or harm to learners.
4. Kindly inform the circuit managers and principals of the five selected schools prior to your engagements with your research subjects.
5. Wishing you the best in your academic pursuit.



DISTRICT DIRECTOR



DATE

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

**The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people**

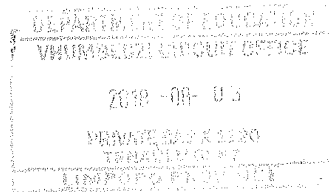
D2: Vhumbedzi Circuit Manager:

**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**  
VHEMBE DISTRICT  
Tshipise Sagole District, Department of Education  
Vhumbedzi Circuit

3 August 2018

Ref : 14/7/R  
Enq. : Nelufule RR  
Contact : 079 750 3759

To: Mr F.T. Nephawe  
P.O. Box 1704  
Thohoyandou  
0950



**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN VHUMBEDZI SCHOOLS.**

1. The above matter refers.
2. You are hereby informed that your request for permission to conduct research at five selected schools in Vhumbedzi Circuit namely: Ranndogwana, Milton Mpfumedzeni, Tondalushaka, Mpandeli and Funzwani on "Exploring Grade 11 English First additional Language learners' competence in the use of tenses at Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa" has been granted.
3. You are expected to adhere to research ethical considerations, particularly those relating to confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent of your research subjects.
4. Wishing you the best in your studies.

  
.....  
MUEDI FP (CIRCUIT MANAGER)

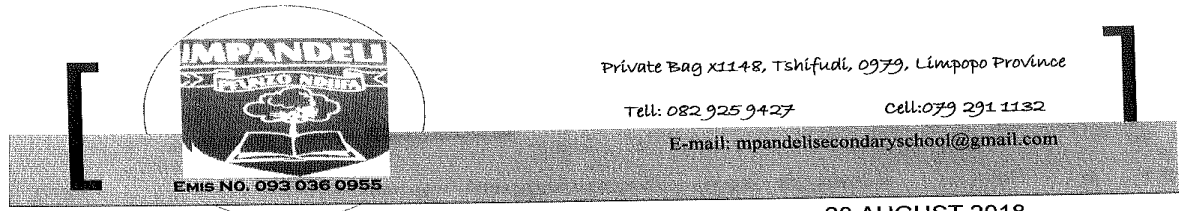
03/08/2018  
DATE

Mutshetshe Presidential School Private Bag X1120, Tshaulu, 0987 Tel: 015 978 3364  
e-mail: muedifp@gmail.com

**The heartland of Southern Africa – development is about people!**

D 3: Five selected secondary schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit

D 3.1 *Mpandeli*



20 AUGUST 2018

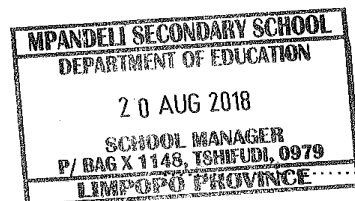
Enq : Mudau T.J.  
Principal

**CONFIRMATION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT MPANDELI SECONDARY SCHOOL**

1. The above matter refers.
2. You are hereby informed that Mr Farisani Thomas Nephawe conducted a research to 25 Grade 11 learners at the above mentioned Secondary School. The topic of the research titled: **Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners competence in the use of tenses at Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa.**
3. Mr Nephawe duly adhered to the research ethical consideration.
4. Wishing you the best.

*Mudau*

Mudau T.J. ( Principal )



Date

PFUNZO NDI IFA

D 3.2 *Milton Mpfumedzeni*

MILTON MPFUMEDZENI HIGHSCHOOL



Emis no:930360962

Enquiries: Muvhango N.J.

Cell No : 083 765 0154

MILTON MPFUMEDZENI HIGH SCHOOL

P.O Box 248

Tshaulu

0987

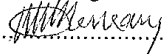
15 August 2018

CONFIRMATION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT MILTON MPFUMEDZENI  
SECONDARY SCHOOL

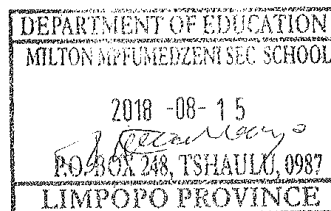
1. The above matter refers.
2. We are hereby informed that Mr Farisani Thomas Nephawe has conducted a research to 18 grade 11 learners ( 9 Boys and 9 Girls) at the above mentioned secondary school.
3. The topic of the research titled: **EXPLORING GRADE 11 ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS' COMPETENCE IN THE USE OF TENSES AT VHUMBEDZI CIRCUIT,SOUTH AFRICA**
4. Mr Nephawe duly adhered to the research ethical consideration.
5. Wishing you the best.

Yours faithfully

Muvhango N.J.



Principal



### D 3.3 Tondalushaka

Tondalushaka Sec School

P.O.Box 619

Tshaulu

0987

20/08/2018

Enq: Netshikwati E.L.

Principal

#### CONFIRMATION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT TONDALUSHAKA SEC SCHOOL

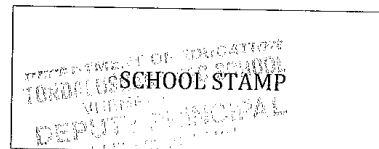
- 1.The above matter refers.
- 2.You are hereby informed that Mr Farisani Thomas Nephawe conducted a research 10 Grade 11 learners at the above mentioned Secondary School. The topic of the research titled :**Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language Learners Competence in the use of tenses at Vhumbedzi Circuit,South Africa.**
3. Mr Nephawe F.T. dully adhered to the research ethical consideration.
4. Wishing you the best.



Netshikwati E.L.(Principal)



Date



D3.4 Randogwana

# RANNDOGWANA SCHOOL

Ref : 7062608  
Cell : 073 133 2893  
Emis no: 930361095  
Enq: MATIDZE K.W

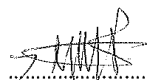


P.O. Box 1127  
TSHAULU  
0987  
14/08/2018

## CONFIRMATION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT RANNDOGWANA SECONDARY SCHOOL

1. The above matter refers.
2. You are hereby informed that Mr. Farisani Thomas Nephawe conducted a research on 9 Grade 11 learners at the above mentioned School. The topic of the research is titled: **Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language Learners competence in the use of tenses at Vhumbedzi Circuit, Vhembe East District, South Africa.**
3. Mr Nephawe F.T dully adhered to the research ethical consideration.
4. We hope the above information meets the requirement of your office.

Yours Faithfully

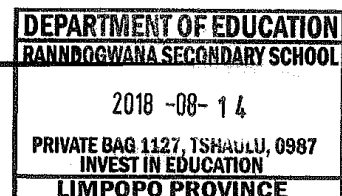


MATIDZE K.W (SCHOOL MANAGER)

*14/08/2018*

DATE

RANNDOGWANA SECONDARY SCHOOL  
INVEST IN EDUCATION  
PRIVATE BAG X1127  
TSHAULU  
0987  
ranndogwanasec@gmail.com



## D 3.5 Funzwani

REF: 930360535 FUNZWANI SEC. SCHOOL  
ENQ: KHOMOLA P.L P.O. BOX 09  
CONTACT: 072 3488 933 TSHIFUDI  
0979  
20 AUGUST 2018

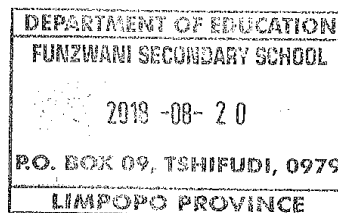
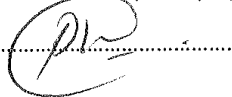
To: Mr F.T Nephawe  
P.O. BOX 1704  
THOHOYANDOU  
0950

### RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT FUNZWANI SECONDARY SCHOOL

1. The above matter has reference
2. We warmly appreciate your research conducted at our school on 16 August 2018 on **"Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners' competence in the use of tenses at Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa"**.
3. We acknowledge your ethical considerations during your research process.
4. Wishing you all the best in your studies.

Yours in Education

Khomola P.L (Principal)



**ANNEXURE E: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN**

PARENT/GUARDIAN.....

.....

.....

TO: Mr FT NEPHAWE

STUDENT NO: 8702342

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: 'Exploring Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners' competence in the use of tenses: A case study of selected schools in the Vhumbedzi Circuit, South Africa' which will be conducted at .....secondary 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.....