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**A Research on Adult Learners' Performance in English Language
in Literacy Centers in Imenti-North Sub-County, Meru County
Kenya**



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A Research on Adult Learners' Performance in English Language in Literacy Centres in Imenti-North Sub-County, Meru County Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper investigated the learning of English as a second language in adult post-literacy level learners, in the adult literacy centres in Imenti-North Sub-County. The post-literacy programme is a part of continuing education that provides opportunities for adults and out-of-school youths to retain, improve and apply basic educational skills for personal, community and national development. The objectives of this paper was to examine the adult learners' performance in English language by analysing the errors they make in their written work and the causes of these errors. The theory used in this study is the Error Analysis theory by S.P. Corder (1974) and expanded by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) which was used to analyse the adult learners' errors in their written work.

Methodology: The study utilised the Descriptive Research Design. Research was carried out in Imenti-North Sub-County, Kenya. The target population comprised 340 adult learners in the nine adult centres. A sample size of 60 adult learners from the Post Literacy Programme level was purposively chosen. The post literacy programme level learners were purposively chosen because English is used as a medium of instruction at this level and also studied as a subject. Data was collected by the use of an essay writing test for adult learners.

Findings: The study established that there was poor performance in English language skills by adult learners as portrayed by the errors in their written work.

Unique Contribution to Theory and Practice: The study recommends that adult English instructors should give learning tasks that are practical, comprehensible and must be relevant to important issues in the adult lives. The study further recommends that the government allocates more funds to the Directorate of Adult Education for the purchase of instructional resources in the learning centres, promote literacy surveys and curriculum development that meet the needs of adult and continuing adult learners.

Key Words: *Adult learners, post literacy programme, performance, errors, written work, target language*

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this section was to identify, describe and analyse the errors made by the adult learners and the causes of the errors. This was intended to investigate the performance of the adult learners in English language as portrayed in their compositions. The errors analysed were from the essays written by the adult learners in the post-literacy group. These adult learners are taught English as a subject and it is also used as a medium of instruction. These are the learners who have graduated from basic literacy level and many have had some form of formal schooling but dropped out of school before sitting for their KCPE Exams. English being one of the core subjects for KCPE exams, they are taught all the skills; reading, writing and speaking. The adult learners in the post-literacy level are different from the ones in basic literacy who do not have any formal schooling and the adult instructors start by teaching them mother tongue, letters of alphabet and how to write their names.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised the descriptive research design. The main aim was to examine the errors adult learners produce in their written work. According to Kothari (2004) descriptive survey research is concerned with description and presentation of the characteristic of a particular individual or group as they are found to be. Descriptive research design was chosen due to its flexibility to provide opportunity for considering different aspects of the problem under study. The study adopted purposive sampling technique to arrive at the sample size of 60 adult learners at the Post Literacy Level Programme (PLP). The PLP learners were chosen because English is used as a medium of instruction and also studied as a subject at this level. An essay writing test was used to determine the types of written errors made by the adult learners. The essay test was adopted from KCPE revision series, English paper 2010. The test was appropriate because KCPE examinations are standardized. The task required the adult learners to write a composition where the beginning of a story was given and they were required to complete the story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Spelling Errors

Spelling error is defined as an error in the conventionally accepted form of spelling a word (Collins English Dictionary, 2000). Spelling errors are when a learner consistently makes the same misspellings because they do not know what is correct (Ellis, 1997). Taking into consideration the data in the table, many of the adult learners at 11.5 percent had a problem of spelling English words. This could be attributed to;

- (i) Lack of awareness of English spelling rules and their exceptions which can be found in the incorrect application of some spelling rules by the adult learners such as plural formation (Muriungi, 2017), for example; trap-trapped. The adult learner does not add the letter `d` and make the error *traped*

- (ii) (ii) Irregularity of English language where there is no connection between sounds and letters such as omitting silent letters in words like knew (Macharia, 2013).
- (iii) (iii) L1 interference which includes errors caused by the linguistic differences between English and Kimeru such as substituting the sound /l/ for /r/; (Mbui, 2011). The findings of the current study show that spelling was a problem area for the adult learner. The following are some more examples of spelling errors from the respondent's essays;

<u>Error classification</u>	<u>Error identification</u>	<u>Error correction</u>
Misspelled words	1. The vehicle *stoped	1. The vehicle stopped
	3. * stepped	3. stepped
	4. *leady	4. ready
	5. * shoked	5. shocked
	6. *celemony	6. ceremony

Addressing spelling errors should be an integral part of teaching English language. Bad spellings affect English sentence structure and cause the mispronunciation of words. The identification of spelling errors in the present study show how far the adult learners have progressed towards the goal of learning English language skills.

Tense Related Errors

Verb tense errors occur when a learner uses the wrong verb tense in a certain sentence (Garrido & Rosando, 2012). The verb tense tells the reader of your sentences when the action is taking place. Hurford (1994), states that tense is a verb form or verb phrase used to express a time relationship. In constructing of sentences in English either written or spoken tense plays a very important role. In English each sentence is marked for tense. Tense and aspect are components of many English tenses where time is expressed as past, present or future while aspect is progressive or perfective. An analysis of tense errors in this study contributes to the learning of English by adult learners since errors permit the description of developmental stages in the acquisition of English language skills. They also provide an insights of how English language is learnt by the adult learners. Based on the findings, 43 errors with an error rate 10.4% occurred within the error category of verbs. The use of verb tense shows that the adult learners still find it difficult when and how to use the tense and the form of the verb.

<u>Error classification</u>	<u>Error identification</u>	<u>Error correction</u>
Wrong tenses	1. We taked two steps	1. We took two steps
	2. He *writed a letter	2. He wrote a letter
	3. I was surprised to saw her	3. I was surprised to see her.
	4. I prepared my breakfast	4. I prepared my breakfast

<u>as fast as I *can</u>	<u>as fast as I could</u>
<u>5.He turned and</u>	<u>5. He turned and opened the</u>
<u>*open the gate</u>	<u>the gate</u>

Tense errors can be attributed to overgeneralization where the respondents apply what they already know of the language to a new situation where such rules do not apply (Muriungi, 2017). Irregular verbs were regularized i.e we *putted things in the bag instead of put. The researcher suggests that teaching methods and materials should be revised in light of learners' errors to help them learn the use of tenses and aspects which will enhance their learning of English as a second language.

Plural Markings of Irregular Nouns Errors

An irregular plural noun is a noun that becomes plural in a way other than adding –s or-es to the end (Albert, 2021). Irregular plural nouns do not follow the same rules as regular nouns when becoming plural. Irregular nouns form their plural by changing vowels, changing the word, or adding a different ending: for example;

Singular	Plural
Man	Men
Person	People
Mouse	Mice
Child	Children
Foot	Feet
Tooth	Teeth
Louse	Lice

The adult learners had problems with plural markings of irregular nouns. From table 8 above 9.9% of errors made were in this category. The respondents added the plural marker to all nouns regular or irregular nouns which resulted to errors. In the following underlined words, the learners wrongly double marked plurality by adding the –s morpheme to irregular plural nouns. Others did not change the irregular nouns to plural. This can be attributed to intralingual errors that make learners to overgeneralise the rule of addition of the plural morpheme (-s) to both regular and irregular nouns (Mbui,2011).

<u>Error classification</u>	<u>Error identification</u>	<u>Error correction</u>
Singular/ plural form	<u>1. The *childrens stole</u>	<u>1. The children stole</u>
	<u>2.They can jump 10 *foots</u>	<u>2. They can jump 10 feet</u>
	<u>3.*Mouse were many in</u>	<u>3. Mice were many in the</u>

<u>the store</u>	<u>the store</u>
4. A big crowd of	4. A big crowd of people
<u>*peoples gathered</u>	<u>gathered</u>

Some respondents added the plural –s morpheme to uncountable nouns as shown below.

<u>Error Classification</u>	<u>Error Identification</u>	<u>Error Correction</u>
Singular/Plural Form	1. <u>*Salts</u>	1. <u>Salt</u>
	2. <u>*Furnitures</u>	2. <u>Pieces of furniture</u>
	3. <u>packed our *luggages</u>	3. <u>Packed our luggage</u>

Findings indicate that there is a problem with plural marking of irregular nouns and adult instructors have to pay more attention to such grammatical items and design and plan their teaching accordingly.

Word Compounding Errors

A compound is a word that consists of two or more words (Richard, 2018). Typically, the new combination of words creates a new or broader meaning. Compound words often produce writing mistakes because it is easy to forget if they are spelled as one word or two words (Richard, 2018). Compounding therefore is a word formation process whereby two or more words are combined to form a single word. Such words form their plural in different ways. According to Bauer (2017) compound nouns can be formed by putting;

- a) Noun + noun for example; fishing rod
- b) Verb + noun such as pickpocket
- c) Noun + verb for example; sunshine
- d) Verb + verb for example; make-believe
- e) Adjectives + noun in words like fast-food
- f) Participle + noun for example; after heat
- g) Verb + participle for example; drop-out

Bauer (2017) further explains that the largest sub groupings of compounds are within the noun + noun compounds. Based on the data collected word compounding had 8.4% of the errors, the adult learners find it difficult to identify words that can be combined to form a new word. They therefore combine words without obeying any rule hence end up with strange forms of words that are not considered right in L2 structure as in the examples shown below.

<u>Error Classification</u>	<u>Error Identification</u>	<u>Error Correction</u>
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Word Compounding Errors

<u>1.*Our Englishteacher</u>	<u>1. Our English teacher</u>
<u>2.* A place wherewomen go to buy things</u>	<u>2.A place where women go to buy things</u>
<u>3.*A group of tenpupils</u>	<u>3. A group of ten pupils</u>

The respondents form words by joining two words that should not be joined for example; *Englishteacher, this shows poor mastery of noun+noun compounding. Wrong usage of adverbs to form compound words makes the word *wherewomen erroneous. The respondents also compounded two nouns that are not supposed to be compounded like in *tenpupils. These word compounding errors are intra-lingual and can be attributed to wrong use of second language rules (Hourani, 2008). Conscious and appropriate teaching of word-formation rules and their particular mechanisms therefore will help learners to be autonomous and produce accurate formations of lexical forms and this will enhance the learning of English language skills.

<u>Error classification</u>	<u>Error identification</u>	<u>Error correction</u>
Omissions	<u>1.*Looking each other</u>	<u>1. Looking at each other</u>
	<u>2.*Enviroment</u>	<u>2. Environment</u>
	<u>3.*writen</u>	<u>3. Written</u>
	<u>4.*Haf a bread</u>	<u>4. Half of a bread</u>
	<u>5.*comfoted</u>	<u>5. comforted</u>
	<u>6. enterd</u>	<u>6. entered</u>

4.3.7 Prepositions

A preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence (Hilda, 2010). It links nouns, pronouns and phrases to other words in a sentence. The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of the preposition. A preposition usually indicates the temporal, spatial or logical relationship of its object to the rest of the sentence. Many respondents in this study at 9.2 percent demonstrated confusion in the right usage of prepositions as shown in the example below. Their errors were mainly as a result of the first language interference (Muriungi, 2017). The adult instructors should develop and establish new programs that help adult learners to be better aware of the use of prepositions of the second language.

<u>Error classification</u>	<u>Error identification</u>	<u>Error correction</u>
Prepositions	<u>1.*The teacher was in holiday</u>	<u>1.The teacher was on holiday</u>
	<u>2.*We speak with English and Kiswahili</u>	<u>2. We speak in English and Kiswahili</u>

3. *Our school was _____ 3. Our school was going for a
 _____ going to a trip _____ trip
4. *I did my exams on happiness 4. I did my exams in happiness

Subject/Verb Agreement Errors

Subject-verb agreement errors occur in the English language when a writer or speaker has mismatched the number (singular or plural) of the verb with the number of the subject of the sentence (James, 2017). Subject/verb agreement was a common type of error made by the adult learners. Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject is singular the word representing the action must also be singular if a subject is plural its verb must also be plural. The learners lack a basic understanding of subject-verb agreement. Cross-linguistic influence; transfer from L1 to L2 is one of the main reason of agreement errors (James, 2017). The following are some of the errors made by the learners.

<u>Error classification</u>	<u>Error identification</u>	<u>Error correction</u>
Subject/verb agreement	1. * The classes was clean.	1. The classes were clean
	2. There was many people	2. There were many people
	3.* Our head teacher own a car	3. Our head teacher owns a car
	4.* She don't like pupils	4. She doesn't like pupils.
	5.*family and friends was invited	5. Family and friends were invited

In the above examples the subject head teacher which is a singular noun should take a singular verb owns and people should take a plural verb were. Harun and Sufian (2018) in their study 'Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement: A study based on Bangladesh University Students' observed that most of the students have the errors in the use of subjects that are supposed to agree with the verbs, especially in the use of third person singular and plural numbers in their sentences. Their findings are similar to this study as the adult learners (8.2%) constructed sentences without considering the rules for subject/verb concord which resulted to communication breakdown.

Word Order Errors

Word order is the syntactic arrangement of words in a sentence, clause or phrase (Ormord, 2003). In English the positions of subject, verb and object are relatively fixed. In declarative clause they occur regularly in the order S.V.O. Clause elements must combine in particular ways to form correct English sentences and the systematic deviations from these conventional modes of element combination constitute grammatical deviations. From the findings, some respondents placed verb before the subject and other respondents wrongly fronted the object placing it before the subject. 8.4% of errors were in this category as in the following examples;

Error classification	Error identification	Error correction
Word order	1. Entered my father and mother in the house	1. My father and mother entered the house
	2. Books we read	2. We read books
	3. They do not give books in our school	3. They do not give us books in our school.

Misordering error alters the surface structure of the sentence and may emanate from incomplete application of the target language rules (Reima, 2017). The adult learners should be exposed to English as much as possible and they should be encouraged to use it.

Punctuation Errors

There was also the poor use of punctuation marks especially capitalization. Punctuation is essential and is used to convey and clarify the meaning of written language. Capitalization means writing a word with its first letter a capital letter (upper-case letter) and the remaining letters in small letters (James, 2017). From the respondents work it was seen that, some proper nouns in their work lacked capital letters. Capitalization errors can really have a negative impact on the impression of the reader on ones writing. The adult instructors should explain clearly the capitalization rules and encourage the adult learners to read through their work after writing.

Error classification	Error identification	Error correction
Capitalization	1. The *english teacher was not in class	1. The English teacher was not in class
	2. We travelled to *mombasa	2. We travelled to Mombasa
	3. We went for the trip on *Friday	3. We went for the trip on Friday.
	4. *My grandmothers compound	4. My grandmother's compound

Explanation of Errors

The explanation of errors is concerned with accounting for why and how errors come about. This is considered as the most important step in the process of understanding second language acquisition. Two major causes of errors in second language acquisition are;

- i. Inter-lingual errors
- ii. Intra-lingual errors

Inter-lingual errors occur between languages and are caused by negative transfer and interferences between first and second language. The learner while learning a second language transfers elements of his mother tongue whenever he feels difficulty to perform in the second language.

Regarding inter-lingual errors it is important to note that in table---on identification of errors, it was noted that most of the learners had problems with first language interference. According to Tarone (2006) negative transfer refer situation in which learners attempt to use inappropriate sound patterns and elements of the mother tongue in place of patterns of the target language. Scholars Dulay and Burt (1972) have also recognized that there are errors which occur due to the interference of the mother tongue. Deviations resulting from interlingual transfer have been recorded at all linguistic levels (Gass and Selinker, 1994).

The second cause of errors is within the language and that is intralingual errors. These are caused by factors attributable to wrong use of second language rules. They include; overgeneralisation, simplification, hyper-correction, faulty teaching, inadequate learning and false concepts hypothesized-these are wrong hypotheses formed by the learners. The errors identified from the adult learners' composition give a clear explanation of the causes of these errors. The phonological errors identified are as a result of wrong pronunciation. Learners tend to write words the way they pronounce them. For example a word like 'calling' is wrongly spelt as *colling. Production of speech sound is affected by interference between their mother tongue and English language. The quality of exposure to English, attitude and motivation and instruction quality influence the development of English pronunciation by the adult learners. Motivation is necessary for any learning and in general the desire to acquire native or near-native pronunciation of English tends to foster better pronunciation skills. Quality instruction is also positively correlated with improved English pronunciation.

Other important causes are overgeneralization and misapplication of rules. In many cases students do overgeneralise or misapply certain morphological rules, for example the suffix –ed is used to derive the past tense. From the adult learners' compositions some learners overgeneralised this rule and wrote *taked, *gived etc. Inconsistency in English language also compounds most ESL learners' problems in the acquisition of English morphology. As per the perception of the adult instructors, this inconsistency that there are no fixed rules in the grammatical constructions lead to morphological errors like plural form of knife is knives, thief-thieves but the plural of chief is not *chieves. These inconsistencies are always a problem for the learner. The study also showed that some errors occur due to poor grammatical knowledge. Poor grammatical knowledge can be as a result of defective teaching methods, inadequate teaching materials, lack of motivation and inadequate time by the learners to practice in L2 and revise for the learnt content.

CONCLUSION

IN conclusion, the error analysis method is an effective way to trace and identify the students' errors. The method is systematically arranged to enable the researcher to come to a conclusion based on the essays produced by the students. The section has discussed the samples of learner language based on the errors that were identified, classified and explained through the error

analysis procedure. After analysing the errors, it has been found out that the adult learners' errors in English result from both Interlingual and intralingual factors that is, they transfer certain rules and structures from their native language into the target language or they overgeneralise target language rules. It is suggested that students' errors provide to the teacher or the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language. Errors show the teacher what aspects of the language can be well-equipped to help students minimize or overcome their learning problems. Teachers should provide tasks that allow learner to succeed within the contexts of their limited time and demanding lives. The instructors can give corrective feedback to their learners in writing tasks so that students can see their progress and decide what to focus on and what to ignore. Continuous progress reports should also be provided to the learners so that motivation can be sustained.

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