

ENGLISH COMPOSITION WRITING SKILLS AT ORDINARY LEVEL AND ITS EFFECT ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THREE DAY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MUTARE DISTRICT, MANICALAND

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to establish the writing skills in English Composition at Ordinary Level and its effect on students' performance in three schools in Mutare District of Manicaland. The research followed a mixed method approach rooted in a case study research design. The sample comprised of 100 students and six teachers from three urban schools. Interview, observation, questionnaires and document analysis were the research tools used. The study deduced that English Language students have a myriad of writing skills difficulties in composition writing. These include mother tongue interference, inconsistent use of tenses, spellings amongst other various challenges. Teaching methods used by teachers were also another contributory factor. The study recommends wide reading, constant practice of writing with sufficient error correction and rechecking of compositions written before submissions by students. To teachers and schools it recommends innovation of teaching learning aids, instructional supervision, community involvement and use of information communication technologies to enhance good writing skills in composition writing.

Keywords: English Composition, writing skills, student performance, secondary school.

INTRODUCTION

A growing challenge of English teachers in Zimbabwe and world over is to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for students to effectively write essay in English. The importance of essay writing for students is underpinned by Shaffle et al (2010) who mentioned that students will need English writing skills that range from simple paragraph and summary skills to the ability to write essay and professional articles. The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) Report 2011 observed that students manifest a range of problems. In most cases, students present essays with loose content. They lack originality basing on the given topic. Their essays also lack proper sequence and organised flow of ideas. Furthermore, paragraphs are badly formulated, with ideas haphazardly arranged. It is common to find different ideas placed in one paragraph, devoid of developers at all. Essays lack properly defined structure, devoid of introductions body and conclusions.

Hesse (2010) also stated that essays lack variety in their expressing of ideas. Sentences are long and meaningless. Sentences include wrongly used conjunctions. The complex sentences which are correct lack variety. Students show lack of understanding of the difference between fragments and short sentences. They confuse the two thereby messing essay with meaningful fragments. Dawson (2008) observed that most ordinary level students do not know the various types of essays. These are, descriptive, argumentative, narrative and expository. He

further retorted that lack of knowledge on types of essays cause many students to provide contrasting devices to a different essay.

Writing and writing instruction is a shared responsibility across disciplines. English, Science, Commercial Studies and other content subjects' examinations are written in English therefore good writing skills are a necessity. The ZIMSEC Report of 2014 highlights composition writing as the most difficult component of English Language curriculum for students followed by written grammar which is also an important proponent of not only English Language but other content subjects. Adas and Bakir (2013) state that writing is an intricate and complex task, it is most difficult of all languages to acquire. They also highlight that many students understand the English Language but most of the students face the problem of communicating their ideas effectively. The problem is lack of adequate stock of vocabulary, creativity in writing and several other factors (Adas and Bakir: 2013).

English Language Ordinary Level Paper 1 consists of two essays – one free composition and one guided essay. This results in students having several sittings of writing the examination. Failing English also hinder students to going to upper academic or professional levels. Without mastery of good writing skills other content subjects will also be affected. Ordinary Level students face a myriad of grammatical problems such as the correct use of verb, surface problem, content problems, sentence structure, process difficulties and many others (ZIMSEC Report 2011). Despite the efforts by the government of Zimbabwe and non-governmental stakeholders in providing qualified instructors, learning resources, financial aid, Ordinary Level students' academic performance in writing essay remains low (ZIMSEC Principal Marking Supervisors Report: 2014).

A good composition is composed of an introduction, body and conclusion (Bereiter and Scardamalia: 2013). Dawson (2009) wrote extensively on essay introductions. He posits that introductions should be good. According to him, opening sentences should capture the readers' interest and ignite in him a desire to read on. Sentences need to be fresh and original. Furthermore, Dawson and Yon (2008) note that some writers, in their work on narratives use the flashback technique. The writer should be clear and gripping. In his research, it is apparent that most students at Ordinary Level write essays which are devoid of the above. Dawson and Yon (2008) suggest that both students and teachers should be knowledgeable of such aspects to improve in writing essays.

Characterisation is an important component of essay writing. Dawson (2009) states that, narratives should have characters that are realistic and convincing. Clear characters do not confuse the examiners and even the students themselves when they use some of the character roles as the story progresses. Students do not use clear characters in their essay. Emphasis on the need for students to have clear character greatly helps students when writing essay, he further purports.

Orthography is another important area of concern in essay writing. Good English essays have correct spelling, punctuation and properly arranged sentences with recommended word division (Dawson: 2006). Teachers are encouraged to instil in students' minds, the importance of these aspects. Students should be taught to punctuate properly, spell words correctly and improve word division as well as practice using variety in sentence construction. Dawson and Yong (2008) stated that students have many basic mistakes in written works on spelling, grammar, punctuation and organisation. Kihara et al (2009) also suggest that some words become spelling problems because of the gap between spelling and

pronunciation. In order to improve essay writing techniques, teacher should put great emphasis in the use of figurative language and various errors that crop up in students work (Al Fadda:2012) . He enlists challenges of English as a Second Language students encounter as:

- difficulty in differentiating between written phrases and spoken words.
- reviewing grammar including subject verb agreement.

and joining sentences to make a coherent paragraph. Gordon (2008: 244-245) suggests that, “ readings such as books , journals and even some websites are invaluable source of which learners could rely on to enrich their lexicon with academic vocabulary and expressions.” . By doing so students will then effectively express their ideas in their own voice.

Essays that lack proper and appropriate use of correct tenses derived from the topic are a common feature in students’ essays (ZIMSEC Report November 2011). Whenever students write an essay, decision should be made on what tense to use. A topic demanding an example in the past calls for the use of past tense. Contrary writing about a newspaper article with a future event, one needs to use the future tense. However, this is not the situation in specified essays. Each essay may be coupled with numerous tenses shifts students will then use the tenses inconsistently.

Discourse markers are important in an essay. Essays without them do not flow and tend to ‘hang’ together (ZIMSEC Report November 2011). Calkins (2010) stresses that an essay which is devoid of cohesive devices is disjointed, jerky and jarring. This contrast with Lester et al (2011) who state that composition writing is a process which has a sequential flow of events. The adjudicators in the Randal National Essay Competition Report pointed out that, students essay usually have weakness in introduction development, sequencing and linking of ideas. Furthermore, they noted that most students do not exhibit skills of writing logically and lack the presence of variety in sentence structure. They recommended teachers to help students write good introductions.

Nziramasanga Commission of 1999, in its findings noted that failure to comprehend English essay writing techniques is part reason to the high failure rate in most subjects. From its findings it would appear that people wanted English proficiency to be emphasised as it affected other subjects. This is also supported by Graham (2008) who stated that writing and writing instruction is a shared responsibility across disciplines: English, Science, Social Studies and other subjects. He further purports that teachers must devote significant attention to the teaching of writing if they expect students to learn how to write effectively within their discipline.

Grammatical errors are also common in student’s works. Al Fadda (2012) defines grammar as the system by which words combine into larger units to convey ideas. Students write, “He play soccer.” instead of “He plays soccer.” or “Washington go to school” instead of, “Washington goes to school.” ZIMSEC Report November 2011. Above examples show the influence of Shona language on learning English. Students usually try to translate word by word from Shona language. The report also points out that, the result of using grammar translation method of English results in students not thinking directly in English language. They think in their mother language (Shona) then transfer and translate their thought to English. This has triggered the researcher to investigate English composition writing at ordinary level, being guided by the following objectives:

- 1.) To find out why students fail to write good essay in English at ordinary level.
- 2.) To investigate how students can be assisted in writing good essay.

- 3.) To evaluate mother tongue interference as a cause for errors in the English writings of students.
- 4.) To determine if writing skill difficulties of English Composition students depend on the quality of the techniques that teachers apply.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

As stated Marshall and Rossman (2006) a research design is a data collection method that is used to gather information in a logical manner to address the problem statement. Oyedele (2011) defines research design as the plan, structure and strategy on investigation conceived as to obtain answer to research questions. In this study the researcher gave a variety of data generating methodologies. Mixed research design was used largely in this research. Researcher largely used qualitative research design but other aspects of quantitative will be incorporated. Leedy (2010) noted that mixed research design brings out a well developed, integrated and comprehensive study. These methodologies helped provide thorough investigations on students' writing skills in English language composition at three secondary schools. Frankel and Wallen (2010) recommend at least 100 subjects for a descriptive study.

Target population

According to Cohen et al (2007), target population is the total collection of all elements or number about which the researcher used to draw conclusions. The researcher included 15 English teachers from three schools as target population. Each school had 5 English teachers to be part of the target population in the research. 300 Ordinary Level students from three different schools also was the target population in this study. Reasons for targeting the selected schools depended on the proximity of the schools to researcher so as to have frequent access to the population. However one of the schools was a rural school in spite of distance away from the researcher so as to represent the rural population.

Sampling Techniques and Sampling Procedures

Leedy (2010) defines a sample as a portion of the overall population that one wishes to study. This follows that a sample is a smaller group of subject taken from a larger population which represents the whole population understand. Purposively sampling techniques was used. Palys (2008) defines purposive sampling as that method that groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to particular research question. In this study only English students and teachers were involved in the research. 100 respondents were used, to necessitate thorough investigations. The three schools chosen were purposively selected and one of it was a rural day secondary school so as to represent rural population. The other two urban schools selected were chosen depending on the proximity of the schools to the researchers.

Data collection tools

Questionnaire

Data was obtained from mainly primary data sources using a self-administered questionnaire method and some secondary information was collected from document studies. The questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument because of its applicability to the mixed research design. Saunders et al (2010) claims that the major advantage of using the

questionnaire is that it can be administered to large numbers of people at the same time. Moreover, this method proved to be cost effective and convenient in collecting data. The data collection process was done in such a way that all respondents were given questionnaires to fill in on their own, but the interviewer also conducted face to face interviews with a few of the respondents. The rest of the questionnaires were hand delivered to respondents and collected later. Berg and Lune (2010) defines a questionnaire as an order of questions which may be employed in a variety of research situations. A questionnaire can be defined as the written form of survey and is used to elicit information that is not available in documented records. These questions were sent out to respondents to fill in. The questionnaire designed by the researcher consisted of both open ended questions, allowing the respondents to fully express their answers and closed ended questions which only provided a simple choice of answers such as a tick.

Face to Face in Depth Interview

Direct interviewing of teachers was done. The interview was done through asking questions stage by stage and writing down responses. In depth interview the subject matter of the interview was explored in detail. They had quick and immediate responses and enabled probing.

Format of interview questions

Although researcher had some pre-planned questions to ask during the interview, the researcher also allowed questions to flow naturally, based on information provided by respondents. Research did not insist upon asking specific questions in a specific order. In fact, the flow of the conversation dictated the questions asked and those omitted, as well as the order of the questions.

Direct Observation

Direct observation was also used during English composition lessons. It included purposive reflection while teaching. Behaviour of learners and teachers as well as events that relate to problem and situation were noted down in lesson observations.

Document study

Document study of students' composition exercise books and teachers' progress mark of records were used. Researcher also gave participants a composition test which was also later studied by researcher. Oyedele (2011) stated that document study guarantees faith in results. It gives a true reflection of what is on the ground.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response rate of questionnaire

Table 1 Response rate of questionnaires

| Questionnaires issued | Questionnaires returned | Percentages |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| 94 students | 94 | 100 |
| 6 teachers | 6 | 100 |

All questionnaires issued were returned, the data gathered enabled the researcher to answer research questions regarding English composition writing difficulties faced by students from three schools from Mutare District of Manicaland. The questionnaires were quick and easy to administer.

Gender and age demographic distribution

Table 2 Gender and age demographic distribution

| AGE/GENDER | STUDENTS | | TEACHERS | | TOTAL | |
|------------|----------|----|----------|---|-------|----|
| | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 14-15 | 15 | 15 | | | 15 | 15 |
| 15-16 | 13 | 20 | | | 13 | 20 |
| 16-17 | 10 | 23 | | | 10 | 23 |
| 25-30 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 30-40 | | | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Above 40 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Sub Total | 38 | 58 | 2 | 4 | 40 | 60 |
| TOTAL | | | | | 100 | |

The research results on the demographic data on table 2 above, illustrate the participants' age according to gender. There was a reflection that the majority the students were from the age range 15-16 while age group range 16-17 had 33 students. Teachers were in the range of more than 30 years. Among the students who participated there were more girls than boys. From the demographic data in table 2 there is illustrated teacher maturity in working with children. The research findings on age difference among teachers in the three secondary schools studied were evenly distributed meaning that they have varied experience in the teaching of English. From the document analysis (attendance register and social books) the researcher noted that majority of students were female. Demographic data reflected that School C Secondary School, a peri-urban school had more students in the age group range of 16-17.

Research Objective 1

Sought to find out why respondents failed to write good essays in English at ordinary level at three selected school generated varies responses from both questionnaires and interviews. Data gathered indicated different reasons.

Table 3 Functions of Introduction

| Introduction | Percentages |
|------------------|-------------|
| Summarises ideas | 63 |
| Develops ideas | 27 |
| States ideas | 10 |

Research findings from question 4 on major functions of introduction exposed the fact that respondents need to understand all components of composition, these being the introduction, body and conclusion. Data gathered indicated that 63% of respondents know the role of introduction in English essays. Research findings concur with Dawson (2009) who wrote extensively on essay introduction. He posits that, introduction should be good. According to him opening sentences should capture the reader's interest and ignite in him a desire to read on. Since 27% of respondents failed to grasp the essence of introductions, research will explore where the essay writing difficulties lie.

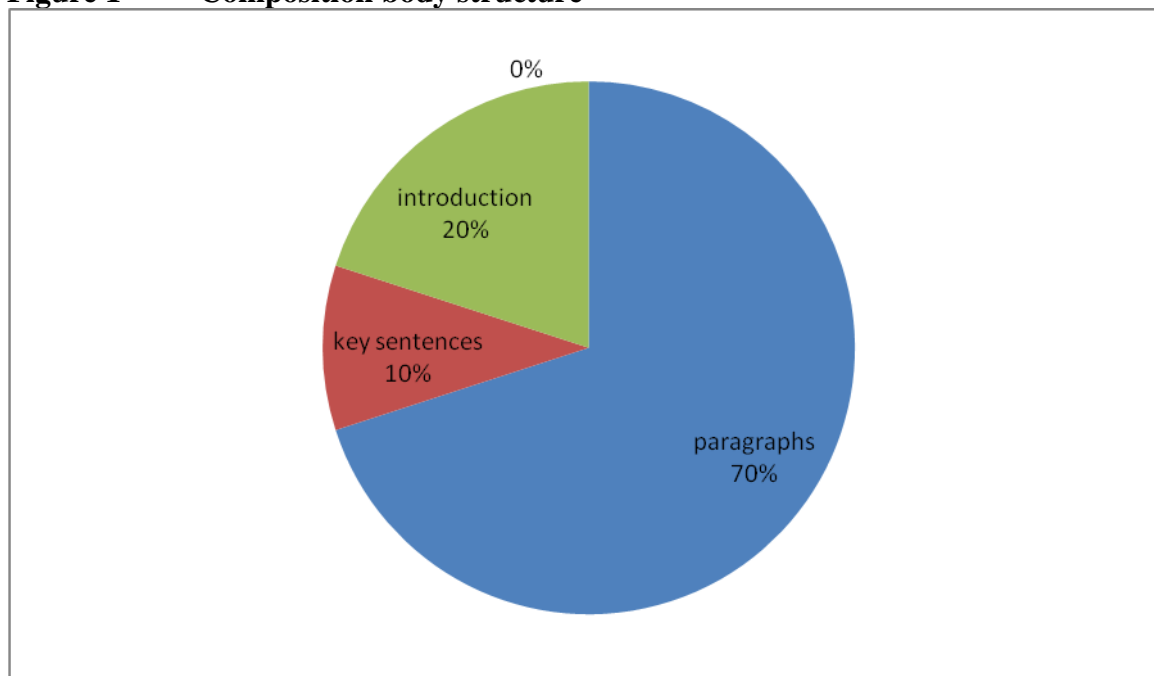
Table 4 Types of sentences

| Types of sentence | Number of respondents | Percentage % |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Simple | 56 | 56 |
| Compound | 6 | 6 |
| Complex | 10 | 10 |
| All of above | 18 | 18 |

From the above revelation this might reflect that more than half of the respondents used simple sentences when writing compositions. However, research findings from composition indicated that respondents poorly constructed sentences. Respondents' essays lacked good sentences. ZIMSEC Report November 2011 emphasized that most essays written by respondents were characterised by choppy sentences. Choppy sentences make essay dull and lifeless. It refers to choppy sentences as unfinished sentences.

Data gathered/generated from interviewed teachers indicated that essay writing skills should be drilled from primary school level and then developed gradually until ordinary level. Teacher's assessments are professional since learning is a process which requires time for respondents to master necessary elements, important to composition writing. Research findings from interviews indicate the length of compositions are expected to increase from one page at primary school to several pages at least three at ordinary level in free composition.

These findings were also congruent with research studies done by Harris et al (2013) who shares similar perception on the length of composition.

Figure 1 Composition body structure

Data generated from questionnaire and interviews conducted by teachers, had common understanding that the body of essay were made up of different paragraphs. Findings confirmed that, facts in paragraph should be arranged logically in sequence and each fact should constitute a new and whole paragraph. Lester et al (2011) notes facts should be

gathered to support both sides of the story. Data obtained from composition indicates a different view. Respondents did not write convincing paragraphs. Writing a composition about Zimbabwe's natural resorts, student views were clustered, not sequenced and linked. Paragraphs were not concluded with a concluding statement, which Lynn (2011) termed a terminator. Most respondents' essays were devoid of terminators. Interviewed teacher (1), confirmed that paragraphs are made up of ideas, which follow one another, starting with most important one to a minor one. The implications of not understanding paragraph structure in the body of the composition, is that respondents construct poor paragraphs. Poor paragraphs negatively affected the quality of their compositions.

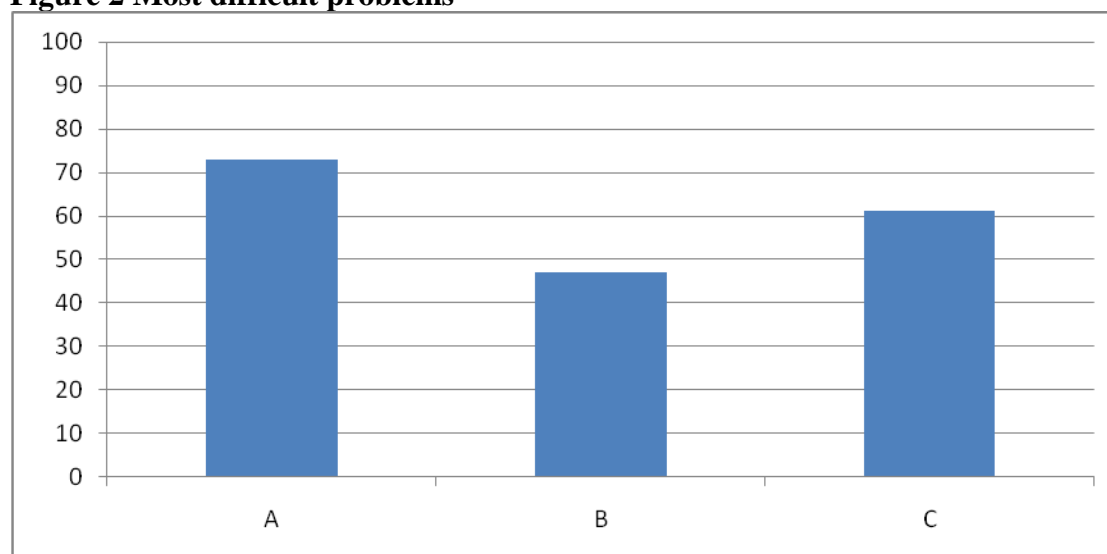
Because of the poor economic condition in Zimbabwe, schools and homes lack books and do not buy newspapers that may encourage a reading culture. However it is important to highlight that lack of reading materials were not the only significant reasons although research studies often seem to cite this as a major reason for writing difficulties.

Table 5 Composition parts

| Composition parts | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 10 | 10 |
| 3 | 76 | 76. |
| 4 | 14 | 14 |

Research study findings from questionnaire carried out with respondents indicated that the majority of respondents, 76% correctly identified the number of parts making a composition. Data generated from the majority of respondents is congruent with findings by Chinodya (2009) which states that, good composition is composed of three major parts, introduction, body and conclusion. However, 23% of the respondents wrongly indicated that composition had 2 and 4 parts. The implication of this on writing skills is that 23% of the respondents are writing composition when they lacked proper understanding of the structure of compositions. Nziramasanga Commission of 1999 in its findings noted that failure to comprehend English essay writing techniques is part reason to the high failure rate in most subjects.

Figure 2 Most difficult problems



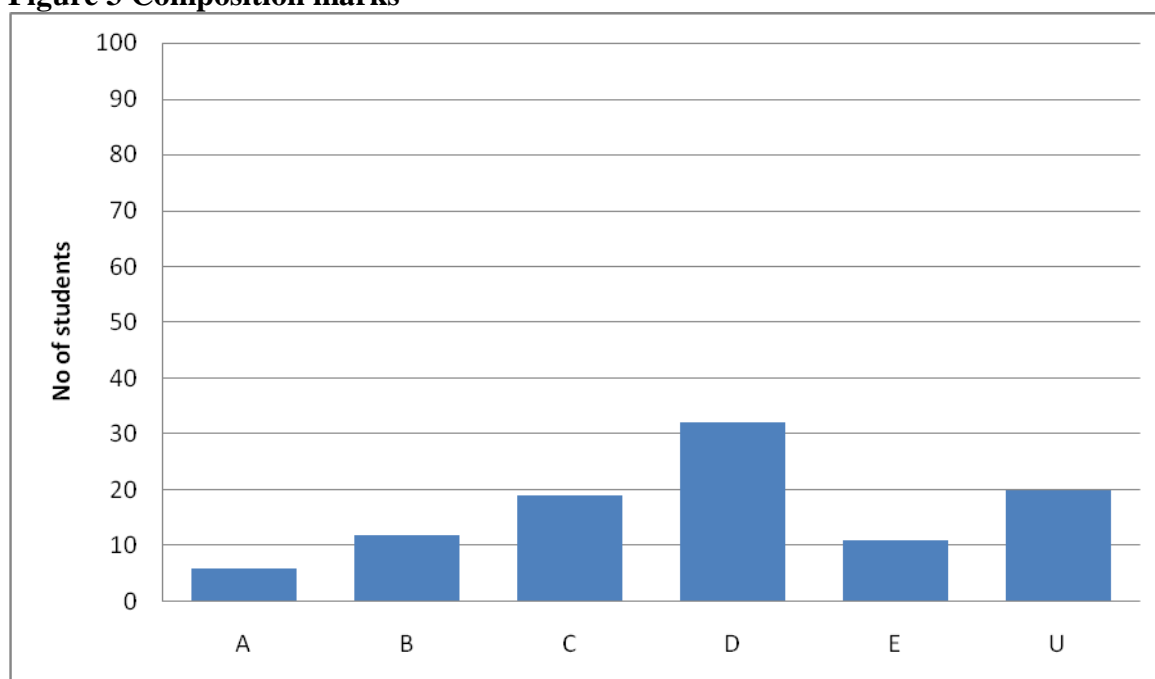
KEY A – Grammar
B – lack of vocabulary
C – Lack of ideas

Data from graph 2 above research findings indicated that incomprehensible grammar was the major problem. Orthography is important in essay writing. Dawson (2006) opined that, good English essays have correct spellings, punctuation and properly arranged sentences with recommended word division. Harris et al (2013) says teacher have the ability to select how to teach respondents on the use of variety of words, punctuation and word division.

Research Objective II

Investigated how respondents could be assisted in writing good essays. Research findings from the study indentified the source of wiring difficulties and offered possible methods to mitigate writing difficulties faced by respondents.

Figure 3 Composition marks



Key range of marks

| O level grade | Percentage |
|---------------|------------|
| A. | 70-100 |
| B. | 60-74 |
| C. | 50-59 |
| D. | 40-49 |
| E. | 30-39 |
| U. | 0-29 |

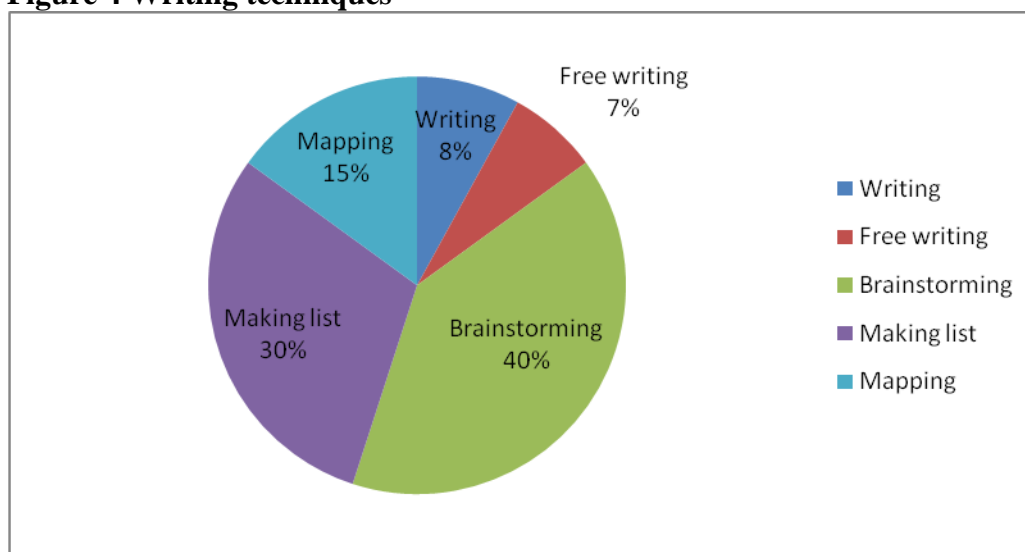
Research results from student composition illustrate that source of writing difficulties are a combination of personal and institutional factors. Only 37% of the respondents passed the composition exercise. Findings indicated that compositions are distorted by incorrect spellings of words and choppy sentences. The aforementioned difficulties constitute personal factors may include student individual intelligence and knowledge.

Institutional factors as teachers' methods of delivery cannot be dismissed without research. Teaching and learning are two sides of a coin. The most accepted criterion for measuring good teaching is the amount of respondents learning that occurs. Chinodya (2009) suggested group teaching as effective as it makes learning a shared experience.

Findings from compositions indicated that they lacked proper and appropriate use of correct tenses derived from the topic. Respondents confused past tenses and future tenses. ZIMSEC report November 2011, stated, when respondents write an essay, decision should be made on what tense to use.

Research findings from composition, exposed the fact that respondents did not write legibly. Bad handwriting, made it difficult for research to read their work. Essay written were short. Poor writers do their best to avoid writing. Teachers need to make writing so necessary and so ordinary that the influent writer cannot avoid it (Ross and Roe 2007).

Figure 4 Writing techniques



Varied composition writing techniques results in varied level of writing success. Therefore, utilisation of appropriate writing techniques results in good, well written, coherent and balanced compositions. Nziramasanga Commission Report 1999), findings confirm these shortcomings when it indicated that, failure to comprehend essay writing techniques is part reason to the high prevalence of essay writing difficulties and failure rate in most subjects in educational institutions in Zimbabwe.

Adas and Bakir (2013) noted, essay writing techniques should be grasped from lower educational level, since student writing enthusiasm depend on writing technique employed. Lack of writing techniques was confirmed by teacher (2) who indicated that; mastering writing techniques helps respondents' ability to translate ideas into grammatically sentences. Al Fadda (2012) stated, in order to improve essay writing skills, teacher should put great emphasis in the use of figurative language.

From interview results, various writing difficulties were identified. The research findings also predicted that lack of reading culture will affect other subjects where compositions are written such as history. Data gathered from interviews indicated that the majority of respondents did not plan their English compositions. Chinodya (2009) concluded that, '... detrimental aspects of lack of planning were haphazard arrangement of ideas. The research findings also spelt out that respondents did not value English.

Teachers who participated in the interview bemoaned the absence of reading culture. Teachers also singled out mother tongue interference as a factor negatively contributing to English composition writing difficulties among the respondents.

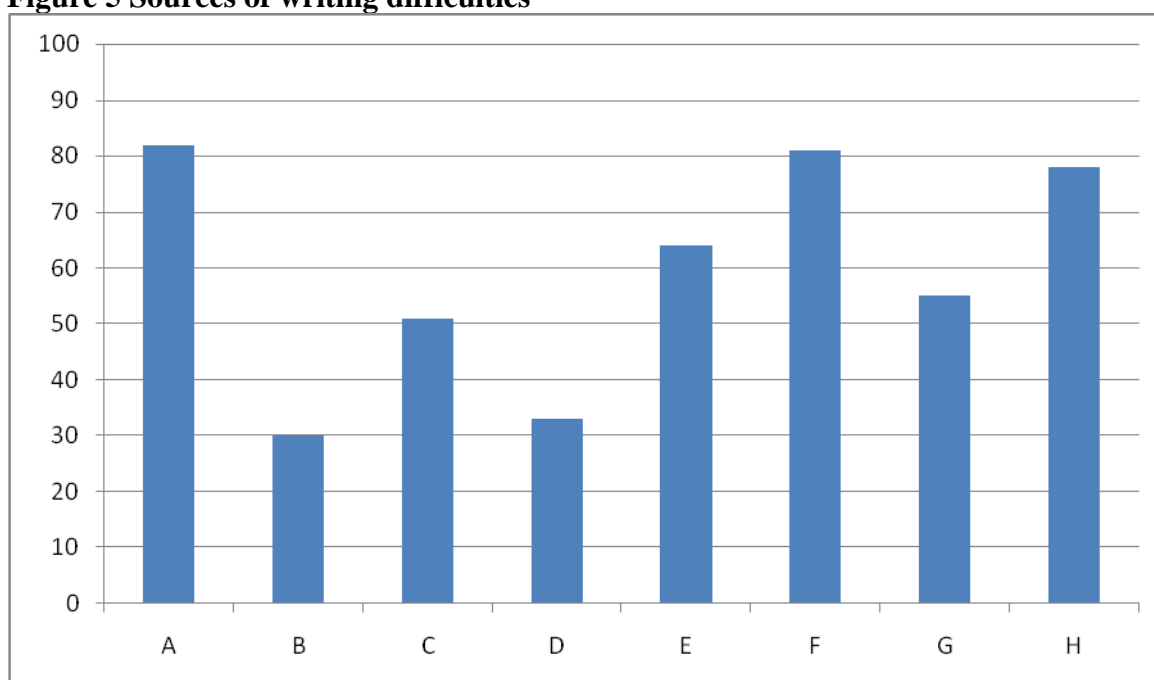
Research finding from the interview reflect that teacher share the same view that, bad composition writing traces back to primary school. Teachers also suggested that much help should be provided to the respondents during the early stage of learning in order to foster improvements in essay writing. In general there are four language skills. These are reading, writing, speaking and listening. Oxford (2011) states that primary school teachers should help respondents distinguish between four aspects of language at an early stage. Research findings indicate that the establishment of well stocked libraries would improve reading culture amongst respondents. This opinion is congruent to Harris et al (2008) who suggested that the importance of reading and spelling awareness helps reduce composition writing difficulties. He further notes that good and average respondents maybe distinguished in orthographic knowledge.

Teachers also pointed that student's compositions are also messed by poor punctuations and word division. Research or effort to appreciate whether poor punctuation and word division were a direct result of teaching method failed as most respondents avoided answering section C question 8, about teaching methods. However, this is against the background that respondents' rating for evaluating teacher effectiveness is primarily used to assist teachers in improving their teaching skills. Nunan (2006) also stated that teachers' attitude about writing and teaching methods can affect their respondents' attitude. Teachers are role models for respondents, positive attitude on teachers partly helps respondents in appreciating the importance attached to writing good essays.

Research Objective III

Evaluated mother tongue interference as a cause for errors in writing of good essays exposed other factors related to that affected the quality of essay written by student. Various factors were exposed as possible problem areas

Figure 5 Sources of writing difficulties



| | | |
|-----|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Key | A - Tenses | B - Textbooks |
| | C - Mother tongue influence | D –Teaching method |
| | E – Incomprehensible grammar | F – Lack of vocabulary |
| | G – Writing Activities | H – Spelling |

Research findings from study indicated that tenses, incomprehensible grammar, lack of vocabulary and spelling were the major sources of writing difficulties. Gordon (2008) notes reading books such as journals, magazines and newspapers are unavailable source of which learners could rely on to enrich their lexicon with academic vocabulary and expression.

Findings from written composition by respondents were congruent with findings by interviewed teacher (3) who confirmed that, student composition lack variety of words. They fail to express ideas clearly because they often repeat words. Interviewed teachers shared common view that Shona and English have different patterns of sentence structure, sometimes respondents confused which structure to use. Barenfanger (2007), notes that transliteration is mostly caused by lack of practise due to vernacular use in English and also because of ignorance of different grammatical rules.

Most respondents did not answer questions relating to composition writing teaching methods. Lack of response may be attributed to different reason among them lack of knowledge about the teaching methods and fear to implicate teachers in their writing difficulties. Further research is needed to find out why they avoided the question relating to teaching methods.

Research Objective IV

Sought to determine if writing skills difficulties of student depended on the quality techniques that teachers applied

Table 6 Teachers' qualification

| Qualification | Number of teachers |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Certificate in education | 1 |
| Diploma in education | 1 |
| Degree in education | 4 |

In addressing the level of education and professional achievement of teachers in the three schools studied, the findings generated through the interview and data from questionnaires reflected that 100% of the teachers had acquired certificates in Education (secondary), Diploma in Education and the majority (4) had degrees in education suggesting they could teach English at secondary school level.

Table 7 Teachers' experience

| Teaching experience | Number of teachers |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 0-4 | 1 |
| 0-5 | 2 |
| 8 and above | 3 |

Results show that of the 6 teachers, 5 had taught/worked for more than 5 years. The research findings might indicate that the three schools had staff that could be knowledgeable to teach

English composition. Therefore, it's important for research to identify factors that contributed to essay writing difficulties amongst respondents.

From researchers lesson observations findings indicated that the teaching methods used by teachers were traditional lecture approach rather than interactive teaching and use of information and communication technologies. This resulted in respondents not being motivated to learn as well as become passive observers during the lessons which in turn made them face a myriad of problems when writing.

CONCLUSIONS

In view of what has been gathered, it is important to note that bad composition written by ordinary level students at three schools in Mutare district are attributable to a dearth of writing skills in English composition. Lack of interest in the subject (English language) is another factor contributing to low academic performance in English composition. Students have a negative image of the subject and also view it as a preserve of a few gifted ones. As a result, students are less motivated to put effort in learning the writing skills.

Furthermore, students favour to communicate in their mother tongue (LI) Shona. This culminates in them literally translating when it comes to composition writing. It is vital for teachers and parents to motivate and encourage students to communication in English regularly.

Also, researcher findings indicated a disparity between skills teaching methodologies and marking. Marking focuses on linguistic items and their accuracy while teaching focused on communication. It is within this context that there is a need for an alignment between teaching methodologies and marking to help students improve their writing competences

Research findings indicated that students do not have a reading culture which cultivates good writing skills. Lack or no use of library by students also implies lack of interest to reading. Students perceive composition writing as difficult and do not go the extra mile to curb and correct problematic areas. Several compositions in one book has same grammatical errors which could be remediated easily by study of frequent errors one is facing and try find solutions on their own.

Teachers are not using visual teaching aids and information computer and technologies to teach composition writing in the classroom. Writing as a skill requires more practice and captivating methods so as to be interesting and captivating. Teacher talk should be minimised and more writing encouraged because practice makes perfect.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Recommendations to Students

- Students are recommended to practice writing English daily. The importance of writing daily is that students will create a new habit. Writing everyday using English will become natural and something to look forward to students. Writing is a process, as students write the better their compositions become/will get.
- Students recommended checking compositions carefully. Rechecking composition reduces mistakes, since they will notice mistakes they made when writing.

Recommendations to Teachers

- From the research findings, researcher would recommend that teacher and students adapt to technological advancement in teaching and learning processes. The use of the internet and information computer technologies is encouraged as it offers both teachers and students a lot of advantages.
- There is need for broad based consultation among teachers and parents on teaching and learning process. Open – fora, whilst there may not be a panacea for the problems studied and cited, they can go a long way in allowing educational partners to learn, appreciate and perceive the extent of composition writing difficulties.
- English teachers, when teaching writing skills should consider corrections seriously. This view is made with full knowledge and experiences that communicative teaching methods and the relaxed attitude over error is not very clear about error correction.
- Essay composition writing is common to subject like history and geography. Except for Shona, most of the essays in these subjects are written in English language. Therefore, teachers who teach these subjects need to know the right and appropriate approaches and strategies in teaching composition writing.
- Teachers should aim for quality written work.

Recommendations to Educational Administrators and the Ministry

- School heads should be innovative enough and invite experts from the district offices and other educational institutions to help English teachers and students with their learning and teaching.
- Failure of ordinary level students in writing good English compositions should be tackled by the entire educational system, starting from primary school up to secondary school
- Class size need to be reduced to manageable levels .It was observed from the research that class sizes were too large, sizes ranged between 50 and 60 students. When teacher – student ratio is large, it makes teaching and learning difficult.
- School recommended establishing libraries with novels, magazines and newspapers. Reading widely increases student’s range of vocabulary, as they learn new words and English idioms.
- Instructional supervision should be planned by relevant head of department. The supervisors should constantly check students English compositions exercise books to assess whether marking is effective and adequate composition are given. The researcher appeals to teachers to utilize double lessons for composition writing. Students should not be rushed into writing composition without proper planning. The teaching and learning should be supported by teaching media which is rarely used by most English teachers.

Recommendations to Curriculum Developers

- Provide teaching and proper resource materials for composition writing.

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