

MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY



DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED EDUCATION

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CHALLENGES FACED BY PUPILS IN
COMPOSITION WRITING AT 'O' LEVEL: A STUDY OF THREE
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KADOMA URBAN AREA.**

BY

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The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to the Midlands State University for acceptance, a research project.

An investigation into the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing at 'O' Level.

A study of three secondary schools in Kadoma urban area.

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DEDICATION

To my mother Janet and my daughter Delia.

You were my source of strength and inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing at Ordinary Level and to identify possible causes and solutions to the challenges in three secondary schools in Kadoma urban area. The researcher employed the descriptive survey method. In this study 14 teachers and one hundred and twenty pupils were the sample. Three hundred and sixty composition exercise books from the three secondary schools were the documents analysed. The questionnaire, the document observation schedule and the focus group interview schedule were used as research instruments in the study. The study revealed that the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing include lack of organisation, poor sentence construction, lack of proper diction and incorrect and inappropriate use of punctuation marks, tenses, spellings, articles and prepositions. The study established that the challenges are mainly a result of lack of interest in reading, poor second language acquisition and poor teaching strategies. The study recommends that teachers in the area studied should teach composition writing skills using a variety of teaching methods. The teachers in the area studied should cultivate a culture of reading and writing amongst pupils.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on challenges faced by pupils in composition writing. A background of the study as well as its significance is given. The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions are outlined. The chapter also gives assumptions, delimitations, limitations as well as a summary.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The researcher through her experiences as a teacher has observed that there are a number of challenges encountered by pupils in composition writing and these negatively affect their composition writing skills. Lack of skills on organization, sentence construction, effective vocabulary, spellings, punctuation and tense system are some of the challenges noted by the researcher.

A general assessment of the challenges has been given by several authorities. Valin (2009) asserts that the challenges range from lack of skills on paragraph structure, spelling, punctuation, linguistic skills, conventions of style to lack of organization skills. Freedom (2010) has noticed that students are not clear on what to write and have to write it. This results in poor paragraph structure. Paragraphs appear random, they lack topic sentences or they address too many ideas. Sometimes the paragraphs fail to link with previous or following paragraphs in a logical way.

The above stated idea is further supported by King (2009) who points out that the students produce paragraphs that have several points that have not been adequately thought or linked. The order or presentation is not clear, as a result the paragraphs need editing.

Another problem that has been cited by Scott (2007) is that of sentence boundary errors. This is linked to mistakes in punctuation. There are frequent comma splices or run on sentences or confusingly combined sentences. Cusipang (2006) suggests that there are also stigmatising errors. According to him, these are errors that skillful writers, fluent in Standard English would not make. For example, lack of subject-verb agreement, lack of correct verb tense, incorrect prepositions or incorrectly used phrases.

Ellis and Tomlinsan (2011) highlight the problem of style. According to them, an appropriate style involves the selection of words and structure to suit the aim of the writer and also the audience the writer has in mind when he/she writes. Students face problems in making a distinction between formal and informal writing. Lack of organizational skills which leads to lack of chronological sequence or logical sequence has been cited by King (2009).

It can be observed that the home background may have a strong effect on composition writing skills. A child from a poor background is likely to lack enough resources, ranging from lack of textbooks to limited reading texts. This will worsen the pupil's composition skills. On the other hand a child from a financially stable home is likely to be having nearly all the resources needed at school and better first language models. With nearly all the resources, a pupil from a financially stable home may grasp the composition skills better.

However, it is interesting to note that though a lot has been discussed on the challenges, a lot of aspects need attention. The researcher needs to establish the nature of the problems related to her geographical setting. The researcher also needs to deduce the effects of the problems on composition writing. It should be noted that the challenges have negatively affected the English language 'O' Level results.

It is against this background that the researcher will investigate the challenges being faced by students in composition writing.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem is that pupils are encountering a lot of challenges in their attempts to write compositions at 'O' Level. The challenges were lack of skills on organisation, sentence construction, effective vocabulary, spellings, punctuation and tense system. These weaknesses hinder the meaningful construction of compositions.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The major issues that will be investigated in this study are summarized by the following research questions:

- i. What are the main composition skills to be given attention to pupils at 'O' Level and what strategies are being implemented by teachers to impart these skills?
- ii. What problems are faced by pupils in composition writing?
- iii. What are the major causes of these problems?
- iv. How can these challenges be overcome?

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research aims at:

- i. Revealing the challenges faced pupils in composition writing.
- ii. Establishing the effects of the challenges on composition effects.
- iii. Identifying the possible causes of the challenges.
- iv. Determining the possible solutions to the challenges.

1.5 ASSUMPTIONS

- i. Pupils face challenges in composition writing.
- ii. The challenges will lead to poor composition writing skills.
- iii. The main challenges emanate from the problems of second language acquisition.
- iv. It is believed that if teachers and pupils devise appropriate strategies to deal with composition writing skills most of the challenges will be eliminated or reduced.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The researcher can use the research findings as a weapon against which she can personally assess the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing and further work towards elimination and reduction of the problems. Effective teaching and learning methods may be devised to suit the challenges. The same information can be presented to other teachers in the cluster during workshops. The research may pave a way to parents who may discover that they have a significant role to play to assist pupils in composition writing. The research can also be used as literature by other researchers. Above all the research may go a long way to improve English language 'O' Level results.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Literal Translation - rendering of text from one language to another word for word with or without conveying the sense of the original.

Mother tongue Interference- Negative automatic transfer due to habit of the surface structure of the first language into the surface of the target language. The interference can affect grammar, vocabulary, accent or spellings.

Second Language - A language learnt by a person after his or her native language.

Fluency -The ability to speak or write easily, smoothly and effectively especially a foreign language.

Composition writing - A piece of writing formed by putting together the ideas one has on a subject.

Cohesion- The use of linguistic devices to join sentences together to give written or spoken text unity and purpose.

Vocabulary - All the words that a person knows or uses, or all the words in a particular language, the words that people use when they are talking or writing about a particular subject.

Descriptive Survey – It is a research method used to describe data and characteristics used to describe the population. The information is collected without changing the environment.

1.8 LIMITATIONS

Some teachers, who are respondents were reluctant and even delayed completing questionnaires.

The researcher had to appeal to the respondents.

Financially, the research is costly, large sums of money were required to purchase stationery, meeting typing costs and travelling expenses. The researcher had to create savings to cater for the expenses.

The researcher is employed full time. This limited the researcher's time for research. However, the researcher compensated for the time by requesting for leave days to attend to data collection.

1.9 DELIMITATION

The research is restricted to the study of challenges the pupils face in composition writing at ‘O’ Level. The study is confined to three secondary schools in Kadoma urban.

1.10SUMMARY

This chapter dealt mainly with the background information of the research problem, research questions, purpose and significance of the study, assumptions and limitations. The next chapter will dwell on literature review.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to explore the main skills in composition writing, the main challenges faced by pupils in composition writing and their effects and the possible solutions to the challenges as stated in chapter one under the research questions. The chapter reviews literature under the following sub-headings:

Composition skills to be given attention to at ‘O’ Level; the challenges at ‘O’ Level under the following sub-headings; lack of organization, poor sentence construction, poor punctuation, wrong spellings, wrong subject-verb agreement and the tense shift, poor pronoun agreement, inappropriate article, poor vocabulary and possible solutions.

2.1 COMPOSITION SKILLS TO BE GIVEN ATTENTION TO AT ‘O’ LEVEL.

The problem of how to make pupils write better is a challenging task to both the English teacher and the pupil. Hochman (2007) outlines the basic writing skills that should be taught to the pupils to minimize the problems the pupils are likely to face. Once the pupil is faced with a topic, she/he is faced with the first skill. The pupil should be able to decide what to write about. Barkley (2005) refers to this skill as focus. The pupil is taught to focus on the topic through brainstorming and formulation of different views on the topic.

The second skill according to Hochman (2007) is that of organizing ideas. Mills and Cottell (2008) suggest that organization is progression, relatedness and completeness of ideas. This involves orderly presentation of information to avoid confusion.

The third skill is that of composing the paper or information. Gross (2009) suggests that this skill can be achieved through the writing of an effective introduction, the development of board of ideas using several paragraphs and finally the writing of conclusion to suit the content or topic under discussion.

The fourth skill is that of polishing the written draft. The polishing is done through avoiding common grammar mistakes. Maddox (2013) highlights several mistakes that should be avoided. These range from organization of ideas, sentence construction, punctuation, spelling to vocabulary.

These skills are helpful to both the teacher and the learner. According to Donald (2009) the skills assist the teacher by providing objective criteria for assessing student writing, focusing direct writing instruction and discussions on the right feature at the right time and above all by giving equal weight to each feature. Donald (2009) continues to explain how the skills help the students. The skills allow the students to focus their attention on just one feature at a time and provide students with more opportunities to succeed by focusing on areas of strength as well as weaknesses. The skills also make expectations visible to students and in Bereiter and Scardamalias (2008) opinion the skills teach students to become critical readers of their own writing.

2.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY PUPILS IN COMPOSITION WRITING AND THEIR EFFECTSON COMPOSTION WRITING SKILLS AT ‘O’ LEVEL.

Cabrera and de Asis (2005) characterize writing as a highly complex and demanding process which requires negotiating the rules and mechanics of writing. Wright (1975) supports the above

views (by Cabrera and de Asis, 2008) as he states that English language is a set of habits that are acquired slowly and through constant repetition especially for second language learners. As a result of the complexity process of composition writing pupils experience numerous challenges ranging from lack of organization to poor choice of vocabulary. The challenges are as follows:

2.2.1 Lack of organisation

Valin (2009) points out that most compositions are marred by poor organisation. Most students fail to make decisions about which points to be developed and using which style. Content may lack logical organisation of ideas in a variety of ways. According to the ZIMSEC report on English language 1122/1 November 2011, most of the pupils failed to structure effective beginning, introduction and board and conclusion for various given topics. This is supported by Dube and Pfende (1997) as they expose the weaknesses of the pupils on paragraphing. Students paragraphs that have several points that have not been adequately thought out or linked. Paragraphs appear random and they lack topic sentences, developers and terminators.

Dube and Pfende (1997) emphasise that paragraphing is crucial since it marks the stages of the argument or view and helps to provide balanced content. They stress that each paragraph must consist of a clearly defined main point which the writer proceeds to develop through exemplification, definition comparison and contrast. Hence it is not enough to simply list the main points in one sentence paragraph. The ZIMSEC English language 1122/1 November 2012 report also echoes Dube and Pfende sentiments. The report highlights pupils' inability to structure essays appropriately, develop, sequence and link ideas logically. This greatly affects the composition's fluency.

2.2.2 Poor Sentence Construction

According to Scott (2007) poor sentence construction occurs in the form of run-on sentences, incomplete sentences and inappropriate construction of sentences for particular contexts. Dube and Pfende (1997) oppose the inability of students to use a variety of sentence constructions and the inability of students to write correct, longer and more complex sentences where appropriate for effective communication.

King (2009) defines a run-on sentence as a sentence that has two distinct ideas or clauses composed of a noun-verb subject but lack conjunctions (and, but, then) which connect those two ideas and clauses for example, 'We went to Dee's party we danced all night'.

This can be broken into two by a full stop or comma or semi-colon.

For example 1) 'We went to Dee's party. We danced all night.'

2) 'We went to Dee's party, and we danced all night.'

As observed through the ZIMSEC 'O' Level English language 1122/1 for June 2012 Report a large number of pupils failed to use punctuation, conjunctions, dependent clauses and this resulted in run-on sentences. King (2009) defines an incomplete or sentence fragment as a sentence that does not have a subject-verb- object structure or does not complete a thought. The fragments often occur because students write dependent clauses that require a completed thought.

For example 1) 'After we found the car'

2) 'Since we ran into Molly?'

These are fragment sentences, they need a complete thought.

For example 1) 'After we found the car, we drove home.'

2) ‘Since we ran into Molly, we decided to go with her to the party.’

ZIMSEC ‘O’ Level English language November 2011 report cites the students’ weaknesses of unfinished sentences, particularly at the beginning of the composition, for example ‘It was on Friday.’

Incomplete and run-on sentences distort the expression of intended ideas.

2.2.3 Poor Punctuation

It occurs as a result of the wrong use of punctuation marks. These marks vary from a capital letter, apostrophe, comma, full stop, inverted comma to a question mark. Tarricone (2006) observes the misuse of the comma, omission of the comma and the omission of the full- stop. Most of the pupils fail to use an apostrophe to indicate a possessive or a contraction.

For example 1) ‘This thesis’s argument’

2) ‘This paper’s point’

The two above expressions indicate a possessive

For example 1) they’re here- they are here

For contraction 2) you’re wrong- you are wrong

Maddox (2013) stresses the idea that a comma is one of the punctuation marks that is misused. He chronicles when a comma should be used. It can be used after an introductory element, for example, “In the novel, Takadini, Sekai lives in Zimbabwe.” A comma can be used in a compound sentence, for example, ‘The distance was long, James had to endure.’ A comma can also be used in a series when making a list. According to Dube and Pfende (1997) the punctuation of direct speech makes up a greater percentage of errors in punctuation that are made by pupils. This distorts the expression of ideas.

2.2.4 Wrong Spellings

Wrong spellings appear to be the commonest mistake among the students according to the ZIMSEC 'O' Level English Language 1122/1 Report for November 2011 and November 2012 examiners. The following words were misspelt:

<u>Wrong</u>	<u>Correct</u>
emeny	enemy
govement	government
truely	truly
student	student
stollen	stolen
recieved	received
gowing	going
mischievious	mischievous
occassion	occasion
suprised	surprised

Ferris (2005) deduced that a certain percentage of wrong spellings is related to wrong pronunciation which is normally a result of second language acquisition. Davis (2003) advocates for drilling practice to eliminate spelling errors while Maddox (2013) advocates the use of a dictionary as a means to reduce spelling errors.

2.2.5 Wrong subject-verb agreement and tense shift.

Scott (2007) identifies subject-verb agreement as one of the errors common in students. According to him, the subject- verb agreement is a grammatical rule in which the noun and the verb in a sentence must correspond with one another.

Students often make subject-verb errors when they confuse the singularity or plurality of a subject with its corresponding verb.

For example 1) ‘A shipment of new book catalogues **are** arriving today’ (wrong).

2) ‘A shipment of new book catalogue **is** arriving today’ (correct).

3) He **run** everyday (wrong).

4) He **runse**every day (correct).

Cusipang (2006) recommends thorough editing and revision of written composition draft to eliminate subject-verb agreement errors.

Tense shifting is another common problem. According to Scott’s (2007) observation, tense shifts occur when the writer shifts from one verb tense (past, present, future) to another.

For example ‘We went to the theatre last Friday but when we get there we realize we are not the only ones who hope to get the last remaining tickets.’ Wrong tenses may be due to over-generalisation of grammatical rules. The given examples below are from the ZIMSEC ‘O’ Level English Language 1122/1 November 2011 Report:

Wrong

I go

I renned

I cutted

Correct

I went

I ran

I cut

I putted

I put

I waked up

I woke up

Emphasis on tense grammatical rules will go a long way to minimise the tense errors.

2.2.6 Poor pronoun agreement

Cusping (2006) established that poor pronoun agreement is one of the pupils' challenges of composition writing at 'O' Level. A pronoun agreement works in the same way as the pronoun-verb agreement in that a pronoun and a noun must have a corresponding plural or singular agreement.

Words such as anyone, anybody, everyone, everybody, no one and nobody are all singular nouns and therefore require singular pronouns for example 1) 'To each their own' (wrong).

2) 'Everybody collected their coats'
(wrong).

'Everybody collected his/her coat' (correct).

Just like the subject-verb agreement the poor pronoun agreement can be corrected through editing and revision of written draft.

2.2.7 Inappropriate Article

Valin (2009) has established that the challenge is common among students whose native language is not English. There is usually the misuse or absence of articles- the, a, an and some. Maddox (2003) points out that nouns require supporting article for example, 'a ball', 'the ball', 'an apple', 'some apples.' Pupils should be reminded that when using an indefinite article before a vowel, it is important to remember to use an, as in 'an apple' or 'an owl.' However in some cases, a noun does not always require an article for example, 'internet users', and 'lions'.

Other nouns such as reading or summary do not require articles for example, ‘Reading is important or ‘Swimming is a dangerous sport.’ Brown (2000) suggests that many of the rules depend on context and a writer whose native language is English will be able to determine when and whether article usage is necessary, for the writer who is learning to read and write in English and is unfamiliar with articles it is important to understand the various rules.

2.2.8 Poor Vocabulary

This challenge deals with words used in a student’s composition. In Ferris (2005) view vocabulary should suit style. Vocabulary is the use of words that is appropriate to the purpose, audience and context of the writing task. Appropriate vocabulary promotes fluency which involves using a variety of sentences styles to establish effective relationship between and among ideas, causes and appropriate statements.

Poor vocabulary may lead to poor expressions and idioms. This is also achieved in the ZIMSEC ‘O’ Level English language 1122/1 November 2011 report. The report highlights the following examples of poor expression and idioms:

- People who died long ago saw nothing
- There was no space to spit saliva
- He had a heart of stone

This is seen by Ferris (2005) as being the result of mother-tongue interference and it is common among second language learners. Ferris (2005) recommends that exposure to rich input in terms of reading material and writing task will minimise the challenge of poor vocabulary.

2.3 POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Several writers have come up with several strategies to minimise and in some cases eradicate the challenges the pupils face. The use of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), group work and recommendations from ZIMSEC examiners will be discussed.

2.3.1 Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

According to Harris et al (1997) the Self-Regulated Development (SRSD) emphasises on powerful strategies for planning, writing, revising, editing and managing the writing process.

The main goals of SRSD in writing are to assist students in developing knowledge about writing skills, to support students in the ongoing development of the abilities needed to monitor and manage their own writing and above all to promote children's development of positive attitude about writing. The model advocates for six important characteristics of developing writing skills which are; the development of background knowledge on a given topic, discussion of possible context, memorization of possible stages in composition writing, supporting of several ideas and above all individual writing of compositions by pupils to reinforce the learnt skills (Harris et al 1997).

In a nutshell, this strategy will motivate learners and promote writing culture as pupils write for real audiences and for real purposes. This motivation will go a long way to correct some of the challenges faced by pupils.

2.3.2 Group Work

In Mills and Cottell's (2008) view, group work is an effective tool of correcting composition errors because it fosters a deeper and more active learning process and it provides instructors with valuable demonstrations of the degree to which students understand particular composition

skills. Group work promotes working together and this gives students the opportunity to learn from each other.

Through group work, the students can plan, organize, write, edit and revise the drafted composition. A number of errors can be edited and corrected as a group. However, group work can only be effective if the teacher effectively design and manage productive group work assignments.

2.3.3 Recommendations from ZIMSEC examiners

The ZIMSEC examiners for English language 1122/1 have several recommendations that can help in monitoring and eradicating the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing. The examiners according to their November 2011 report, emphasise on quality and quantity as there is a disturbing feature of long and hurriedly written scripts with unbelievable carelessness and inaccuracy. Teachers are advised to teach basics of grammar to eradicate many grammatical errors. Teachers are encouraged to avoid giving pupils vocabulary to memorise but instead they should encourage pupils to read widely for vocabulary. Emphasis on skills and the communicative aspects of language should be made a priority by English language teachers.

If teachers implement these recommendations most of the challenges will turn into strengths. Teachers have the power to influence positive writing skills as they are the most important factor in the instructional process since it is the teacher who creates a desirable classroom climate, plans a variety of learning activities, use effectively the instructional materials and identifies the needs and aspirations of students for effective learning.

2.4 SUMMARY

Through the review of related literature, it has been established that there are some challenges faced by pupils in composition writing at 'O' Level. These range from lack of organisation, poor sentence construction, poor punctuation, wrong spellings, wrong subject- verb agreement, inappropriate article to poor vocabulary. Effective teaching and cultivation of appropriate composition skills are highly recommended to minimise the pupils' challenge. The next chapter will dwell on the research methodology of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The chapter discusses the Research Methodology under the following subheadings: Research Design, Population and Sample, Research Instruments, Data Collection Procedures, Data Analysis, Validity and Reliability of collected data and summary.

3.1 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The Research employed the descriptive survey method as it appeared to be the best approach for the issue that was under investigation. Walford (2002) describes the survey method as one which deals with a situation that demands the technique of observation as the most suitable way of gathering data. Hamersley and Atkinson (1995) further elaborated that the descriptive survey has the capacity to pay attention to detail, the ability to embrace both verbal and non-verbal behavior and above all, the ability to penetrate all angles and reveal complex issues.

It is with the above views that the research made use of the pupils' composition exercise books. A thorough observation and analysis of the nature of the written compositions gave the research enough detail as to the nature of the challenges that pupils are facing in composition writing at 'O' Level.

One can deduce that observation is not just supposed to be restricted to the physical eye but it incorporates other means such as the use of questionnaires, hence the researcher designed a detailed questionnaire for teachers. This questionnaire was divided into different sections eliciting data that enabled the researcher to establish the pupils' challenges, their causes and

possible solutions. The use of the focus group interview enabled the researcher to collect firsthand information from the pupils in a conducive environment created by the researcher concerning the challenges that pupils faced in composition writing.

All in all, through the use of descriptive survey facilitated through the use of the questionnaire, focus group interview and observation of composition exercise books, the researcher was able to get a portrayal of perspectives, feelings and experiences of teachers and pupils on pupils' challenges on composition writing.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

In this research the population comprises of a study of three urban schools in Kadoma. Manson (2002) defines a study as an empirical intensive investigation of situations which serve to identify and describe basic phenomena.

Simple Random Sampling was used to select two urban secondary schools and one other school was selected by the researcher because it has unique characteristics, it is a former group A school whereas the other two schools are former Group B schools. Thus a total of three urban secondary schools were selected out of six urban secondary schools in Kadoma. The sample becomes representative and allows for generalization of the findings. At each of the three schools, pupils were sampled using stratified random sampling. Using this method pupils were placed into their homogeneous group consisting of boys and girls. This ensured that all variables in terms of sex and ability of students were catered for in the sample.

Four 'O' Level English Language teachers from each of the three schools were administered with questionnaires. The researcher through the questionnaires expected to gather data on:

Strategies being implemented by teachers to impart composition skills, problems faced by pupils in composition writing, causes and possible solutions to the problems.

The researcher observed and analysed a total of 360 composition exercise books from three schools, 120 composition exercise books from 'O' Level classes per school. Using an observation analysis guide the researcher was able to analyse the problems faced by the pupils in composition writing and their intensity and their possible causes. The research also made use of the focus group. The group gave the researcher detailed explanations of their challenges in composition writing, causes and suggested solutions to their challenges.

The use of the questionnaires, document analysis and focus group enabled the researcher to elicit detailed information that is strongly accounted for.

3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Research Instruments are described by Borg and Gall (1994) as tools by which a research will be conducted. The researcher used the questionnaire document analysis and the focus group to gather data. Wright (2009) defines a questionnaire as a form of inquiry which is made up of systematically compiled and organised questions which are used to collect information from a large population. The questionnaire is also referred to by Robson (2002) as impersonal probe as it solicits for unbiased information from respondents.

The use of the questionnaire proved to be very effective for the researcher as a way of gathering data. The 12 questionnaires administered to 12 teachers were able to generate large amounts of data within a short period of time and the data was easy to process and analyse. The researcher came up with a variety of challenges, causes and solutions from the issued questionnaires. The questionnaire reduced bias because there was uniform question presentation and no middle man

bias therefore, the researcher's own opinions did not influence the respondent to answer questions in a certain manner as there was no verbal or visual clues to influence respondents.

The research questionnaire for this study was in two parts, that is closed ended and open ended questions. The closed ended questions contained definite, concrete and open statements or questions. The closed ended part of the questionnaire was able to identify the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing and the open ended questions allowed the respondents to express their own views pertaining the challenges, causes and solutions to the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing.

The document analysis was the other method that was used by the researcher to gather data. The researcher carried out document analysis of a total of 360 composition exercise books of learners to assess the challenges and possible causes and solutions. The researcher was able to come face to face with pupils' written compositions and deduce for herself the challenges without any bias as the researcher was using a document analysis schedule. The written compositions were a true reflection of pupils' performance hence a true reflection of their challenges and above all, it provided the researcher with enough detailed information on the nature of the problems and their possible causes.

Though the method was quite effective, it was time consuming for the researcher. The method proved to be taxing to the research as it required time to assess, analyse and present data for 360 composition exercise books. The books were observed and analysed under the following subheadings: evaluation of topic, organization, sentence construction, diction and use of punctuation marks, tenses, spellings, vocabulary, subject-verb agreement, conjunctions, articles and prepositions.

The other method which was used by the researcher which complimented the questionnaire and the document analysis was the focus group interview. Jankowicz (1995:214) defines the focus group as a form of group interview in which data arise from dialogue and general discussion among participants. This method enabled the researcher to discover a range of views concerning the nature of the problems and it provided detailed information on the possible causes and solutions to the challenges. The focus group elicited detailed discussions because it created a conducive environment for interaction. Though useful, the data collected from the focus group proved to be difficult to analyse because of the nature of responses. A total of 120 pupils were considered for the focus group for three schools. A group of 40 pupils per school was created.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Data Collection is defined by Yin (2008) as gathering sample information about empirical indicators of constructs, recording data and converting the data into meaningful information.

In this study, data was collected using questionnaires, document analysis and the focus group. Equipped with the introductory letter from Midlands State University, the researcher sought permission from Provincial Education Director and the school heads to be allowed to collect data from schools.

The researcher communicated in advance before visiting the schools. The questionnaires were personally distributed and collected by the researcher. Expert advice was sought during the construction of the questionnaire, document analysis schedule and the focus group interview schedule to ensure validity and reliability of research instruments. The researcher made appointments with the heads of the schools she visited. She administered 16 questionnaires to the

'O' Level teachers, observed and analysed 360 composition exercise books and carried out 3 focus group interviews.

3.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The researcher used the triangulation method. Walford (2001) describes it as the use of several methods to explore an issue. In this research, questionnaires document analysis in form of composition exercise books used to gather data on the challenges, causes and possible solutions to problems faced in composition writing. The use of more than one instrument to seek for the same data from the same respondents helped the researcher to examine the data obtained to improve validity. The researcher also pilot tested the questionnaires on one of the schools to determine the feasibility of the investigation as well as to determine the suitability of the research instruments.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis procedures are steps followed in data presentation, analysis and interpretation. Data collected from questionnaires and focus group interviews were presented using descriptive statistical method through the use of tables that clearly outline a summary and analysis of the challenges, causes and solutions. Data from document analysis was presented in form of fig. Each fig symbolize a certain category of a challenge and its related problems. The data analysed relate to the challenges encountered by pupils in composition writing.

3.7 SUMMARY

A Descriptive Survey was employed as a quick way of collecting information. The population consisted of three urban schools in Kadoma urban area. Questionnaires, document analysis and a focus group interview were used to collect data that related to challenges encountered by pupils in composition writing at 'O' Level. The following chapter centers its attention on data presentation, analysis and discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The study sought to establish the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing at ‘O’ Level. This chapter presents, analyses and discusses data that was collected in the research field based on the responses of questionnaires by teachers, analysis of pupils’ composition exercise books and focus group interview for pupils.

Empirical Findings and Analysis

The study followed a descriptive survey approach where a sample of three secondary schools in Kadoma urban area were investigated. In this research a total of 12 English Language teachers were selected, 360 composition exercise books were analysed and 3 focus groups comprising of 40 pupils were interviewed.

4.1 PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF TEACHER RESPONDENTS.

Table 1. Professional Qualifications of teacher respondents.

n = 12

Teacher Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma	4	33.3
Degreed	7	58.3
Masters	1	8.3

Table 2. Teaching experience of teacher respondents.

n = 12

Experience in Years	Frequency	Percentage
0-5	2	16.6
6-10	4	33.3
11-15	4	33.3
16 years and above	2	16.6

The professional qualifications shown in Table 1 revealed that all of the teacher respondents were highly qualified to understand the nature and concepts involved in composition writing. This is an agreement with King (2009) who believes that it is of paramount importance that teachers should be equipped with the necessary composition writing skills so that they can impart them to the learners. Table 2 reveals that the subject is being taught by experienced teachers who have a sound knowledge of the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing.

4.2 COMPOSITION SKILLS BEING GIVEN ATTENTION TO AT ‘O’ LEVEL AND STRATEGIES BEING IMPLEMENTED BY TEACHERS TO IMPART THESE SKILLS.

Table 3. Strategies being implemented by teachers to impart composition writing skills.

n = 12

NUMBER	ITEM	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
1	Methods used to impart composition skills	1. Lecture Method.	69
		2. Phases - Introduction	60
		3. Class discussion.	56
		4. Paragraph by paragraph – analysis – topic sentence, developer, terminator.	55
		5. Revision of written composition.	55
		6. Participatory	48
		7. Brainstorming	45
		8. Question and answer	43
		9. From known to unknown	36
		10. Drills – sentence construction, word formation	22
		11. Demonstration	15
		12. Relate composition to comprehension passage	10

Table 3 outlines the different methods that are being used by different teachers who responded to the questionnaire. As was established through the analysis of pupils’ composition exercise books, most of the teachers have knowledge and are imparting the various composition skills. According to the observation these skills were ranging from focus, organizing ideas, layout of composition structure to polishing up of written draft. The observation revealed that teachers valued the implementation of the composition writing skills. This is in support of Cross’ (2009)

observation that highlights the importance of imparting the skills by stating that the skills are the focus points of any composition.

Table 3 reveals that the frequently used strategies in the impartation of the composition skills are the lecture method with 69%, the phase by phase drilling (60%), the class discussion method with 56% and the paragraph by paragraph with 55%. Each of the commonly used methods have advantages and disadvantages.

4.2.1 The lecture method and drilling method.

These two commonly used strategies fall under the grammar translation approach of teaching. Under the lecture and the drilling methods the teacher plays a dominant role and the pupils are taken as passive recipients of information. Hence the pupils fail to get enough room to plan and construct their own responses. Richards and Rogers (2006) concur with this as they discuss the limiting factors of the grammar translation method.

4.2.2 The discussion method and paragraph by paragraph approach.

As revealed by Table 3 the two stated strategies are among the frequently used methods. These methods carry overtones of the communicative approach. The analysis of pupils' composition books had indications of tasks that supported the communicative approach. This was in form of paragraphs that were constructed in groups. It was observed through the analysis of composition exercise books that these teachers who strongly advocated for communicative teaching faced less writing challenges from their students. This concurs with Richards and Rogers (2006) who sees the communicative approach as an approach advocating for meaningful communication in consideration of the given text.

4.2.3 The brainstorming method.

The method received 45% frequency of use from questionnaire respondents. This method was commonly associated with the skill of focusing where learners decide what to write about on a given topic. As can be observed from the group tasks seen in the composition exercise books, the researcher observed that 38% of the composition tasks are planned for and the teacher brainstorms for a variety of ideas from the pupils.

4.2.4 The demonstration strategy.

This method received little attention from the teachers under observation. It had 15% frequency symbolizing that the teachers attach a number of limitations to the method. Those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that this method is effective if it is used with other methods. After the use of the lecture method, class discussion and other complementing strategies the teacher can use the demonstration method to reinforce the learnt skills. These sentiments are also echoed by Mills and Cattel (2008) who discuss the advantages of the use of the demonstration strategy by highlighting the importance of giving a vivid example.

All in all, as can be observed from Table 3, the teachers under observation highlighted a number of methods they use in imparting composition skills. However, it can be noticed that about 60% of the methods promote teacher dominion in lessons. Only 40% advocate for pupil – centered learning methods. Hence the 60% who receive teacher – centered learning strategies suffer the consequences related to the method as was to be revealed through the challenges that were noticed in the pupils' composition exercise books.

4.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY PUPILS IN COMPOSITION WRITING.

Table 4. Challenges faced by pupils in composition writing: Response from teachers' questionnaire.

n = 12

NUMBER	ITEM	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
2A	Problems faced by pupils in composition writing	1. First language interface	80
		2. Inappropriate tenses	71
		3. Poor paragraphing – lack topic, sentence, developers, terminator	70
		4. Poor punctuation – comma, capital letters, full stop, direct speech	65
		5. Wrong spellings	65
		6. Poor composition structure – no introduction, board and conclusion	65
		7. Tense errors	61
		8. Lack of creativity	60
		9. Poor expression in English	57
		10. Poor sentence construction	55
		11. Poor planning	51
		12. Lack of unity and flow of ideas	50
		13. Poor use of articles, pronouns, prepositions	45
		14. Poor subject verb agreement	43
		15. Poor sentence division – many ideas in one sentence	42
		16. Poor diction – lack of proper register	41
		17. Inappropriate vocabulary	40
		18. Errors of omission	40
		19. Poor linking devices	39
		20. Unacceptable length too short	38

Table 5. Challenges faced by pupils in composition writing. Responses from focus groups interview.

n = 3 focus groups (120 pupils).

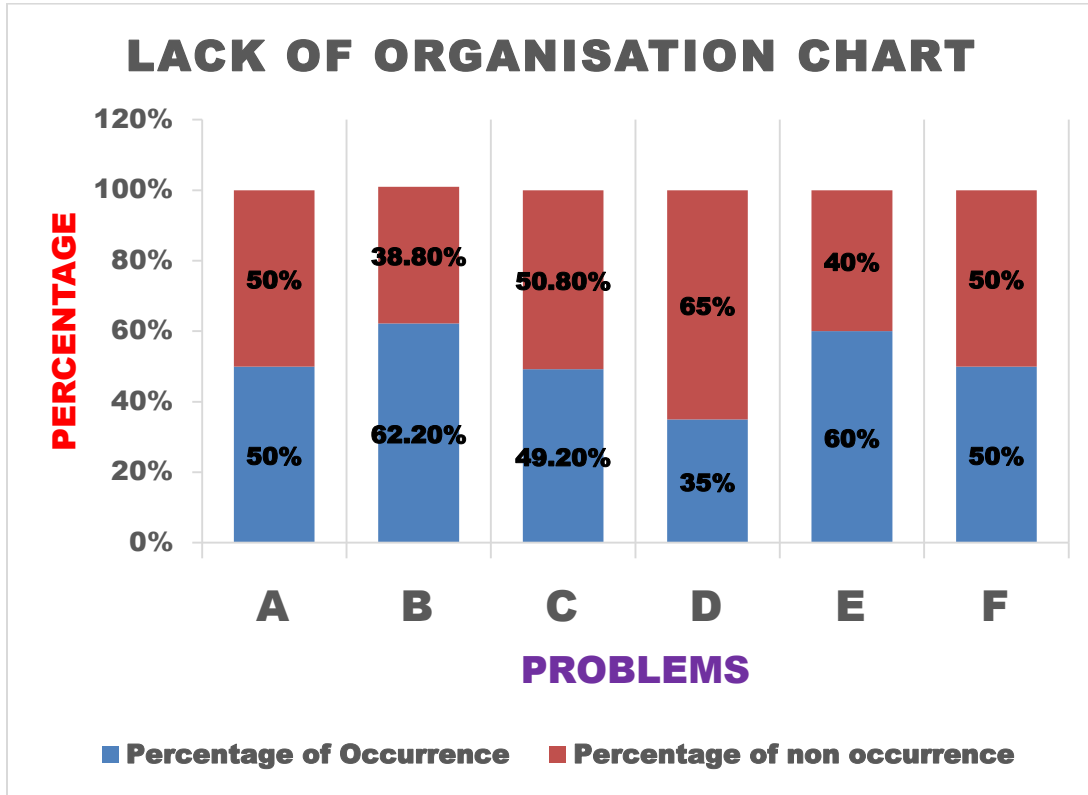
NUMBER	ITEM	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
3	The problems faced by pupils in composition writing	1. Poor paragraphing	67
		2. Wrong spellings	65
		3. Poor punctuation	65
		4. Incorrect sentence construction	62
		5. Lack of fluency	60
		6. Poor composition structure – Introduction, board and conclusion	60
		7. Inappropriate tenses	59
		8. Wrong use of prepositions, pronouns, articles	51
		9. Poor diction – register	50
		10. Lack of ideas on topic	35
		11. Poor interpretation of topic	30

The researcher in gathering data for the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing made use of the teachers' questionnaire responses, observation and analysis of pupils' exercise books and responses of focus group interviews. In presenting data on the challenges the researcher used Table 4, Table 5 and relevant fig. Table 4 summarised teachers' responses to the questionnaire on the challenges, Table 5 presents data gathered from the focus groups on the challenges faced by pupils and the relevant. fig presents data collected from observation and analysis of 360 composition exercise books.

4.3.1 Lack of organization

Fig 1. Lack of organization

n = 360 Composition exercise books



KEY

A – Poor introduction

B – Lack of logical paragraphs

C – Lack of unity within paragraphs

D – Lack of general coherence

E – Poor development of the theme of the topic

F – Poor conclusion

One of the challenges faced by the pupils as indicated by the data collected from questionnaires, focus group interviews and analysis of composition exercise books is that of lack of organization

in the compilation of a composition. The problems as observed range from poor introduction, lack of logical paragraphs, lack of general coherence, lack of development of the theme of the topic to poor conclusion.

4.3.1.1 Poor Introductions

The challenges of constructing meaningful introductions is a thorny one to the learners. This can be observed from teachers' questionnaire (Table 4) that indicates 65% frequency of the challenge, Table 5 with data collected from the focus group indicates a frequency of 60% while the observation of pupils' exercise books has a slightly lower frequency of 50%. The three sources of data collection are in agreement indicating that the problem needs attention. Most of the observed composition exercise books indicate lack of sound knowledge to construct an introduction.

In most of the observed composition books the introductions were completely divorced from the board of the composition and its thematic concerns. While some of the introductions were too long and winding to be considered as introductions. Some of the pupils even failed to find suitable vocabulary to express their views.

The results of the research are echoed by Dube and Pfende (1997) in their assessment of the errors made by pupils in composition writing when they highlighted the difficulties faced by pupils in constructing introductions.

4.3.1.2 Lack of logical paragraphs

Another challenge on organization is lack of logical paragraphs, it has a total frequency of 70% from table 4, 67% from Table 5 and 62.2% from fig 1. The three sources are in total agreement. The observation made from the pupils' exercise books indicated that most of the compositions

lacked meaningfully constructed paragraphs. Some of the paragraphs lacked topic sentences, developers and terminator. Some of the paragraphs addressed too many ideas in one paragraph. These paragraphs lacked unity of ideas, flow of ideas was disjointed. This observation from pupils' exercise books is supported by responses from the questionnaires with 50% frequency from Table 4 and 49% frequency from Table 5.

4.3.1.3 Poor development of thematic concerns

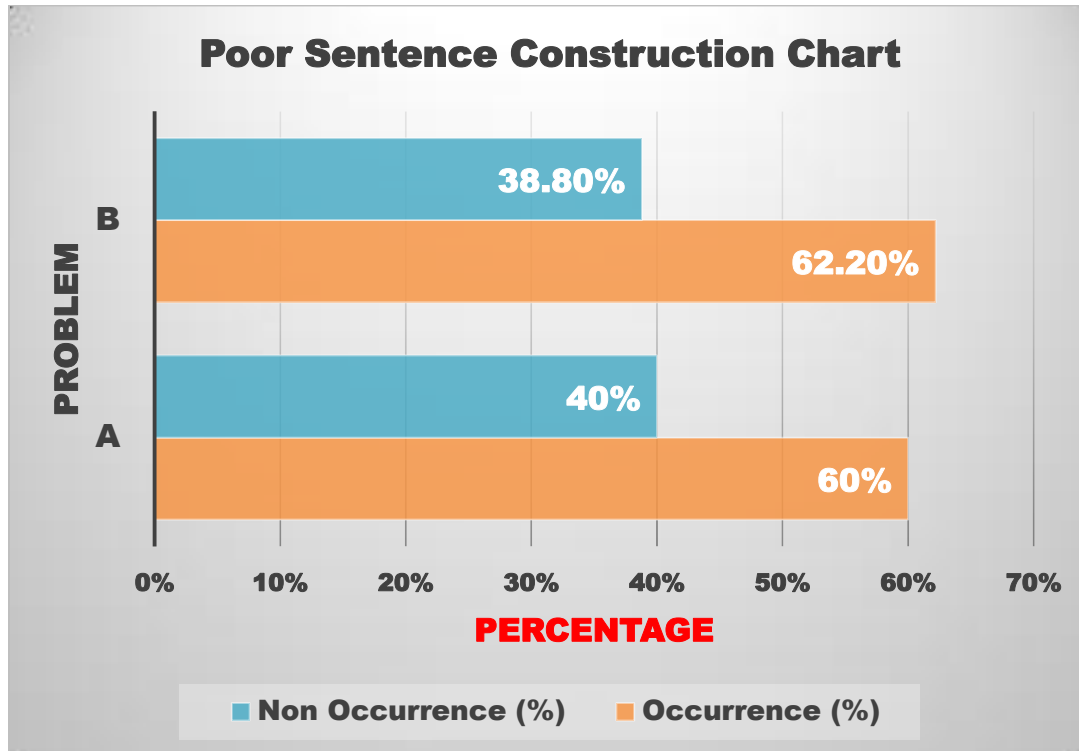
This is another challenge that can be observed from Table 4, Table 5 and Fig 1. Most of the compositions observed by the researcher lacked creativity in relationship to the given topics. Most of the ideas were left hanging and the length of some of the compositions were below the standard length. This challenge affects most of the learners as can be seen by percentage frequency of 60% from the questionnaires and 60% from the observed books.

All in all on organization, It can be observed from the data collected that learners fail to organise their ideas from introduction, sequencing of ideas, meaningful paragraphing to lack of ability to develop ideas coherently in consideration of the topic.

4.3.2 Poor Sentence Construction

Fig 2 Poor Sentence Construction

n = 360 Composition exercise books



KEY

A = Lack of variety in sentence structure

B = Lack of general fluency

Poor sentence construction is one of the greatest challenge that was revealed through the research. As was revealed through the teacher questionnaire responses, focus group responses and composition exercise books observation, the problem manifests itself in lack of variety in sentence structure and lack of general fluency in English Language.

4.3.2.1 Lack of variety in sentence construction

As observed from the composition exercise books, most of the sentences lacked creativity. The sentence pattern was rigid and was mainly composed of short simple sentences. This problem is clearly outlined in Table 4 with a frequency of 55%, Table 5 with a frequency of 62% and fig 2 with 60% frequency. Analysis of the composition exercise books indicated that an average of only 35% have the ability to construct meaningfully compound and complex sentences. As a result most of the sentences constructed are monotonous and lack vivid description.

4.3.2.2 Lack of fluency

Lack of fluency is a contributory factor to poor sentence construction. Most of the sentences observed from the learners' composition exercise books are marred by meaningless sentences. The sentences failed to communicate. Table 4 with 57% frequency, Table 5 with 60% frequency and Fig 2 with 62.2% clearly demonstrates that lack of fluency is one of the major challenges of composition writing skills. Most of the learners are second language learners of English Language who happened to have acquired the language poorly.

The following are some of the examples of meaningless sentences.

1. My friend wat ayo doing in you form 3.
2. Ferst weeks of school is no learn.
3. Schools is nays buty they toilesly
4. Raning, security, dety banty in thesi atheletikisy.

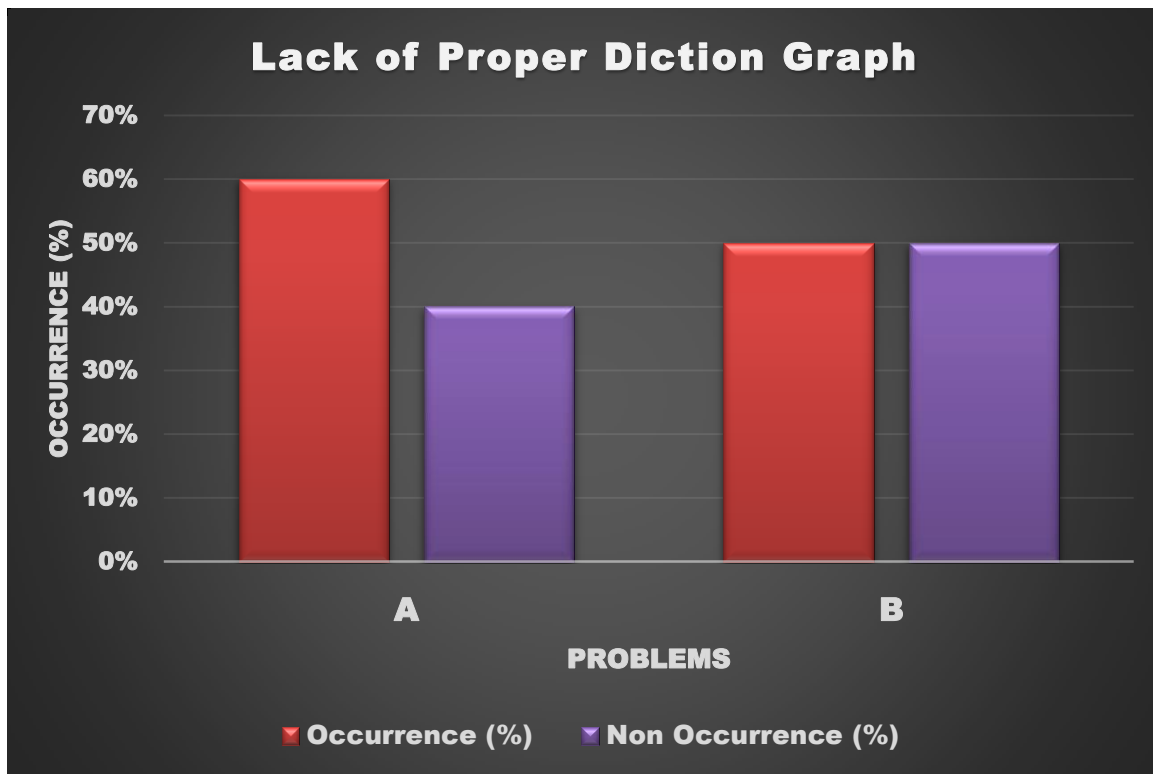
All in all, the observation made from the research concerning poor sentence construction was also noted by the ZIMSEC examiners in their English language 1122/1 June 2012 Report. They

have established that lack of fluency in English Language is the greatest handicap on meaningful composition writing skills.

4.3.3 Lack of proper diction

Fig 3 Lack of proper diction

n = 360 Composition exercise books



KEY

A = Lack of exactness and vividness of nouns, verbs and adjectives.

B = Poor and inappropriate figures of speech

The researcher established that the issue of proper diction is another problem that pupils face in composition writing and this can be greatly attached to lack of fluency in English as a second language. This, as seen by the researcher through the exercise book analysis comprises of lack of

exactness and vividness of nouns, verbs and adjectives and poor and inappropriate figures of speech.

4.3.3.1 Lack of exactness and vividness of nouns, verbs and adjectives

According to the researcher's analysis of the books, pupils use inappropriate nouns, verbs or adjectives in most of the sentences analysed by the researcher. The following examples were noted from the composition exercise books:

1. This child think he could walk with her friends but she walking in one place.
2. Mother you sit front of me you told me I was shouted the thief
3. That morning was very shouting.
4. This journey it was tired and good.

4.3.3.2 Poor and inappropriate figures of speech

This was also noted in most of the books observed. Table 4 indicates 41%, Table 5, 57% and fig 3, 50% error frequency of the challenge. Most of the pupils failed to make use of the appropriate register to suit the given situation, setting, purpose and audience. They failed to distinguish formal and informal writing. The use of wrong vocabulary to suit context led to poor and inappropriate expressions.

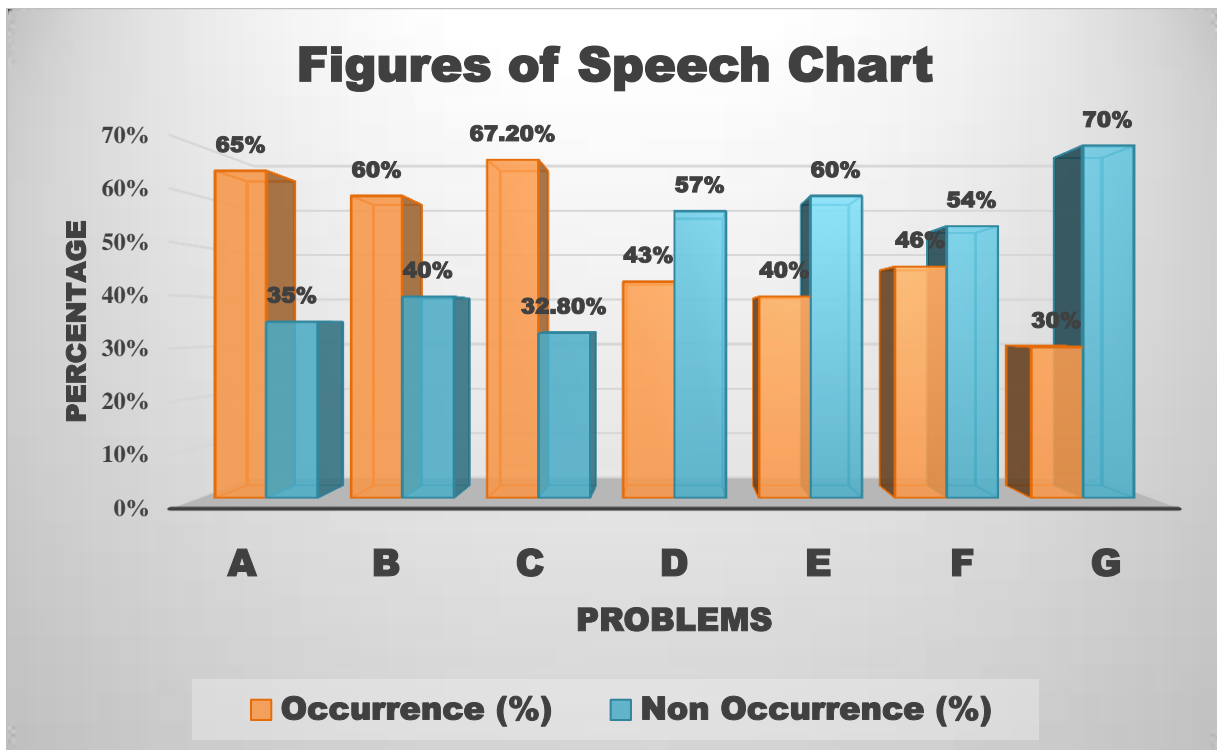
The challenge of poor diction was also noted by Brown (2000) who also noticed that the use of proper diction is strongly attached to the ability to distinguish the context of language use.

4.3.4 Incorrect and inappropriate use of :

- A) Punctuation marks
- B) Tenses
- C) Spellings
- D) Subject – verb agreement
- E) Conjunctions
- F) Articles, pronouns and prepositions
- G) Inappropriate use of idioms

Fig. 4 Incorrect and Inappropriate use of punctuation marks, tenses, spellings, subject – verb agreement, conjunctions, articles, pronouns, prepositions and idioms.

n = 360 Composition exercise books



KEY

A – Poor punctuation

B – Inappropriate tenses

C – Wrong spellings

D – Incorrect subject – verb agreement

E – Inappropriate conjunctions

F – Wrong use of articles, pronouns, prepositions

G – Inappropriate use of idioms

4.3.4.1 Poor Punctuation

One other major challenge that was observed by the researcher is the issue of poor punctuation. Most of the composition exercise books revealed errors of poor punctuation. The errors ranged from failure to start a sentence using a capital letter, failure to write a proper noun making use of the capital letter, failure to use a comma appropriately, failure to punctuate direct speech to failure to make use of a full stop where necessary. Table 4 indicates error density of 66%, Table 5 has 65% and fig 4 indicates 65% frequency on punctuation errors. These three sources complement each other.

Here are some of the examples of punctuation errors that were observed by the researcher from the pupils' composition exercise books:

(1) mrs nyamuta said to tadiwanashe follow me

(2) on 20 june i visited john in chinhoyi it was a school trip we arrived in the evening

(3) my parent said I don't want to loose this boy I want to take him like my baby now it has 7
years

The highest error density was observed in the punctuation of direct speech. Most pupils failed to use opening and closing inverted commas appropriately. The researcher's observations tally with Dube and Pfende (1997) who also observed in their analysis of the errors made in essay competition that punctuation of direct speech make up a greater percentage of errors.

4.3.4.2 Inappropriate tenses

Table 4 reveals 71% frequency of errors on inappropriate tenses, Table 5 has 59% and fig 4 has 60% frequency. The researcher discovered that the use of wrong tenses by learners had one of the highest error density. In most compositions observed by the researcher, most of the pupils failed to stick to appropriate verb tenses. The verb tenses shifted from one type to another and this completely distorted the flow of ideas and the intended meaning or communication.

Here are some of the examples derived from pupils' composition exercise books

(1) After visiting my aunt last week she give me some food to ate. I start eat slowly and nicely.

After finish eat I go to wash plates

(2) On our way to Harare in 2000 we board a bus, the bus start to move. we pass Kadoma we arrive in Ingezi. The bus stop for us to went to bought something to eat

(3) When we arrived in Norton, we enter the venue of the wedding. When my brother enters everyone is happy. I shade tears of joy that day. We thank God we arrive safely.

The above sentences reflects the nature of the challenges that the pupils are facing in the use of tenses. They are failing to match tenses to given events and time frame. In most of the books observed each and every sentence is characterized by higher error density of tenses.

4.3.4.3 Wrong Spellings

Just like the use of inappropriate tenses, the use of wrong spellings have dominated composition writing errors. Table 4 indicates 65% error frequency, Table 5, 65% and fig 4 has 67.2% error density from the observed composition exercise books. Just like the tenses, the spellings completely distort communication.

The following words are some of the wrongly spelt words picked from observed composition exercise books:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| - antil | - moning |
| - desgraceful | - diffrent |
| - repect | - praizeu |
| - interlligent | - jorney |
| - nolves | - munetime |
| - shep | - helyday |
| - traspart | - bedly |
| - scriming | - botle |

4.3.4.4 Incorrect use of prepositions

Incorrect use of prepositions is another problem that was observed from the composition books (46%), the focus group (51%) and the teachers' questionnaire (45%). Just like the wrong spellings the inappropriate use of prepositions distort the meaning of sentence as revealed through the composition exercises.

Examples of wrongly used prepositions are given from the researcher's observations of composition exercise books:

(1) He was sitting in a tree and laughing under me

(2) I was happy on my grandparents. My grandparents were happy at see me.

(3) I got experience about travel with myself.

The challenge has an average error density of 45%. This indicates that the challenge is not very common though its effects on sentence construction is heavily felt through complete distortion of ideas.

To sum up on the challenges, the researcher has established a variety of challenges faced by pupils in composition writing through the combined use of questionnaire, composition exercise book observation and focus group interview.

4.4 THE MAJOR CAUSES OF THE CHALLENGES

Table 6. Causes of the challenges

n = 12

NUMBER	ITEM	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
2B	Causes of the problems	1. Lack of interest in reading	75
		2. First language interference	71
		3. Poor second language acquisition	70
		4. Lack of exposure to second language	65
		5. Failure to read widely	65
		6. Failure to put events in correct time frame	65
		7. Poor planning of compositions	60
		8. Lack of composition writing and practice skills	55
		9. Background of pupils	55
		10. Lack of writing skills from primary schools	49
		11. Poor teaching methods	45
		12. Pupils do not edit compositions	20

Table 6 highlights the causes of the challenges. These were derived from teachers' questionnaires. These range from lack of interest in reading to failure to edit written work.

4.4.1 Lack of interest in reading

This cause has the highest frequency of 75%. This implies that pupils lack a culture of reading. It is from the text that pupils are exposed to a variety of writing techniques. Without the reading material pupils fail to create, visualize and even imitate.

4.4.2 Poor Second language Acquisition

The issue of poor language acquisition was sighted by most teachers and it carries a percentage of 70. This means it is applicable to most of the pupils. It was even established from the focus group interviews that most of the pupils lack proper native – like exposure to second language. The researcher noted that it appears that the pupils have had poor language acquisition from their primary school education. Another major cause related to poor second language acquisition is lack of writing skills and practice. Lack of practice hinders effective development of writing skills.

4.4.3 Poor teaching Strategies

Poor teaching strategies have been quoted as having one of the greatest effects on development of composition writing skills. Table 6 outlines poor teaching strategies resulting in poor writing skills. Through exercise books observation the researcher deduced that in most cases teachers use teacher – centered activities. Most pupils through the focus group interview indicated that teachers are not teaching composition writing but they are testing because the pupils are hardly given enough practice and guidance. Richards and Rogers (2006) outline the importance of using

pupil – centered activities to facilitate communicative learning which can go along to eradicate the challenges.

Failure by teachers to teach pupils enough grammar causes poor punctuation, poor tenses, wrong spellings and inappropriate use of prepositions. This was established from questionnaire respondents.

To sum up on causes, Table 6 gives a list of possible causes from the learner's teacher's perspective.

4.5 STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES

Table 7 Strategies to overcome the problems. n = 132

ITEM	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
What can be done by pupils?	1. Read widely	85
	2. Practice composition writing	60
	3. Use English always	65
	4. Make use of dictionaries and student companions	45
	5. Watch English films	56
	6. Practice spellings	45
	7. Avoid literal translation	59
	8. Develop a culture of reading	59
What can be done by teachers?	1. Teach pupils composition skills	76
	2. Introduce library periods	68
	3. Give pupils more practice	68
	4. Mark compositions meaningfully	63
	5. Teachers across the curriculum to use English language	50
	6. Vary teaching methods	70
	7. Reward pupils who progress	35
	8. Engage pupils in debates and public speaking	39
	9. Demonstration to pupils	50
	10. Give pupils written and oral feedback after marking	69
	11. Teach all aspects of language	40
What can be done by parents	1. Encourage pupils to speak in English	70
	2. Give pupils reading materials	61
	3. Nurture a culture of reading	66
	4. Help pupils to access the internet	55
	5. Let pupils join local libraries	61
	6. Assist learner with homework	60
	7. Monitor children's performance	61
	8. Create libraries at home	20
What can the head and administration do?	1. Libraries to be established and well stocked	80
	2. Procurement of key texts, newspapers, magazines	61
	3. Enforce the use of English in school premises	65
	4. Supervision of teachers in composition writing	50
	5. Avoid large classes	55
	6. Make debate and public speaking clubs compulsory	55
	7. Motivate pupils - reward	61
	8. Recruit competent teachers in the English department	53

Fig. 5 Summary of responsibilities of parents, teachers and the headmaster in eliminating the challenges.

n = 132

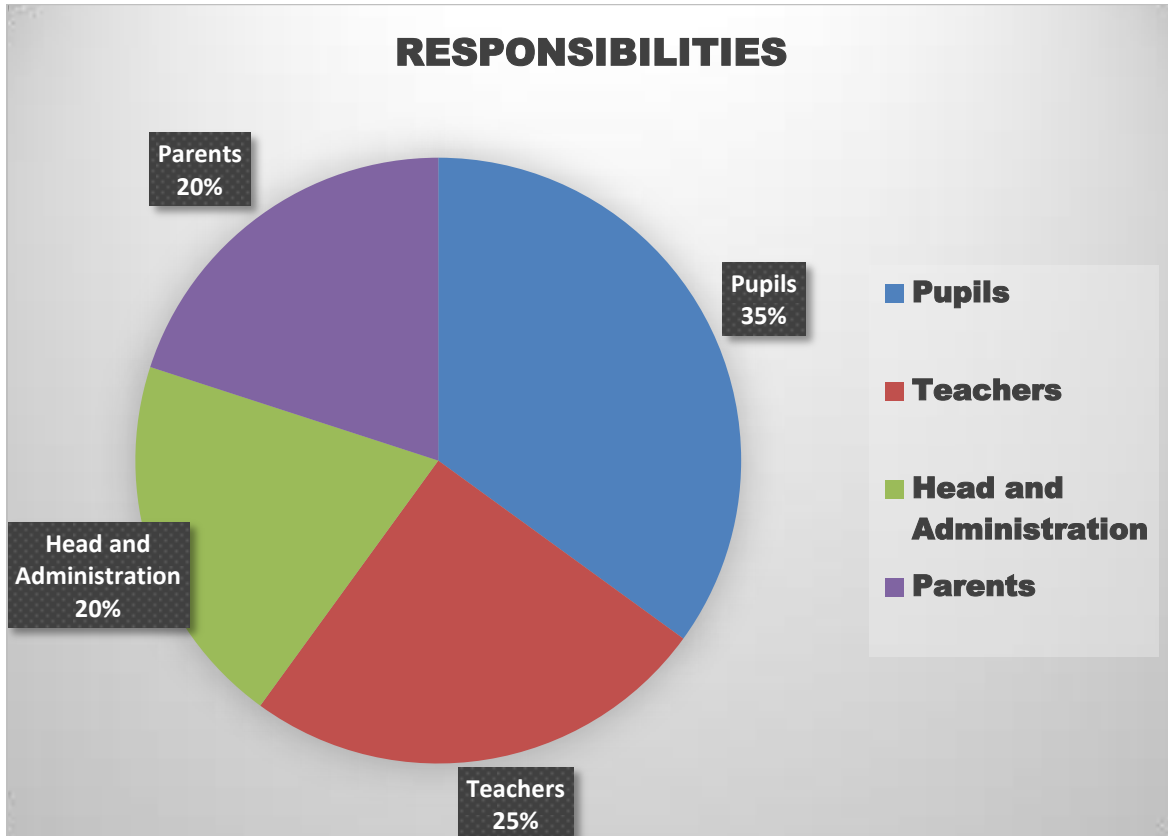


Table 7 and Fig 5 clearly outlines the solutions to the challenges that were gathered by the researcher from the 12 teacher respondents of the questionnaire and 120 pupils grouped into 3 focus groups.

4.5.1 Reading widely

Top on the list with 85% on table 4 recommended pupils to read widely and nurture a culture of reading as a solution.

4.5.2 Establishment of libraries

80% as indicated by table 4 advocated for the establishment of libraries and stocking them. This solution was suggested by both the teachers and pupils. The value of reading material cannot be underestimated for it is the cornerstone of all written expressions, especially in composition writing. Cusipang (2006) concurs with the researcher's view of attaching greater importance to reading.

4.5.3 Varying teaching methods

The issue of varying and using effective teaching methods that facilitate communicative teaching and learning received much attention from the respondents thus Table 7 outlines 70% frequency. The issue of marrying grammar lessons to composition writing was seen to be effective in eliminating most of the grammatical mistakes that were observed by the researcher.

4.5.4 The importance of pupils, teachers, parents and the Head in eliminating the challenges.

Fig 5 displays the respondents' view on the importance of pupils, teachers, parents and the Head and Administration in eliminating the pupils' composition writing challenges. Fig 5 demonstrates that parents, pupils, teachers and the Head can work together as a team in solving the composition challenges. However, their area of responsibility towards elimination of problems vary but all the four members play a vital role towards elimination of the challenges. To sum up

on possible solutions, it can be observed from Table 7 that strategies may differ, one has to select a strategy that suits his or her context

4.6 DISCUSSION

Responses from questionnaires seem to imply that the strategies employed are teacher – centered. Responses from the focus group further indicate that composition activities are teacher centered. This implies that inadequate imparting of composition skills is being done in the schools under research. Given the scenario that pupils lack adequate skills and guidance, it is important for the teacher to be equipped with the know – how to deal with the impartation of skills. This is supported by Mills and Cattel (2008) and Cross (2009) concurs as he highlights on the importance of the availability of teachers who have the knowledge and skills to impart composition skills.

The teachers’ questionnaire, the observation of pupils’ exercise books and focus group interview reveal that pupils face numerous challenges in composition writing. Findings reflect that lack of organisation, poor sentence construction, lack of proper diction and incorrect and inappropriate use of punctuation, tenses, spellings, conjunctions, subject verb agreement, pronouns and prepositions are some of the challenges that hinder meaningful composition writing. Lack of organisation as was observed through the pupils’ composition exercise book hinders the flow of ideas. As observed through observation of pupils’ composition and teachers’ questionnaire responses, lack of organisation manifests itself through poor introductions, lack of logical paragraphs, lack of general coherence and poor conclusions.

Responses from questionnaires see lack of organisation as a product of lack of composition skills on the other part of the learners. On the other hand, the focus group responses attach this

challenge to lack of practice on the part of the learner. Wright (1975) discusses the importance of appropriate strategies in imparting composition skills. All the cited justifications are applicable to the study. The importance of editing is stressed through the teachers' questionnaire as a way of eliminating the problem. Donald (2009) stresses on the importance of practice on the part of pupils as a solution to the challenge.

Poor sentence construction as revealed through the teachers' questionnaire and observation of pupils' exercise books depicted the most challenging task in composition writing. This resulted in limited style of sentence structure and most of the sentences lacked fluency, Respondents of questionnaires highlighted poor second language acquisition as the main source of the challenge. This was highly supported by the responses from the focus group that referred to lack of English vocabulary in which to express themselves as their main hindrance to meaningful sentence construction.

Richards and Rogers (2006) have suggestions on how to promote language fluency. They strongly advocate for a communicative approach to the teaching of sentence construction. The researcher's results concurs with Richards and Rogers (2006) as the respondents suggested pupil – centered approach.

The challenges of incorrect and inappropriate use of tenses, spellings, conjunctions and prepositions was revealed by questionnaire respondents as resulting from lack of grammatical rules on the part of the teacher and mother tongue interference. Brown (2000) advocates for integration of grammatical skills and writing skills. The researcher concurs with Brown (2000) as the integration would promote practice which would go a long way to eliminate grammatical problems.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the challenges, causes and possible solutions to the problems faced by pupils in composition writing. Various observations on the challenges faced by pupils like lack of organisation, poor sentence construction, lack of proper diction, and incorrect and inappropriate use of punctuation, tenses, spellings, conjunctions, pronouns and prepositions were highlighted. Solutions to these challenges include wide reading on the part of the pupils, implementation of effective teaching strategies on the part of the teacher and the teaching of composition skills to the learners. The next chapter focuses on summary, conclusions and recommendations of the research findings.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on a summary of the research study, draws conclusions and gives recommendations.

5.1 SUMMARY

The main aim of the research was to investigate the challenges faced by pupils in writing compositions at 'O' Level. From the background of the study, it has been indicated that pupils face numerous challenges and these negatively affect their composition writing skills. The research helped the researcher to have a broader and deeper understanding of the challenges encountered by pupils at 'O' Level. The study also helped the researcher to identify the possible causes and determine the possible solutions to the challenges. Findings may be used as a guide to personally assess the challenges faced by learners in composition writing and further work towards elimination and reduction of the problems. The study was confined to three secondary schools in Kadoma urban area. The review of related literature gave an outline of the skills and strategies used by the teachers to implement composition skills, challenges faced by pupils in composition writing and possible causes and solutions to the challenges. The descriptive survey was used as the research design. The population comprised three secondary schools. Questionnaire observation of composition exercise books and a focus group interview were used to gather data from teachers and pupils. Triangulation method was used to gather data. Expert research and advice from the supervisor was sought to design questionnaire, composition observation guide and focus group interview schedule. Descriptive statistics in the form of tables

was used to present data. The study revealed that lack of organisation, poor sentence construction, poor diction and incorrect and inappropriate use of tenses, punctuation marks, spellings and prepositions are some of the major problems faced by pupils in composition writing. Several causes were established which include poor second language acquisition, lack of composition skills and practice, first language interference, poor teaching methods, lack of interest and resources in reading and the background of the pupils. Various strategies to overcome the challenges were established. They vary from the teaching of the composition skills, varying teaching methods, reading widely, giving of oral and written exercises to the pupils, nurturing a culture of reading through establishing and equipping libraries and honouring of acceptable teacher – pupil ratio.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

A) What are the main composition skills to be given attention to at ‘O’ Level and what strategies are being implemented by teachers to impart these skills?

Research revealed that most ‘O’ Level teachers focus on the following skills: planning and organizing ideas, developing the ideas in a logical manner, constructing grammatically correct and meaningful sentences to express one’s ideas and using proper register to suit given context.

Research has shown that teachers mostly make use of the lecture method, drilling, brainstorming and demonstrations to impart the composition skills.

B) What are the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing?

Results of the study have indicated that poor organisation, poor sentence construction, poor diction and vocabulary and incorrect use of tenses, spellings, punctuation marks, prepositions are among the major challenges of pupils in composition writing.

C) What are the causes of the challenges?

The researcher established that the challenges are a result of poor teaching methods, poor second language acquisition, lack of exposure to English as a language, limited reading materials, lack of English grammatical rules and first language interference.

D) What are the possible solutions to the challenges?

The research has revealed that elimination and reduction of the challenges can be realized through implementation of effective teaching and learning methods, teaching and practice of English grammatical rules and structure, practice of composition skills through reading materials and exposure to first language speakers and positive motivation of pupils. The researcher has found out that large English classes of more than 45 pupils are a hindrance to effective composition teaching and marking for teachers hence enrolment should tally with approved teacher – pupil ratio.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 Given that the study found out that there is more of composition testing than teaching in the area studied, as a result this inhibits acquisition of composition skills, the researcher recommends that:

- Teachers in the research area should teach the implementation of composition skills and not to just test. Teaching guides pupils towards effective writing.
- Teachers in the concerned area are to use a variety of teaching methods that are pupil – centered not teacher – centered to activate writing skills and motivate pupils.

- Teachers in the area under investigation should mark compositions meaningfully and give meaningful written and oral comments to help pupils eliminate problems.

5.3.2 In the light of the fact that the research revealed that the main challenges to composition writing are a result of lack of exposure to English language the researcher recommends that:

- Teachers and heads in the area under study should cultivate a culture of reading by establishing e- learning libraries and stocking them with reading materials.
- The heads of the schools under study should establish a language policy that advocates for compulsory use of English language across the curriculum.
- The English head of departments of the schools under observation should frequently organise workshops to facilitate for composition teaching and writing.

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ZIMSEC 'O' Level English Language 1122/1 Reports for November 2011 and November 2012 Examinations.

APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire for the teachers

I am a student at the Midlands State University carrying out a research project on the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing. The aims of the current research are to investigate the main composition skills and strategies being implemented to impart the skills, to investigate the challenges faced by pupils in composition writing, to investigate the major causes and possible solutions to overcome the challenges.

I would be grateful if you would answer this questionnaire fully. All the information you provide will be confidential and used for study purposes only.

Thank you very much for your help and collaboration.

Please respond to the following statements by putting a tick into the box that best expresses your opinion at composition writing.

SECTION A: Focuses on Teaching and learning composition writing

How often do you focus on each of the following in teaching of composition writing?

Number	Item	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	English grammar			
2	Idioms			
3	Composition structure layout			
4	Analysis of written composition			
5	Discussing prior knowledge of topics of writing			

If you would like to add other focuses, please do so in the spaces provided above.

SECTION B: Composition writing practice

How often do you do each of the following procedures?

Number	Item	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Select appropriate teaching method			
2	Use brainstorming			
3	Use topic based teaching of writing			
4	Use lecturing			
5	Give pupils oral feedback			
6	Give pupils written feedback			
7	Hold a whole class discussion to pinpoint the most common mistakes in written compositions			
8	Ask pupils to self-assess their compositions			
9	Mark written compositions according to a list of criteria			

If you would like to add any other practices, please do so in the space above.

SECTION C: Composition writing difficulties

This part of the questionnaires asks you to respond to the given phases related to the difficulties that pupils face in composition writing.

How difficult are the following to pupils?

Number	Item	Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy
1	Writing a good introduction				
2	Writing a good topic sentence				
3	Developing a paragraph				
4	Expressing one main idea in one paragraph				
5	Writing a good conclusion to the composition				
6	Linking sentences and paragraphs using appropriate cohesive devices				
7	Using most appropriate vocabulary in writing				
8	Using idioms in writing correctly				
9	Writing grammatically correct sentences				
10	Applying correct punctuation rules in writing				
11	Writing correctly spelled words				

SECTION D: Revision and Editing Practices

How often do pupils do each of the following?

Number	Item	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Revise the unity and flow of writing			
2	Revise vocabulary			
3	Correct any grammatical mistakes in writing			
4	Spot any punctuation errors and correct them			
5	Correct spelling mistakes after writing			

SECTION E: Free response

This part of the questionnaire asks you to give free responses on strategies used in imparting composition skills, the major problems and causes and possible solutions to overcome the problems in composition writing.

1. State any methods you use in imparting the composition skills to pupils

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2. (a) List the problems faced by pupils in composition writing

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(b) What do you think are the causes of these problems

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3. What do you think should be done by the following people to overcome the problems faced by pupils in composition writing?

A. Pupils

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B. Teachers

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C. Parents

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D. The head and Administration as a whole

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Document Analysis Guide

The following aspects will be analysed from the pupils' composition exercise books.

1. Evaluation of the broad topic given to pupils to see if it suits their academic level
2. Organization

The following aspects will follow under organization

- A. Introduction
 - B. Logical sequence of paragraphs
 - C. Unity within paragraphs
 - D. General coherence
 - E. Development of broad theme of the given topic
 - F. Effective conclusion
3. Sentence construction
 - A. Variety in sentence structure
 - B. General fluency
 4. Diction
 - A. Exactness and vividness of nouns, verbs, adjectives
 - B. Interesting and appropriate figures of speech
 5. General check on:
 - A. Punctuation
 - B. Tenses
 - C. Spellings
 - D. Vocabulary
 - E. Subject – verb agreement
 - F. Conjunctions
 - G. Use of articles, pronouns, prepositions
 - H. Use of idioms

Focus group interview schedule

Questions

1. A) Would you describe composition writing as
 - a) Difficult
 - b) Very difficult
 - c) Easy
 - d) Very easy

B) Why do you say so?
2. Which type of composition are you comfortable with (narrate, descriptive, factual or augmentative)?
3. State some of the common problems you face while writing composition
4. A) How much time are you given by your teacher to prepare and write compositions?

B) Do you feel the time is enough?
5. What do you think should be done by pupils, teachers or parents to reduce problems in composition writing?

