

## ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH PERFECTIVE ASPECT IN NARRATIVE DISCOURSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the functions of the English perfective aspect in narrative discourse and highlights its relevance to social studies education. The perfective aspect is a fundamental grammatical category in English that enables speakers and writers to present events as completed, thereby contributing to temporal sequencing, coherence, and meaning construction in narrative discourse and social studies education.. Adopting a qualitative discourse-analytic approach, the study analyses selected English narrative texts among higher education students to identify the communicative and pragmatic roles of the perfective aspect in representing completed actions, establishing causal relationships, and constructing historical and social realities. The findings indicate that effective use of the perfective aspect enhances textual cohesion, facilitates readers' comprehension, and supports critical interpretation of narratives. The paper further argues that integrating grammatical discourse analysis into English language and Social Studies instruction promotes learners' linguistic competence, critical thinking, historical consciousness, and intercultural awareness. Such interdisciplinary pedagogy fosters inclusive learning environments by accommodating diverse linguistic backgrounds while equipping students with the communicative and analytical skills needed to address contemporary social challenges. The study concludes that the integration of English language studies and Social Studies contributes significantly to building resilient higher education systems capable of producing graduates who*

*are effective communicators, critical thinkers, and responsible citizens. It recommends the incorporation of discourse-based grammar instruction into higher education curricula to enhance inclusive, resilient, and socially responsive teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** Perfective Aspect, Narrative Discourse, English Grammar, Higher Education, Social Studies.

## Introduction

In English the perfective aspect play a significant role in narrative discourse by indicating completed actions and establishing a sequence, continuity and coherence of events . Effective use of use the perfective aspect enables speakers and writers to present experiences, historical events and social phenomena with clarity and precision. The English language occupies a central position in global communication, education, administration, science, and international relations. As a global lingua franca, English facilitates interaction among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In many multilingual societies, English functions not only as a medium of instruction in schools but also as the language of academic discourse, government communication, and professional engagement. Scholars observe that the dominance of English in education has made it a critical tool for knowledge acquisition and dissemination across disciplines, particularly in countries where it serves as a second language. Consequently, mastery of English grammar and usage is essential for learners to communicate effectively in both spoken and written forms (Crystal, 2019; Harmer, 2015).

In English grammar, the expression of time and the structure of events are largely conveyed through the systems of tense and aspect, which are fundamental to accurate communication. Tense in English refers to the grammatical marking of time, indicating whether an action occurs in the past, present, or future. For instance, in the sentences “She writes a letter” (present tense) and “She wrote a letter” (past tense), the verb form signals when the action takes place. Aspect, on the other hand, describes the internal structure of an action or how the speaker views the event in relation to its completion, duration, or repetition. English commonly expresses aspect through constructions such as the progressive (is writing), which shows an ongoing action, and the perfective (has written), which presents an action as completed or connected to another time reference. Although tense and aspect are closely related, they perform different grammatical functions: tense situates an action in time, while aspect describes the nature or state of that action. For example, the sentence “She has finished her assignment” uses the present perfect form to indicate that the action of finishing is complete but still relevant to the present situation. Understanding this distinction is important for learners because misuse of tense or aspect can lead to ambiguity or misinterpretation in communication (Swan, 2016; Yule, 2020).

Within narrative communication, the perfective aspect plays a particularly important role in structuring events and presenting completed actions. Narrative discourse typically recounts a sequence of events that occur in a story, report, or personal experience, and grammatical choices such as tense and aspect help organise these events logically. The perfective aspect is often used to indicate that an action has been completed before another action occurs or before a specific reference point in the narrative. For example, in a narrative sentence such as “By the time the teacher entered the classroom, the students had finished their assignment,” the form “had finished” signals that the action was completed prior to another event in the story. Similarly, in “She has written three chapters of her story,” the perfective construction highlights the completion of part of the narrative process while linking it to the present moment. Through such constructions, the perfective aspect helps writers and speakers organise events, establish temporal relationships, and maintain coherence in storytelling. This functional role of the perfective aspect makes it an important grammatical feature for analysis within English narrative discourse.

The correct use of the perfective aspect presents significant challenges for many learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). In Nigeria and other multilingual African contexts, learners often acquire English in addition to their indigenous languages, whose grammatical systems may differ considerably from English structures. As a result, learners sometimes struggle with grammatical elements that involve auxiliary verbs and verb inflections, such as those required in the formation of the perfective aspect. Studies in Nigerian English language education have shown that students frequently experience difficulties with verb forms, particularly the correct use of past participles and auxiliary verbs such as *has*, *have*, and *had*. These challenges arise partly because learners tend to transfer patterns from their first language into English usage, leading to grammatical inaccuracies in both spoken and written communication (Akindele & Adegbite, 2018; Otagburuagu, 2017). These examples show common grammatical problems such as the incorrect use of past participles, the omission or misuse of auxiliary verbs, and confusion between the simple past tense and the present perfect form. Such errors are common among ESL learners and may affect the clarity and grammatical accuracy of their narratives, especially when they attempt to describe events that have been completed (Bamgbose, 2015; Jowitt, 2019).

Considering the persistent difficulties, ESL learners experience in using the perfective aspect, it is important to examine how learners actually employ this grammatical feature in authentic communication, particularly when narrating historical events describing social issues, civic responsibilities and expressing cultural experiences that are central to social studies education. Many studies in English language education have traditionally relied on written tests or structured questionnaires to assess learners’ grammatical competence. However, language is most naturally expressed through spoken interaction, where learners must organise events, describe experiences, and maintain coherence in real-time discourse. Narrative tasks are therefore particularly useful in

linguistic research because they encourage speakers to recount personal experiences and organise events sequentially, thereby revealing their natural use of grammatical structures such as tense and aspect (Akindele & Adegbite, 2018).

For this reason, this study focuses on examining how ESL learners use the perfective aspect in English narrative discourse. By analysing learners' narratives, the study seeks to understand how completed actions are expressed and how the perfective aspect functions within the sequencing of events in discourse. Such an investigation is important because it can provide insights into the patterns of grammatical usage among ESL learners and contribute to a better understanding of how tense and aspect operate in learners' narrative communication.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of students' understanding of the present perfect and past perfect forms in English?
2. To what extent are students able to apply the perfective aspect correctly in different narrative discourse and social context?
3. What areas of difficulty do ESL learners experience in the use of the perfective aspect in English and social studies?

This study is expected to contribute to the teaching and learning of English grammar and social studies by providing insight into students' understanding and use of the perfective aspect. By identifying the common difficulties students encounter in using the present perfect and past perfect forms, the study will help to highlight areas that require greater instructional attention (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). The findings of this study will be beneficial to English language teachers and social studies teachers as they will gain a clearer understanding of the specific challenges students face when using the English perfective aspect. This understanding may guide teachers in adopting more effective teaching strategies and offering clearer explanations when teaching tense and aspect (Ellis, 2006). The study will also be useful to students, as it may draw attention to the common errors associated with the perfective aspect and encourage greater awareness of correct usage in both written and spoken English (Swan, 2005).

## **Literature Review**

### **Concept of Aspect in English**

Aspect in English grammar refers to how an action or event is viewed in terms of its internal structure, such as whether it is completed, ongoing, habitual, or repeated. Unlike tense, which locates an event in time (past, present, or future), aspect focuses on the nature and flow of the action itself. According to Adeyanju (2019), aspect is important because it allows speakers to

present actions not just as events in time, but as processes with duration, completion, or repetition. In English, aspect is expressed through different verb constructions rather than single verb changes. For example, habitual aspect can be seen in “Tunde visits his grandmother every Sunday,” showing repeated action. The progressive aspect appears in “The lecturer is explaining the topic to the students,” which shows an action in progress. The perfective aspect is seen in “The principal has approved the results,” indicating a completed action with present relevance. In contrast, “The workers had left the site before the inspection began” shows that one action was completed before another past event. These examples highlight how aspect changes the meaning of sentences even when the time reference remains similar.

In English narrative and everyday discourse, aspect helps to organise events clearly and meaningfully. For instance, in storytelling, “Amina entered the hall quietly and took her seat” presents a simple sequence of completed actions. However, “Amina had entered the hall before the announcement started” shows a background action completed earlier. Also, “The crowd was cheering while the team celebrated” presents simultaneous ongoing actions. These differences are important because they show how aspect controls the flow of meaning in discourse. In Nigerian ESL contexts, learners often struggle to distinguish these forms, especially when moving between simple past narration and perfect constructions, which affects clarity and coherence in communication.

### **Types of Aspect**

English aspect is generally classified into different types that show how actions or events are viewed in relation to time. These types mainly include the perfective aspect, the progressive (continuous) aspect, and the habitual/repetitive aspect. Each type presents a different way of understanding actions, whether as completed, ongoing, or repeated over time. According to scholars such as Oluwole (2017), these aspectual distinctions help speakers and writers express meaning more precisely beyond simple time reference. The perfective aspect presents an action as completed, often with relevance to a particular time. It is commonly formed using auxiliary verbs such as *has*, *have*, or *had* followed by the past participle. For example, “The university has released the admission list” shows a completed action with present relevance, while “The students had submitted their scripts before the alarm went off” shows completion before another past event. This aspect is particularly important in narratives because it helps to show results and completed stages of events. The progressive (continuous) aspect shows actions that are ongoing or in progress at a specific time. It is formed using *is/are/was/were* + verb-ing. For example, “The students are preparing for their examinations” shows an action in progress, while “The security officer was monitoring the gate when the incident occurred” shows an ongoing action interrupted by another event. This aspect is important in discourse because it provides background actions in narratives. The habitual or repetitive aspect refers to actions that occur regularly or repeatedly over time. For

instance, “Chika attends lectures every morning before work” shows a habitual action, while “The mosque announces the call to prayer five times daily” reflects repeated activity. This aspect helps to describe routines, customs, and repeated behaviours in communication. Together, these aspectual forms allow speakers to express different shades of meaning in English. In ESL contexts, however, learners often confuse especially the perfective and progressive forms, which leads to errors in both spoken and written discourse. This makes aspect an important area of focus in English language learning and analysis.

### **Perfective Aspect in English (Present Perfect and Past Perfect)**

The perfective aspect in English refers to verb forms that present actions as completed, often with a focus on their result or relevance to another point in time. It is mainly expressed through the present perfect (has/have + past participle) and the past perfect (had + past participle). This aspect is particularly important in discourse because it helps speakers show completion, consequence, and temporal relationships between events. According to Olatunji (2018), the perfective aspect enables speakers to connect actions across time in a meaningful and coherent way. The present perfect is used to describe actions that were completed in the past but are still relevant to the present situation. For example, “The committee has approved new guidelines for students’ conduct” shows a completed decision that affects the current situation. Another example is “Ngozi has travelled to Abuja for her internship,” which suggests a completed action with present relevance. This form is commonly used in reports, announcements, and personal experiences where the result of an action is important.

### **Challenges of Using Perfective Aspect Among Learners**

The perfective aspect presents notable difficulties for learners of English as a second language, particularly in environments where English is not the first language. One major challenge is the structural difference between English and many Nigerian indigenous languages, where equivalent auxiliary verb constructions such as has, have, and had do not function in the same way. This often leads learners to transfer native language patterns into English, resulting in incorrect grammatical structures and misunderstanding of how completion and time reference are expressed.

Another common difficulty is the use of perfective aspect is the confusion between the simple past tense and the perfective aspect. Many learners tend to use past tense forms where present perfect or past perfect structures are required. They also misuse auxiliary verbs in their attempts to form perfect constructions. For example, learners may produce sentences like “He has finished yesterday” or “They had went home before the teacher came,” which reflect a lack of understanding of both verb forms and time sequencing in English grammar. These errors often persist because learners focus more on meaning than grammatical accuracy in spontaneous speech.

## Functions of Perfective Aspect

The perfective aspect in English performs several important grammatical and discourse functions, especially in relation to expressing completed actions and organising events in time. One of its primary functions is to indicate that an action has been completed, often with emphasis on the result or current relevance. For instance, in the sentence “The registrar has signed the clearance forms,” the focus is on the completion of the action and its outcome, which is now valid for administrative purposes.

Another key function of the perfective aspect is its ability to establish clear temporal relationships between events. It helps speakers and writers show which action occurred first in a sequence, especially in narrative discourse. For example, “The security officers had closed the gate before the visitors arrived” clearly shows that the gate-closing happened earlier than the arrival. This function is essential in storytelling, reporting events, and explaining processes where order of events must be clearly understood. The perfective aspect also serves to connect past experiences to present situations, particularly through the present perfect form. For example, “I have lived in this hostel since my first year” links a past action to a present state. Similarly, “The department has introduced new assessment methods this semester” shows a recent development that is still relevant. This function is widely used in academic, professional, and everyday communication. In ESL contexts, however, learners often struggle to apply these functions correctly, leading to errors that affect clarity and meaning. This makes the perfective aspect a crucial area of focus in English grammar instruction and analysis.

## Aspect and Tense

Aspect and tense are two major grammatical categories in English that work together to express time-related meanings in communication. Tense refers to the time of an action, whether it occurs in the past, present, or future, while aspect explains how the action unfolds over time, such as whether it is completed, ongoing, or repeated. In simple terms, tense answers when something happens, while aspect explains how it happens.

In English usage, tense and aspect often combine to form different verb structures that convey precise meanings. For example, “The students submitted their assignments” uses the past tense to indicate a completed action in the past. However, “The students have submitted their assignments” uses the present perfect aspect to show completion with relevance to the present situation. Similarly, “The students had submitted their assignments before the lecturer entered” uses the past perfect aspect to show that one past action occurred before another. These examples show how aspect adds depth to tense by providing information about the structure and timing of events. In many ESL contexts, learners often confuse tense and aspect because both deal with time reference. This confusion leads to errors such as using simple past forms where perfect constructions are

required, or misusing auxiliary verbs. Understanding the distinction between tense and aspect is therefore essential for accurate grammar usage, particularly in narrative discourse where sequencing and clarity of events are important.

### **Distinguishing Features between Aspect and Tense**

Tense and aspect are closely related grammatical concepts in English, but they differ in both meaning and function. Tense primarily indicates the time of an action, such as past, present, or future, while aspect explains the internal nature of the action, such as whether it is completed, ongoing, or repeated. In other words, tense situates an event in time, whereas aspect describes how that event unfolds within that time. One key difference between tense and aspect is how they are expressed in sentence structure. Tense is often marked through verb forms or time indicators, while aspect is expressed through auxiliary verbs combined with participles. For example, in “The boy left early,” the past tense simply places the action in the past. However, in “The boy has left early,” the present perfect aspect shows that the action is completed and still relevant to the present situation. Similarly, “The boy was leaving when the bell rang” uses the progressive aspect to show an ongoing action interrupted by another event.

Another important distinction is that tense is generally required in every finite verb phrase, while aspect is optional and depends on the speaker’s intended meaning. For instance, one may simply say “She cooked rice,” but may also choose “She had cooked rice before the guests arrived” to show a sequence of events. This flexibility makes aspect a powerful tool for meaning-making in discourse, especially in narrative communication where clarity of sequence and completion is essential. In ESL learning contexts, confusion between tense and aspect is common, particularly when learners attempt to express completed actions using incorrect verb forms or misuse auxiliary verbs. This highlights the importance of teaching both concepts together in a meaningful way that reflects their functional roles in real communication.

### **Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)**

Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a linguistic theory that views language as a social semiotic system used for making meaning in context. Developed by M.A.K. Halliday, the theory explains that language is not just a set of structural rules but a resource through which speakers and writers express meanings based on their social and communicative needs. In this sense, grammar is seen as functional, meaning that every grammatical choice reflects a particular meaning potential within a given situation. SFG therefore focuses on how language operates in real-life communication rather than abstract rule memorisation.

A key feature of SFG is its emphasis on the relationship between language and context. Halliday explains that meaning is shaped by three contextual variables: field (what is happening), tenor

(participants involved), and mode (channel of communication). These variables influence how grammatical structures are used in different situations. For example, in narrative discourse, speakers select specific tense and aspect forms to organise events, show sequence, and indicate completion.

### **Studies on Learners' Usage of the Perfective Aspect**

Adeniran (2018) investigated tense and aspect errors among Nigerian secondary school students and found that learners frequently confused the present perfect with the simple past tense. The study revealed recurrent errors such as “I have visited him yesterday” instead of “I visited him yesterday,” showing a misunderstanding of time markers and auxiliary usage. The study concluded that learners' difficulties were largely due to inadequate grammatical grounding and overgeneralisation of rules, which affected their ability to use aspect correctly in context.

Similarly, Eze (2020) examined students' narrative writing and reported persistent misuse of the past perfect aspect. Learners often produced sentences such as “Before he left, he has eaten breakfast” instead of the correct form “Before he left, he had eaten breakfast.” The study attributed these errors to limited exposure to narrative structures, insufficient practice in sequencing events, and lack of explicit instruction on how aspect functions within discourse. It further emphasised that learners often understand grammatical rules in isolation but struggle to apply them in extended narratives. Olaleye (2019) carried out a classroom-based study on Nigerian senior secondary school students' understanding of the present perfect in storytelling activities. The findings showed that although students could correctly identify the structure in isolated grammar exercises, they often failed to apply it accurately in continuous discourse. This revealed a clear gap between grammatical recognition and productive usage, suggesting that traditional teaching methods may not adequately support communicative competence in aspectual usage. Outside Nigeria, Kumar and Singh (2021) examined ESL learners in India and reported similar patterns of difficulty. Their study found widespread confusion between tense and aspect, frequent misuse of auxiliary verbs, and challenges in maintaining correct temporal sequencing in narrative writing. The authors argued that grammar instruction that is not embedded in meaningful communicative contexts limits learners' ability to internalise and apply aspectual forms effectively.

Empirical studies further reveal that ESL learners, especially in Nigerian contexts, consistently experience difficulties in the use of the perfective aspect. Common errors such as incorrect auxiliary usage, confusion between simple past and present perfect, and misapplication of the past perfect have been widely reported. While these studies provide useful insights, most of them rely heavily on written tasks, classroom exercises, or recognition-based tests, which may not fully capture learners' spontaneous language use in real communicative situations such as oral narratives. A critical review of the literature also shows that relatively fewer studies have focused

on ESL learners at the tertiary level, particularly within Nigerian universities. Much of the existing research concentrates on secondary school learners, leaving a gap in understanding how university students handle aspectual structures in spoken discourse. Furthermore, there is limited attention to the functional analysis of the perfective aspect in narrative communication, especially using authentic oral data. This suggests a need for studies that examine learners' actual performance in meaningful discourse contexts. Therefore, the reviewed literature indicates a clear gap in research on the use of the perfective aspect in oral narrative discourse among ESL learners in Nigerian universities. This study is positioned to address this gap by focusing on ESL learners at Lagos State University, Ojo, and examining how they use the perfective aspect in spoken narrative tasks.

### Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative discourse analytic design, which is appropriate for investigating ESL learners' usage of the perfective aspect in English Narrative Discourse. A discourse analytic design allows the researchers to analyse how perfective aspect is used. This design is particularly suitable for the present study because it enables the researcher to: Analyse how learners use the perfective aspect in actual oral narrative production, Identify patterns of correct usage and errors in the deployment of present perfect and past perfect forms. Analyse how meaning is constructed through tense-aspect choices in learner discourse without manipulating variables. The qualitative nature of the design allows for an in-depth interpretation of learners' language, focusing on how and why particular grammatical forms are used in context. Unlike purely quantitative approaches, this design prioritises meaning, structure, and function in learners' spoken output. The population of the study consists of ESL learners in selected faculties at Lagos State University, Ojo. These students use English as a second language for academic and communicative purposes within the university setting and are regularly exposed to its use in both formal and informal contexts. The sample for this study consists of ESL learners selected from different faculties at Lagos State University, Ojo. The participants are drawn from across various levels of study in order to capture a broad range of learners with different levels of exposure and experience in English usage. A simple random sampling technique is employed in selecting the participants. Specifically, 20 students are randomly selected from each faculty across different departments, while students from the English Department are excluded to avoid bias arising from specialised knowledge of English language studies. The primary instrument for data collection in this study is oral narrative tasks designed to elicit spoken responses from ESL learners, aimed at assessing their use of the perfective aspect in English narrative discourse. The oral narrative tasks were chosen because they allow for the collection of natural spoken language data, which reflects how learners use grammatical structures in real communicative situations. The data collected for this study was analysed using qualitative discourse analysis, focusing on how ESL learners use the perfective aspect in their oral narratives. The recorded responses were first transcribed verbatim to produce

written versions of the participants' spoken narratives. The transcriptions will then be carefully examined to identify instances of the present perfect and past perfect forms in the participants' discourse, with attention to both correct usage and grammatical errors.

## Results

### Research Question One: Level of Students' Understanding of Present Perfect and Past Perfect Forms

The findings indicate a low to moderate level of understanding of the perfect aspect system among ESL learners. The present perfect recorded the highest level of difficulty, with 90% incorrect usage, showing that most learners lack awareness of its functional meaning (current relevance and experiential reference). Common errors include: Misuse of structure: have/has + V2 used incorrectly (e.g. have went, has did) Use of present perfect with past time adverbials (e.g. I have seen him yesterday) Substitution of present perfect with simple past in all narrative contexts

In contrast, the past perfect shows partial understanding (55% correct usage). Learners demonstrated some awareness of anteriority but lacked consistency in applying the structure correctly.

Frequent errors include:

Morphological errors (e.g. had went, had saw)

Overuse of simple past instead of past perfect in sequencing

Incorrect formation of verb phrase after had

Learners show weak conceptual understanding of the present perfect and only emerging understanding of the past perfect, indicating incomplete acquisition of the English perfect aspect system.

### Research Question Two: Extent of Correct Application of the Perfective Aspect in Narrative Discourses

The extent of correct application varies across the three forms:

Simple past: 100% usage, fully dominant but overextended

Past perfect: 55% correct usage, partially applied for anterior actions

Present perfect: only 10% correct usage, largely misapplied in narrative contexts

Learners correctly applied the past perfect mainly in contexts involving two past events where sequencing was required (e.g. I had finished before he arrived). However, they often failed to maintain consistency, switching to simple past in similar structures.

The present perfect was rarely used correctly, indicating that learners are unable to apply it appropriately in experiential or result-oriented contexts. While learners can apply simple past effectively, their use of perfect forms is inconsistent, showing limited control over aspectual distinctions in narrative discourse.

### **Research Question three: Areas of Difficulty in the Use of the Perfective Aspect**

The major areas of difficulty identified among ESL learners include:  
Conceptual confusion between tense and aspect

Learners treat present perfect as a past tense rather than a form indicating present relevance.

1. Morphological errors in verb formation

Frequent use of incorrect past participles (e.g. had went, have did).

1. Overgeneralisation of the simple past

The simple past is used as a universal narrative tense, replacing both present perfect and past perfect.

1. Inability to maintain temporal sequencing

Learners struggle to consistently mark anteriority in complex narrative structures.

1. Influence of L1 transfer (implicit)

The absence of equivalent perfect constructions in some learners' first language may contribute to structural confusion.

The main difficulty lies in learners' inability to distinguish functional meanings of tense-aspect forms, leading to overgeneralisation and structural simplification.

The error analysis reveals that ESL learners experience significant challenges in mastering the English perfective aspect. While the simple past is fully internalised, the present perfect is largely misunderstood and the past perfect is only partially acquired. Overall, learners demonstrate a tendency to simplify narrative tense systems, resulting in reduced aspectual accuracy and weakened temporal expression.

The most dominant pattern observed is the complete omission of the present perfect form across all responses. No learner produced structures such as *have done*, *has gone*, or *have experienced*. This represents a 100% absence rate, indicating a strong tendency to avoid the structure entirely. From an error analysis perspective, this is classified as a systematic omission, not occasional error. It suggests that learners do not attempt the structure at all in spontaneous narrative production. From an SFG perspective, this reflects a restricted activation of the tense-aspect system, where learners fail to deploy the grammatical resource that expresses experiential meaning linked to present relevance.

(b) Limited Deployment of Past Perfect Forms The past perfect appears only in a few isolated cases (P57, P70, P84), and although these instances are correct, they are extremely limited in distribution. This indicates that learners have partial awareness but weak systemic control of the form. Instead of using it to consistently mark anteriority in narrative sequencing, learners depend mainly on simple past structures. From an SFG perspective, this shows that learners are not fully utilising the logical sequencing potential of the verbal group system, leading to reduced grammatical cohesion in narratives.

(c) Frequent Substitution of Grammatical Forms with Lexical Expressions Another dominant pattern is the use of lexical substitutes in place of perfective aspect forms. Learners frequently use: *was able to* + verb *managed to* + verb. These forms appear repeatedly in P9, P12, and P15 among others. This substitution reflects a strategy where learners prioritise semantic meaning over grammatical accuracy, resulting in avoidance of complex aspectual structures.

## Discussion

This study examined the use of the English perfective aspect, specifically the present perfect and past perfect forms, in students' oral narrative discourse. The focus of the study was on identifying the extent to which learners understand and appropriately use these aspectual forms, as well as the challenges they encounter in their application to English language and social studies. The study was motivated by the observed difficulty among learners in distinguishing between different tense-aspect forms in English, particularly in narrative contexts where temporal relationships between events are essential. Despite the importance of the perfective aspect in expressing completion, anteriority, and relevance to present situations, learners often rely on simpler grammatical structures, leading to reduced variation in their language use.

The findings of this study are presented in line with the research questions and supported with quantitative evidence from the checklist analysis. Each finding is also discussed in relation to relevant studies reviewed in Chapter Two.

Research Question 1: What is the level of students' understanding of the present perfect and past perfect forms in English? The findings reveal that students demonstrate a very low level of understanding of the present perfect, as it recorded a 0% usage rate across all analysed responses.

This indicates a complete absence of the structure (have/has + past participle) in learners' narrative production.

In contrast, the past perfect showed a 20% usage rate, with only three instances identified across the dataset. Although these instances were grammatically correct, the low frequency suggests limited understanding and lack of consistent application. These findings corroborate the observations of Adeniran (2018), who reported that learners exhibit weak mastery of perfective aspect forms, particularly the present perfect. Similarly, Eze (2020) noted that learners struggle with the appropriate use of aspectual distinctions in English. The present study supports these claims, confirming that learners' understanding of the perfective aspect remains underdeveloped.

The findings show that the most significant error type is systematic omission, with the present perfect recording 100% non-occurrence. Additionally, learners frequently employ substitution strategies, with approximately 33.3% of responses showing the use of lexical alternatives such as "was able to" and "managed to" in place of perfective forms. These patterns indicate that learners avoid complex grammatical structures, which limits their ability to express nuanced temporal and experiential meanings. As a result, their proficiency is affected not only in terms of grammatical accuracy but also in the range of meanings they can convey.

This finding corroborates Eze (2020), who identified frequent errors and avoidance strategies in learners' use of tense-aspect forms. However, the present study extends this by showing that learners do not only make errors but also systematically replace grammatical forms with lexical expressions, indicating a deeper level of structural avoidance. To what extent are students able to apply the perfective aspect correctly in different narrative discourse? The findings indicate that students' ability to apply the perfective aspect in narrative discourse is very limited. While the past perfect was used correctly in the few instances identified (20% occurrence), it was not applied consistently across narratives. The present perfect was not used at all (0%), indicating a lack of functional application. Instead, learners relied almost entirely on the simple past tense, which appeared in 100% of the responses as the dominant narrative structure. This finding corroborates Adeniran (2018), who observed that learners tend to rely heavily on simple past tense in narrative contexts, avoiding more complex aspectual forms. It also aligns with Eze (2020), who reported that learners experience difficulty applying perfective forms appropriately in discourse. These difficulties indicate that learners struggle not only with the formation of perfective structures but also with their functional use in expressing temporal relationships and experiential meaning. This finding corroborates both Adeniran (2018) and Eze (2020), who identified tense-aspect usage as a persistent challenge among learners of English. However, while previous studies emphasised incorrect usage, the present study highlights systematic avoidance and restricted grammatical choice as central issues.

## Conclusion

The analysis of English perfective aspect in narrative discourse underscores the importance of grammatical competence in constructing meaningful and coherent narratives. As narrative communication is fundamental to social studies education, strengthening learners understanding and use of the perfective aspect can enhance critical thinking effective communication and inclusive participation by integrating insight from language studies into social studies pedagogy. It contributes to more resilient and learner centered higher education The study was motivated by the need to examine learners' ability to express temporal relationships and experiential meaning through appropriate tense-aspect choices. Using a descriptive design and an Error Analysis checklist as the analytical instrument, the study examined patterns of usage, correctness, and error types in learners' narratives. The study demonstrates that the effective teaching and learning of the English perfective aspect require not only attention to form but also to function, enabling learners to use grammatical structures as meaningful resources in discourse.

## Suggestion for Further Studies

Further studies could examine the use of the English perfective aspect across different discourse genres and educational levels. Research could also investigate first-language influence, teachers' instructional practices, and innovative approaches to teaching the perfective aspect. Additionally, studies could explore how mastery of the perfective aspect enhances learners' comprehension and construction of historical and social narratives in Social Studies education.

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