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DIFFICULTIES STUDENTS OF NORTHERN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

ENCOUNTER IN WRITING ENGLISH COMPOSITION

ERICA TALATA AMOAH

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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, ERICA TALATA AMOAH, declare that this dissertation with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted either in part or whole for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE: …………………………………………..

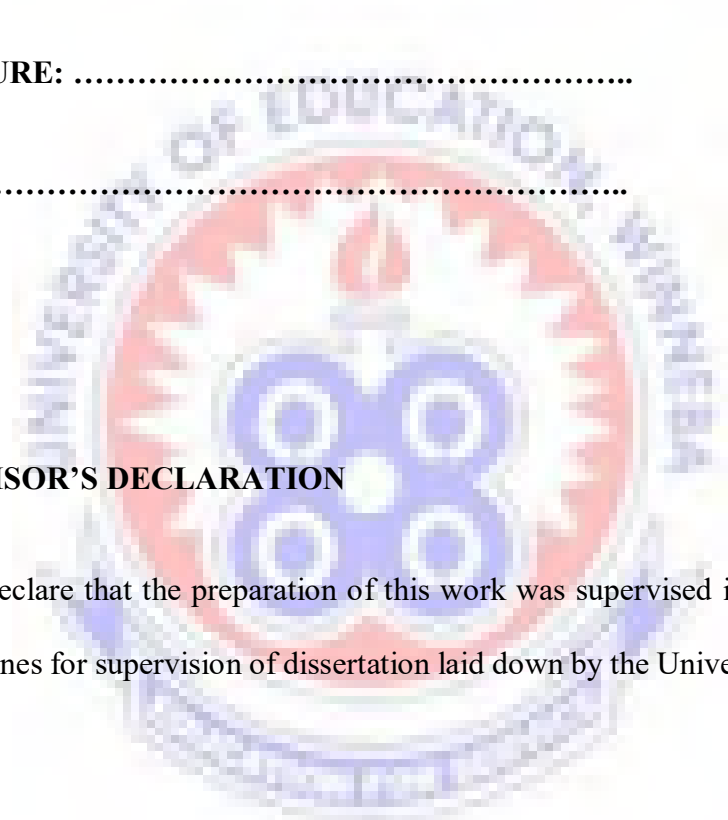**DATE:** …………………………………………………..

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of dissertation laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

SUPERVISOR'S NAME:……………………………………………………………

Signature: …………………………………………..

Date: …………………………………………………..

DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to my cherished children: Wilhelmina V. Angkyier and Wilfred Diongviel Angkyier.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Writing is an important skill for language production. However, it is considered a difficult skill, particularly in English as second language (ESL) contexts where students face challenges in that aspect. The present study was conducted to investigate difficulties that students of Northern School of Business face in composition writing; causes of challenges and remedies to those challenges. Though a number of students could express themselves in English, they could not write composition competently in the areas of introduction, content, and conclusion. Purposive simple random sampling was used to gather data using thematic data analysis for the study. These involved administering questionnaire, pre-intervention test to thirty sampled students; and three English teachers interviewed. All the said activities were geared towards achieving the research objectives, namely, to identify students' challenges in composition writing, causes and remedies. The result indicated that, students had challenges in the organization of ideas to write, content mastering, limited vocabulary and the structure of essays. Students' effective English composition writings were also interfered by their first language (L1). The result also revealed that teachers did not use the appropriate instructional methods and approaches to teach composition writing. In the light of the study's findings, the researcher recommended that students should do more reading to improve their language competency which will enhance their writing. Teachers of English should pay more attention to composition writing using the appropriate methods. The eclectic approach to teaching composition was also recommended for teaching English composition writing.
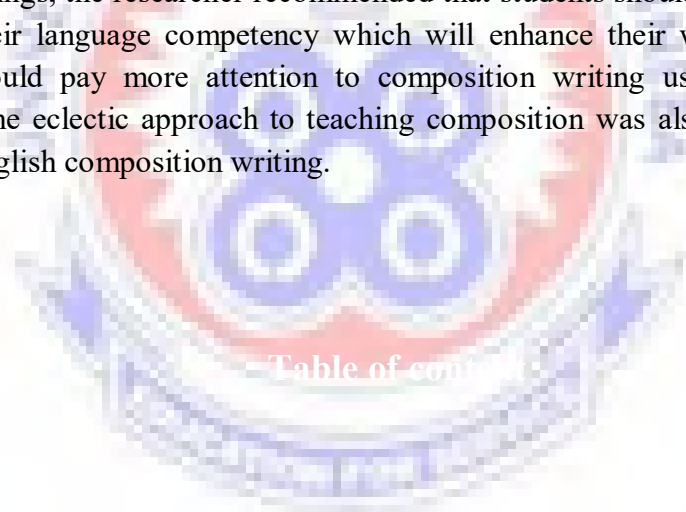
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the dissertation which presents the following elements of study: the background and general concepts; statement of the problem; purpose and objectives; research questions; significance of the study; limitations; delimitations and the general layout of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

In Ghana English language is learnt and taught as a second language and it is also the country's official language, as well as the Language of Instruction (LOI) in schools, colleges and universities. It is also an international language. "English function as a means of international communication among the nations all over the world" (Wisnu, 2010: p.1). To affirm to this statement, Ramelan (1992, p.2) mentioned that "English as international language is used to communicate, to strengthen and foster relationship among all countries in the world in all fields". In view of this, the country has consequently designed a vibrant second cycle education system with an increasing emphasis on the English language as it is the medium of instruction in the country as well as an international language. It is also an undisputable fact that assessment of students' achievement in English language is mostly done through writing.

Written expression is more effective in socio- cognitive instances of communication than oral expression. Unlike speaking, writing enables communicators to convey messages independent of time and space (Hughes, 1996). It is considered man's best academic achievement based on skills or components like mechanics, production, conventions, linguistics and cognition. Ahmed (2010) agrees to this ascension that competence in writing helps students perform well in their academic

programs. Adams and Keene (2000) endorse it that learning to master writing skills can help students to deal successfully with their academic demands and to perform effectively in their disciplines and professional contexts. However, writing is one of the most difficult tasks especially to most language learners. According to Negari (2012), learning to write in a first (L1), second (L2) or foreign language (FL) seems to be the most difficult skill for language learners to acquire in academic contexts. Tangpermpoon (2008) also ascertained to this statement by mentioning that when compared with other language skills namely, listening, speaking, and reading, writing is the most difficult skill to learn because it requires writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as principles of organization in L2 to produce a good written text. Similarly, Richards (2008) notes that learning to write in either first or second language is one of the most difficult tasks students encounter and one that few people can be said to fully master. Writing is recognized as an advanced language skill that has wide ranging implications for the way we think and learn.

It also encourages learners to be organized, logical and creative in their thinking as they need to put things together to ensure good writings. Society therefore demands that learners should be helped to acquire these skills that will enable them to express their ideas clearly and effectively. In view of this that the syllabus singles out the ability to write well as essential in influencing students' chances of being successful, develop personally, and have good relations with other people through effective communication. It is further emphasized in the syllabus that there is the need to encourage learners to achieve competence in writing using language structures they have learnt. This is confirmed in the learning objectives pertaining to writing as spelt out in the syllabus to include the ability to: write clearly and correctly for a wide variety of purposes and functions; use effectively the main structures of English language by

writing logically and coherently on a given topic and to demonstrate acceptable habits both in spoken and written communication among others. Technically, the ability to write compositions well is one of the determinants of good skills in English Language which leads to academic success.

Composition aspects as the distinct features of composition writing include descriptive, narratives, arguments, and expository which should therefore be critically looked at. According to Ong'ondo (2001) there are two broad categories of writing namely functional and creative. Functional writing involves writing of letters, minutes, reports, notices, speeches, book reviews, and memorandum among others. On the other hand, creative writing is concerned with the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narration, description and can also be used to transform information into new texts such as in exposition and argumentative writing. Writing skills that are necessary for the two categories of writing have been grouped by Gathumbi and Masembe (2005) into two classes namely, basic and advanced. Basic skills involve good handwriting, proper spelling and correct punctuation. Advanced skills on the other hand, are those related to proper organization of ideas, correct use of grammar and originality of expression. These aspects of English language play a very emphatic role in students' lives as their communication may be to describe, narrate, agree or disagree to, or explain issues or incidents. Students are expected to organize ideas pertinent to specific topics and aspects into coherent and competently written forms. Thus, the acquisition of appropriate composition writing skills becomes essential for students, particularly as compositions are part of their everyday academic life. Most of their responses to questions in the academics' demand essay writing and contribute to their success in the various subjects.

Unfortunately, most students of Northern School of Business Senior High School encounter difficulties in writing English Composition every day and this made its' teaching and learning boring. Students cannot confidently write good essays with ease. They are usually battling with how to go about their writings, and also exhibit shortage of vocabularies and expertise in that field. Where they have a few, the choice of vocabulary to write suitable essays has always been a challenge as the language obviously requires using right words at the appropriate places. Essentially, the understanding of composition questions and the ability to write well cannot be underestimated. Essays call for students' ability to think, read and write. Therefore, this field of study entreats students to interpret the topics accurately and write the exact type of compositions demanded. This statement is supported by Stalnaker (1951, p.774) that "abilities to organize, to write clearly, etc., cannot at this time be measured independently of the topic in which the writing centers".

Tangpermpoon (2008) is also emphatic about the need of having enough vocabulary and putting them appropriately by pointing out that when compared with other language skills of listening, speaking and reading, writing is the most difficult skill to learn because it requires writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as principles of organization in L2 to produce a good written text. Contrary to having lexical and syntactic knowledge, students are unable to read, understand, think, and write accurately on given composition topics. Their thoughts are mostly not organized coherently and presented concisely and logically. Due to these lapses, they spend much time to produce nothing but poor essays.

Every good composition also revolves around grammar which unfortunately is a deficiency among most students of Northern School of Business. According to

Kirkpatrict (2007, p.17), "it is a framework on which ideas are hung, and the cement that binds words together". Kirkpatrict therefore asserts that, grammar refers to the rules that govern the way language works. On the other hand, students' language works, precisely the compositions are mostly not governed by these rules. Their grammar competency is nothing to write home about. They commit grammatical errors when writing their essays and cannot construct good sentences without assistance, not to mention the construction and development of good paragraphs.

It has also been noted that a lot of teachers do not teach composition writing as it involves a lot of technicalities and needs much strategies to treat coupled with students' weaknesses in the composition aspect; and even in the subject area at large. Where there must be, the effects of the lots of composition writing technicalities and students' weaknesses in that aspect make its instructional activities somewhat dormant. There are usually breaks in lessons as teachers and students cannot fully flow through the instructional periods. Teaching and learning of composition writing should have been participatory. Both teachers and students should be actively involved in its teaching and learning. There should be teacher-student interaction to make the lesson interesting and effective. Unfortunately, this is often not realized in the class as most of the talking is usually done by the teacher. The lesson becomes teacher-centered therefore no class participation. To confirm this with the usual 'easy class question' with the No or Yes answer, 'have you understood?' Yes! 'Someone should explain or demonstrate to me how it is done' The class becomes silent as a grave yard as no one is willing to give a response making this aspect of English boring and therefore not interesting.

Interestingly, there has also been huge diversity with regards to students' socio-economic background. The various schools that students graduated from, as well as the home environment sometimes carve the levels of their communicative competence. Students who passed through well-endowed schools where English is the means of communication may be more fluent in the language than the less privilege students as fluency effect writing. Also, those whose economic backgrounds are better may turn to have more formal educational materials than the under-merit ones. Their former schools could also contribute to their foundation for performance as the basis start from there. Coupled with the recent introduction of the Educational policy of Double-Track System of the 2018/2019 academic year which gave privilege to every School-going child from the rank and file of the country to access Second Cycle Education, situations have heightened up. The number of students in the classes has shot up making class management challenging as there are larger class sizes to manage. This could therefore serve as a hindrance to good composition writing.

Due to these difficulties in composition writing, there is the need for a consented effort to inculcate composition writing efficiency in students, as well as in English Language teachers in order to find a meaningful and lasting solution to the problem. There is also the need for studies which attempt to describe current students' composition writing situation and to delineate those features of compositions regarded as acceptable or unacceptable. Clarification of these aspects of English language, thus essay writing may provide students with knowledge which will assist in the development of their composition skills.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The ability to write good essays effectively is an integral part of written communicative competence among students at all levels of their education. However, essay writing is a problem that students face in the secondary schools. The students of Northern School of Business are of no exception. They demonstrate difficulties in their composition writing any time the researcher takes a lesson in that aspect. It has been observed that most students' usually do not do well in their writings and for that matter do not always go far in the writing especially with regard to paragraphs development. They are usually not able to identify the types of composition demanded for and how to go about the various writings. Organization of ideas and structuring in their writing is another difficulty. Also, due to grammatical errors it has become difficult in some cases to read scripts of students let alone make any meaning out of their writing. Majority of them do not do well in the composition writing. The researcher has observed that most students perhaps did not go through the writing approaches which are deemed more effective to the teaching and learning of composition writing. The researcher is therefore to make a study in this direction and base on the research findings, some suggestions as to how to help solve these writing difficulties would be made.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the difficulties associated with English composition writing in the Senior High Schools; a study of students of Northern School of Business in the Sagnerigu District, Northern Region; and to find out what could be done to have lasting solutions to such difficulties. In the process, the following specific issues would be considered: (a) The difficulties face by students of Senior High Schools in composition writing (b) The causes of composition writing difficulties (c) The ways in which the difficulties can be curbed.

1.5 Objectives

The objectives of this study were

1. to investigate the difficulties that students encounter in composition writing in order to provide a proposal to solve such difficulties.

2. to investigate the causes of composition writing difficulties.

3. to establish appropriate strategies to curb students' composition writing difficulties.

1.6 Research Questions

In embarking on this work, the following questions were set to facilitate the achievement of the research goals:

1. What are the difficulties encountered by students in writing composition?

2. What are the causes of the difficulties?

3. What measures can be taken to curb those challenges?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to identify the difficulties that student face in writing English composition. It is to also to bring out the causes of these difficulties of writing; as well as to obtain appropriate solutions or remedies to curb the menace of composition writing difficulties. It is hoped that the outcome of this study will help the students to appreciate and overcome their difficulties in composition writing. In addition, it is to help every single English composition teacher to adopt suitable strategies and to develop effective practices to improve the teaching and learning process of English composition. Similarly, the study will enable curriculum developers and textbooks writers to appreciate and come up with conscious plans, resources, document, objectives and materials that will help in the teaching and learning of composition writing. In addition, the researcher believed the findings of the study

would be relevant to language education institutions which may enable them come up with better methods of training language teachers with specific reference to essay writing skills. Finally, the study could contribute to knowledge of classroom research and form a basis for further research which could prompt other researchers to do similar studies at other levels of learning.

Therefore, a research in this direction of students' difficulties in composition writing is very important in order to ascertain findings of previous research and also of this very study to propose a lasting solution to minimize the difficulties if not put an end to them.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

Generally, students have challenges with regards to English composition writing. These are evident in the essays they write. Composition writing includes stories, letters and articles. Essays could also be narratives, descriptive, expository or argumentative.

According to Ong'ondo (2001), there are two broad categories of writing namely functional and creative writing where functional writing involves letter writing, minutes, reports, speeches among others; and creative writing is the ability to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narration, description; or transform information into new text such as exposition and argumentative writing. This study would however be limited to the introduction, content, grammar (language use) and conclusion of essays.

1.9 Limitations of the study

Although certain measures were taken to prevent most of the anticipated difficulties during the course of the study, some challenges were encountered due to certain conditions in the school. Some of the challenges had to do with accurate number of

sample size being met at the same time due to students' absenteeism. Another factor was the usual disruption of school programs like sporting activities, social talks and others within the academic year. Some of the subjects were not regular at school; and also, there were days that the school contact hours were not met because of disruption of school programs. This limited the instructional time for the application of the various interventions. Consequently, these factors reduced the effectiveness of the intervention. Despite this, the overall impact of these limitations was not significant enough to render the result of the study invalid.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter contains a review of related literature on the difficulties of composition writing. The purpose of the review is to find out what literature said about composition writing difficulties and the proposed remedies to these difficulties. Base on this, the identified similarities, differences, and gaps in findings on the concern research topic will assist the researcher in further research to aid propose working and lasting solutions to the lapses. It will also in the long round push the writer, as well as other English language teachers as to how best to help students in their composition writing.

In the interest of clarity, the review would be organized under the following headings: the definition of the term English composition, difficulties encountered/common errors made by students in composition writing, causes of difficulties in composition writing, and proposed teaching strategies to improve composition writing.

2.1 Definition of the Term Composition Writing

Composition is another word for writing. It is a means of communication between the writer and the audience on paper. By Aragon, Baires and Rodriguez (2013, p.77), composition "in written language, refers to the collective body of important features established by the author in their creation of literature" According to Daniels & Bright (1996), writing is a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance in such a way that it can be recovered exactly without intervention of the utter. Also, "writing can be said as a systematic visible permanent representation of the auditory transient phenomena of speech", (Lauer et al 1981, p.1). Composition

writing is a cognitive as well as a social process (MacArthur, 2006). Sackey, Agordjor and Kpogo (2016, p.11) also states that, "essay is a special kind of writing. Like a piece of music, it is also called a composition. It deals with a particular issue or topic and may be long or short." This leads Ferris (1998) to say composition is the distinctive types of communication using written words. Further defined by Hyland (2003), he said composition is about the ability either to tell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or the transformation of information into new texts. Ferris (1998) also points out that composition is a piece of writing made up of one or more paragraphs. According to him, it has a theme that can be broken into a number of topics. That each topic in a composition has its' own paragraph. He again explains that paragraphs are usually developed from their framework by building up or elaborating on the theme or topic sentences. "Writing requires appropriate language use, text construction, lay-out, style and effectiveness", (Harmer 2007:112). Heaton (1975) also mentions that composition writing is a task which involves writer's manipulation of words to produce grammatically correct sentences linked together to form a piece of coherent writing, which successfully communicates the thoughts and ideas on a certain topic.

English composition writing requires imaginations, greater in-depth knowledge of grammar, the collection of thoughts, the generation of ideas and organizing them in their logical order in a written form. It is a complex, cognitive, recursive process that involves the interaction of motor and language skills. Thus, one should be able to think and generate ideas from a given topic and putting it into writing taking into consideration communication rules. According to Muhammad and Lahore (2012), it is an undisputable fact that writing involves a lot of complex rhetorical and linguistic capabilities which require the writer's full attention and concentration. An effective writer should convey a message in such a way to affect the audience as is intended to.

The writer is someone who is aware of the readers' competence level and gives a sense of thoroughness and wholeness to his/her writing, and knowing the conventions of every genre.

The ability to be competent in writing is a major distinct feature of language development and academic success among students at all levels of education. It is considered the most important skill that students require in order to enhance their personal development and academic success (Mukulu et al. 2006). Though, as Cockburn and Rose (1978, p.4) state, "… success in essay writing is always to some degree dependent on literary ability", composition writing is a specialized form of language manipulation that requires the mastery of diverse appropriate skills. Essays call upon students' ability to think, read and write. This entails students interpreting essay topics accurately. The type of compositions demanded, budgeting their time efficiently, organizing their thoughts coherently as well as presenting the fruits of their thinking in concise and logical language, all contribute to writing a good essay.

Therefore, composition writing is about the understanding of given topics, organizing the appropriate ideas to be used and writing it structurally accurately with meaning, interest and understanding.

2.2. Difficulties in Composition Writing

It is not far from right to say that writing is a complex process that requires the writer's full attention and concentration. An effective writer does not only convey message in such a way as to affect the audience of the writer's intents, but should also always be aware of the readers' competence level.

Hall (1988), a text of an effective ESL writer must be cohesive, logical, clearly structured, interesting and properly organized with a wide range of vocabulary and mastering of conventions in mechanics.

The learning objectives pertaining to writing spelt out in the Senior High syllabus include the ability to: write clearly and correctly for a wide variety of purposes and functions, using effectively the main structures of English language by writing logically and coherently on a given topic, demonstrating acceptable habits both in spoken and written communication as both go hand in hand with each other. Emphatically, Riddell (2003) stated that written language is more formal than spoken language. There are no nodding, gestures or body language to aid understanding, intonation, falling or rising of tone, no direct contact with readers; therefore, good writing is essential. Writing is a complex process as it involves lower order skills such as forming letters, as well as higher order cognitive skills including cohesion and coherence. This prompted Dar & Khan (2015); Hyland (2003); Mahboob (2014); to say that composition writing is one of the most challenging areas in English language. It is based on appropriate and strategic use of language with structural accuracy and communicative potential.

However, not able to base on appropriate and strategic use of language with accuracy and communicative potentials, students face a lot of difficulties in composition writing ranging from word spelling, sentence formation to the complete essay. According to Faroog (2012), students face challenges in the use of correct sentences and paragraph development, and in creating coherent text. A pertaining issue has also been mentioned by Aragon, Baires & Rodriguez (2013: 13), that "a second-language or dialectic speaker who has thoroughly mastered English grammar, spelling, and sentence structure may still have problems in organizing his ideas and writing

essays". Similarly, a statement by Myles (2002), indicates that composition involves cognitive processes where all learning strategies must be employed and transfer the language to good essays which many second language writers are not capable of. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) also affirmed that, due to the complex processes of writing in a second language, learners often find it difficult to develop all aspects of the writing stages simultaneously. As a result, they use only those aspects that are automatic or have already been put in place. Therefore, students need to develop particular learning strategies that isolate component mental processes so as to be able to develop all stages of the essay.

Notable among the difficulties of students' composition writing include the inability of students to gather the right information for their essays. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1999), students are not able to gather the right information on given topics for essays. To them the required pieces of information to build the essays systematically is lacking in students. They are not able to organize ideas in a continued and systematic way to write good essays. This required area of ability is sealed by Hyland (2003). According to Hyland (2003), writing requires composing, which calls for the ability to either tell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. To have the ability to tell pieces of information into essays requires organization of ideas. Unfortunately, most students in the schools these days are lacking the ability to organize ideas into good essays. To Hyland, composition is viewed as a continuum of activities that range from the more mechanical or formal aspects of writing to the more complex act of composing. He therefore ascertained that students who do not have the ability or cannot go through this continuum of activities are facing difficulties in composition writing.

Another difficult area of composition writing among students is the inability to have well-presented essays which however cannot be under-estimated. A well-knit and well-organized presentation of essay is not only easy to remember but also easily understood. There should be consistence in writing. Cohesion and coherence should be of writers' concern. According to Rico (2014), an incoherent text fails to communicate ideas which causes lack of confidence in learners even if they have mastered syntactic, lexical and grammatical command over text composition. The logical arrangement of information to flow is the hallmark of every good easy (Grab & Kaplan, 1996). Coherence is an implicit feature of text which describes the logical relationship between the ideas and information embodied in discourse. Coherence is helped by cohesion which is the process of cohering one sentence to the next sentence (Bex, 1996).

Students are to have not only the ability to organize, tell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or transform information into new text by logical presentation, but to also form admissible sentences. Grammar is another most difficult area student writers find themselves in writing composition. The use of correct sentence structure is a worrying issue in students' writing. According to Leisak (1989), grammar skills include run-on sentences, fragments and verbiage, use of different type of sentences, subject-verb agreement, and placement of modifiers, tense agreement and parallel construction. Grammar is more than just a set of rules; it is an ever-evolving structure of a language. But, learning grammar can be pretty dull, as no one likes rules; and the memorization of rules is worse than applying them. Students usually make mistakes building tenses, and the worst is to pen these tenses as sentences. Students face difficulty in combining two complete sentences. Parallelism is also one of the problems (Kleisar, 2005). The grammatical arrangement of words must be followed, that is obeying the rules. However, students do face challenges as a result of grammatical errors. According to Cook (2008) and Shahbazi (2009), it is necessary for

students not only know the meaning of the new words, but they should also know which parts of speech they are, not in isolation but in context in order to use them in useful and meaningful sentences. Unfortunately, students' scripts are usually filled with grammatical errors that make their essay difficult to read and understand.

Though the accumulated abilities of students need conscious thoroughgoing adapting to the new material and maturity, another noted area of students' difficulties at the moment of composition writing is the topic, for that matter the subject area is not usually in line with what students are writing or are expected of. Content mastering is an enormous issue in students writing. As Stalnaker (1951, p.774) commented that "abilities to organize, to write clearly, etc., cannot at this time be measured independently of the topic in which the writing centers". The ability to write what is expected of them considering the material is usually lacking. The individual with such writing difficulties usually write out of topic.

In addition, students encounter challenges in getting and manipulating the required and appropriate words to write good essays. Due to limited vocabulary, students are usually found wanting. This makes the teaching and learning of composition writing colorless, boring and ineffective. Vocabulary is said to be in two parts, namely, active vocabulary and passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary is learned to produce, whereas passive vocabulary is used only for recognition. Students usually encounter difficulties in the production area which is associated with meaning (specific/general), form (pronunciation/spelling), possible word combinations and structures (Miller, 1984).

Further on students' difficulties in composition writing, according to Aragon et al (2013), students have challenges with regards to poor handwriting or writing

illegibly. Aragon et al stated that students do not follow the lines on papers. They usual write up and down without considering lines. Words that their base are to touch the down lines do not; and tales that should have gone below the lines do not. Also, the students write too small or too large that it makes the identification of words not easy. They sometimes mixed up upper and lower- case letters inappropriately which makes no meaning as the teacher cannot identify the beginning and end of sentences in their writings.

Another prominent area that writers have mentioned is first language(L1) interference in the composition writing of students which serves as a challenge to students when they are writing composition. Students do mother tongue transfer when they are writing as their L1 influences their L2, therefore essays that they write. According to Cook (2001), first language helps learners when it has elements in common with L2, but hinders the learning process when both language systems differ. A person who speaks two languages has gone through the acquisition process twice, but second language learning takes many forms and occurs in many situations other than natural circumstances which cause problems (Cook, 1993).

Maxwell (1975) also stated that "poor writers seem to be getting poorer in those skills that are specific to written communication, but seldom called for in conversation. It is reviewed that students demonstrate composition writing inconsistent with verbal abilities. They are sometimes able to speak well but not able to write systematically. Even where they are able to write consistently, they write short and or simple essays though can verbalize more complex thought. Their Oral vocabulary is more complex than that of the written vocabulary.

Psychologists, (Lunsford, 1979; Lamberg, 1975; Miles, 1975), have investigated about all these problems and they have identified three types of students that can suffer these difficulties. These include the basic writing, the cognitive egocentrism, and the focused argumentative students.

First of all, the students with minimal composition writing skills and little previous exposure to books and readings according to Lunsford have been called "the basic writing students". For this kind of students, academic writing is a trash, not a way of saying something to someone. They have severe grammatical or other basic writing problems and have difficulty with writing academic assignments. Many students who do have severe grammatical or other basic writing problems do have difficulty with composition writing assignments. It is not therefore surprising that major problems areas in students' attempts at composition writing have been identified by a psychologist, Lamberg, J. (1975). According to him students lack self-management skills. He stated some of the signs of lack of self-management skills to include a history of incomplete assignment, turning in papers late, and not knowing specifics details of the assignments such as number of words or amount of writing required. Lamberg further stated that they lack a strategy for composing and have no set of procedures for working through a writing assignment from beginning to end. Again, students fail to understand and follow directions. They may write good essays but do not follow the instructions. Additionally, that they write poorly organized essays and sometimes fail to select a topic. They have many errors and lack a system of proofreading. Lastly, that they have problems in understanding and accepting the teacher's criticism.

On the aspect of the cognitive egocentrism, Miles, J. (1975) mentioned that it is a situation that when students are asked to compose paragraphs base on the various

themes in the subject matter, instead, they write about personal opinion out of the topic. Andrea Lunsford (1979), used Piaget´s concept of egocentrism to explain the reasons why these writers have problems, but realized that apparently, they are unaware that they have veered from the assigned topic. That means that they are not conscious of what they are doing, this just happens.

The focused argumentation was studied by the professor Dean Drenk, who said that many students as writers have difficulty discovering issues within a topic or formulating composition statement that take focused positions on issues. He realized that either they write diffuse compositions, or they write essays that are illogically presented. Therefore, they become inadequate essays, which are missing sense of the issue at hand.

Many of the problems that have been presented here are not only for native English speakers but also for the ones that are learning English as a second or foreign language. A second-language or dialectic speaker who has thoroughly mastered English grammar, spelling, and sentence structure may still have problems in organizing his ideas and writing essays.

In conclusion, Arigon et al (2013:13) stated that "it is more difficult for a foreign or second language learner to put into practice all the strategies and techniques that have been taught to them in their composition courses since they have to think in English, not in their native language. Besides, if they have not developed this ability in their own language, probably it will be impossible to become a good writer in a field that is completely strange to them".

2.3. Mistakes Commonly Made in Composition Writing

The mistakes in composition writing is a major problem, and there is very little or no disagreement among the experts with regard to the commonly made ones. To convey the message properly in writing composition, it is necessary that students write all the required information and appropriately. They should be able to write the exact type of essay required, providing the right material and obeying all grammatical rules. A study carried out by Abaya (2006) revealed that the lexical errors learners made in their written compositions included: confusion of synonyms, inappropriate collocation, incomplete sentence structures, first language interference and coinage. However, the mistakes commonly made by students when writing composition have been underlined.

It was suggested that students write out of essay topics and types. Students at times do not take the pain to understand the topic and what is demanded of them especially the types of essay. These include the descriptive, the narrative, and the expository. The question may be demanding one of these but the student may deviate. For example, 'Write a letter to your friend in another school to tell him/her how your school celebrated its 50th anniversary'. Instead of writing about 50th anniversary and a narrative essay, the student goes to write about Speech and prize, and expository essay.

Students also make mistakes as to what is the format of demanded essay. Whether it is formal or informal and what would be the essay parts. Students sometimes cannot differentiate between formal and informal; article and letter among others. For example, a student may not be able to identity what a formal letter should have and where to put them such as: The writer's address, date, recipient's address, salutation, title, introduction, body, conclusion, and subscription.

Capitalization and Punctuation marks- Inappropriate capitalization and punctuation are the most common writing mistake. Mostly, capitalization problems go

along with punctuation problems. Students usually commit mistakes in using or omitting commas, full stops, semicolons and colons which equally affects capitalization process. According to Davidson (2005), Punctuation helps others to understand what you intend to say. It was therefore not surprising that Meyer (1985) found that educators see punctuation accuracy as the difference between "good" writing and "bad" writing. He therefore suggested that writing an easy to read style requires students to use various punctuation marks correctly to help the reader construct the intended meaning of each sentence correctly and meaningfully. Rumki (2005), has also buttressed this point by stating that wrong punctuation can interrupt the flow of ideas and change the meaning, but properly used punctuation not only helps readers understand your meaning but also makes them engrossed in one's writing.

The most suggested punctuation mistake in composition writing is the comma. To use comma, students think that it goes wherever one hears a pause in a sentence. This is not so. Commas are said to be after conjunctive adverbs like 'however', 'therefore', 'moreover' or transitional phrases like 'in fact', 'in addition'; listing of things or to separate items in series; separating subordinate clause from main. However, its suggested semicolon should be used to connect two independent clauses. A dash or colon is also stated to be for emphasis.

Students do not care about capitalizing the beginning of sentences. Where proper nouns are also in the middle of sentences, students seem not to know that those nouns are to be capitalized. Even names seem not to be of their concern. The most worrying issue is of first-person singular pronoun or the subject 'I'. Students frequently replace it with the small letter 'i'. Some students try to write sometimes, yet the size is too small to discriminate between the small and the capital letter. Due to the mistakes in

capitalization, this affects punctuations in students' work. Most of them omit punctuations especially 'full stop'. And also make punctuations where they are not needed. It is found also that the students make excess use of 'and', and ignore using full stops and commas. In a piece of simple composition such as a descriptive essay like 'Myself', the students most often do not use full stops and commas until they come to an end. All these punctuation mistakes mar the beauty of essays.

Grammar is another area of mistakes for composition writers. Students make mistakes in the use of correct sentence structure and paragraph development, and in creating a coherent form of writing. According to Kirkpatrick (2007, p.17), "grammar is a framework on which ideas are hung, and the cement that binds words together". To this, Kirkpatrict asserts that, grammar is the rules that govern the way language works. Consequently, a language cannot operate without rules. Kambal (1980) noted that most students were weak in the following areas: tenses, verb structure, and subject-verb agreement. According to Kambal, students showed deficiency in the use of tenses like tense substitution, tense sequence, tense marker, and uncertainty of perfect tenses. In addition to this, learning grammar can be pretty dull, as no one likes rules; and the memorization of rules is worse than applying them. Students usually know how to build tenses, but when use them in written expression they are confused. English has a relatively large number of tenses with some quite subtle differences, such as the difference between the simple past 'I ate' and the present perfect 'I have eaten.' In their essays, a student would have wished to say '….. and I ate T.Z. yesterday', would rather say '…..and I have eaten T.Z. yesterday'

Also, English language has an appreciable number of articles, including the definite article 'the' and the indefinite articles 'a', 'an'. At times, English nouns are

used without articles; this is called the zero articles. Even at some point, students get confuse because they are made to know that every noun that begins with a vowel is said to have 'an' as an article. For example, 'University'. Therefore, will argue so. However, they are to be made know that not all nouns with vowel initial are pronounced phonologically the same. University takes an 'a' article because the initial vowel 'U' is not pronounced. Some of the differences between definite, indefinite and zero article are very easy to learn, but others are not, particularly since a learner's native language may lack articles or use them in different ways than English does. In view of this, studies have showed that most students do not know when, which, and where to place articles; whether it is needed or not. For examples, specific nouns should go with definite articles such as 'the boy in Form One A' (definite), 'a boy in Form One A' (indefinite).

Double prepositioning is said to be another grammatical incompetence of students' composition writing. The following example is an indicative of the use of double prepositions. Students will write their sentences like 'I am from in Tamale', 'I watch football from at 4 O'clock'.

Yet another interesting feature that has been mentioned is usually found in regular classroom situation of direct translation. Students write their sentences direct from their mother tongues such as 'he is name is', 'I will bath water and I will wear my wearing clothing', 'my name is calling', 'I was standing my standing'. These are transferred into their composition writing which give a lot of mistakes.

2.4 Causes of Difficulties in Composition Writing

Accordingly, a sure way to wreck one's chances of learning how to write competently is to believe writing is a "natural gift" rather than a learned skill. People

with such an attitude think that they are the only ones for whom writing is unbearably difficult. They feel that everyone else finds writing easy or at least tolerable.

However, there are many causes of confusion in the minds of writers when it comes to good composition writing, and these range from lack of exposure to carelessness and the inability on the part of the writer. It was therefore not surprising that Nunan (1989) argued that writing is an extremely difficult cognitive activity which requires the learner to have control over various factors without which can cause challenges. This statement is elaborated more by Al – Nakkash (1978: 130), that "the difficulty of composition writing comes from many factors: getting the necessary information, the ability to arrange this information in a suitable order and having the power to express it clearly, pleasingly and effectively". Students usually struggle with the structural component of English because an inappropriate structure complicates the content and comprehension of the text, which a reader deciphers through involvement of a mental process (Quintero, 2008; Nik, Hamzah, &Rafidee, 2010).

Many writers in the field of English have emphasized that much has not been done in the study of composition writing difficulties. Lack of research in writing increases the difficulties as much is depended on trial and error teaching methods to seek suitable approaches. Dysfunctional writing styles can impede ones writing throughout life (Hansel, 2008). According to Taylor (1978), there have been calls for concerns with regards to research on students' writing techniques. Though not referring to senior high students, in Nommo (1977), an article entitled 'The Undergraduate Essay: A Case of Neglect', he argued that researchers have disregarded the research of essay teaching and learning in higher education. Taylor's reason is that, essays as integral part of higher education is easily taken for granted. The limited study on

composition writing difficulties has barred as to which suitable methods and approaches could be adopted for the teaching and learning of composition writing, therefore causing difficulties. This is backed by Muhammad et al. (2012), that the lack of research in ESL (English as a Second Language) writing increases the difficulties as the instructor has to depend upon trial and error methods to find out which approach should be adopted.

Also, a study conducted by Owuondo (2011) revealed that teachers' lack of appropriate instructional methods for the teaching of composition writing has gone a long way to affect students' composition writing. Ahmad et al. (2013) equally bought Owuondo's idea by saying that teaching strategy which does not conform to students' learning styles and cultural backgrounds impedes learning, which composition is of no exception. The study revealed that there was a vicious cycle of students' dismal performance and lack of interest in composition writing in relation to teachers' lack of appropriate pedagogy, interest and confidence in the same direction. The inappropriate pedagogic approach could be the cause of lack of students' interest in the writing aspect. An in-service training for teachers and the design of appropriate teaching and learning materials as well as necessary changes in curriculum development all geared towards motivating and adoption of appropriate strategies of instruction in composition writing was recommended. From the discussion, all doubts are cleared that the teaching methods adopted by teachers have influence on students' success in learning composition writing.

Another cause of writing difficulty is confirmed by Eyinda and Shariff (2010). In their study they accentuate that most teachers dominate in the classroom interaction. That teaching methods used are mainly teacher centered such as lecturing, and question

and answer. According to them, that although, a variety of teaching and learning activities are used in their writing lessons, most of the activities used make teachers dominate class proceedings. Therefore, teachers overwhelmingly control the writing lessons.

Another body of research shows that wide reading leads to broad mind, and the acquisition of vocabulary without which is the reverse. However, studies indicated that most students do not have the reading habit, and therefore their vocabulary level would as well be low. This has adversely affected students' composition writing. Students limited vocabulary has made their writing colorless, boring and ineffective. Vocabulary is the backbone of every composition writings, which without it hinders the flow of the writings. Students are said not to have enough words to express their selves and this is a challenge to them; as composition is all about the manipulation of the rightful words in a given context to bring out meaningful text. Vocabulary is divided in two parts: active vocabulary and passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary is learned for production and passive vocabulary is used only for recognition. Students usually face difficulties in the production area which is associated with meaning (specific/general), form (pronunciation/spelling), possible word combinations and structures (Miller, 1984). It is necessary for students not only know the meaning of the new words, but they should also know which parts of speech they are in order to use them in useful sentences. (Cook, 2008; Shahbazi, 2009).

Social media is another area that has been looked at as a source that impedes composition writing. Students' attention is said to have been taken off completely from academic works by social media that students virtually spent their time on books. Gone are the days when students' means of distance communication was letter writing. This

made them competent in writing in those days. Students minds are said to have been diverted so much to things that are merely for entertainment and gossips rather than improving their studies; therefore, composition writing is not exempted, (Pineteh, 2013).

Writers have also indicated that L1 interferences or the effects of L1 transfer have important implications in the learning of written expression which could be a cause of difficulties in composition writing. According to Nunan (1999), L1 interference is an enormous challenge to produce a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing in one's L2. He points out that this is magnified by the fact that rhetorical conventions of English language, that is, structure, style and organization often differ from those in other languages. L1 learning is different from L2 learning, as the person already knows about meaning and use of one language. Ellis (2003) notes that when writing or speaking in a second language situation, L2 learners tend to rely on their L1 structures to provide responses. If the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus, indicating an interference of L1 on L2 writing. According to Cook (2001), first language helps learners when it has elements in common with L2, but hinders the learning process when both language systems differ. A person who speaks two languages has gone through the acquisition process twice, but second language learning takes many forms and occurs in many situations other than natural circumstances which cause problems (Cook, 1993). Where the L1 has elements in common with the L2, the writer is likely to flow smoothly in words and otherwise for languages that have no elements in common. Therefore, flow in words would bring about good expressions leading to good essays.

More also, the cause of difficulties in composition writing is as a result of lack of well-knit and well-organized presentation skills by students in their work. The information which is well organized is easier to remember and write. As earlier been mentioned in the challenges of students writing that they have the difficulty to write their essays presentably, Grab and Kaplan (1996) emphasized that the root cause is same. Students do not have the competency to effectively present their essays in an acceptable and readable form. They asseverated that information which is well organized and well-presented is easier to remember and understand. This is backed by Bex (1996) that the cause to composition difficulties is because students cannot implicitly present the features of a text that describes the logical relationship between the ideas and information embodied in discourse. To Bex, coherence is helped by cohesion which is the process of connecting one sentence to the next. The production of a coherent and well-organized piece of writing that students cannot manage, is the cause to their challenges. This is magnified by the fact that the rhetorical conventions of English texts such as the structure, organization, lexis and grammar differ from those of other languages (Ahmed, 2010). Observations have shown that students cannot strongly and firmly construct and present their ideas in an organized and convincing manner when writing composition.

Another group of researchers identified the cause of students' composition challenges as a result of incompetent teachers who instead of promoting creative skills urge students for rote learning and exam-oriented language production (Mansoor,2005; Rahaman, 2002; Siddiqui,2007). Ogalo (2011) stated that teachers use very few class activities in their teaching and resort to lecture with the aim of arriving at the end product of writing. Most teachers teach students to acquire just what is to be learnt but the processes involved in understanding every bit of the teaching are not dealt with. All

boils down to rote learning and does not encourage writing. It was stated that teachers should use techniques such as: group work, discussion, dialogue, debate, questions and answer techniques to teach writing. Teachers need also to use a variety of activities which involve the students to actively participate in class and understand every part of composition writing instead of the end result.

The degree and frequency of practice of composition writing has an impact on students' composition writing. All the challenges of inability to gather information for writing, grammar errors, content mastering, unpresentable essays among others are all as a result of students' inadequate practice of composition writing. According to Miles (1975), it is the responsibilities of teachers to teach repeatedly to make students perfect in writing, as teaching of writing is not done once and for all. There should be reinforcement in teaching to coach students to become competent in their writings.

2.5 Teaching Strategies to Improve Composition Writing

With a variety of different skill levels in every classroom, teachers are expected to treat composition by employing effective strategies that allow an enhanced teaching and learning of the subject. It is worth noting that a successful composition by students comes as a result of good and effective teaching and learning strategies.

According to Karliner (1974), writing competency is a skill which needs continual reinforcement; it is impossible to expect that one student will become a good writer if he has never written before and if it will not be required to write again in their college career. Sengupta (2000) also notes that methods teachers use in the teaching of composition writing have measurable effects on the quality of the students' written products. Similarly, Byrne (2000), said writing is learned through a process of instruction in which the student is expected to master the written form of the language

and to learn certain structures that are not common in speech but which are vital for effective written communication. In this sense, Graham and Perin (2007) claim that a well written essay focuses on the topic and has an organizational pattern that enables a reader to follow the flow of ideas. It also contains supporting ideas that are developed through the use of examples, appropriate vocabulary and follows the conventions of standard of written English language such as correct spelling, capitalization and sentence structure. Byrne (2000) added that conscious effort must be made to equip language learners with writing skills which will enable them to organize their ideas so that a reader who is not present and even known to them can understand. Adding to that, Archibald (2001) also observes that teaching method has an effect on the students' ability to reflect on their writing and to produce more effective and appropriate texts in L2. In addition, Hyland (2002) asserts that writing is an activity which must be mastered in order for students to express their ideas effectively in writing. It is therefore imperative for teachers to help students to learn writing skills that will enable them express themselves appropriately and effectively in L2 writing.

Another area as a strategy to improve composition writing according to language scholars is practice and reinforcement. Karlinerin (1974), an English composition teacher stated that writing competency is a skill which needs continual reinforcement; and one should never be expecting a student becomes a good writer if he has never written before.

In the discourses above, almost all have mentioned effective teaching strategies for composition writing. However, as to which approaches or strategies are the most appropriate and effective ones to improve the teaching and learning English composition is another serious area that should be looked at.

There are different approaches as to how to effectively teach composition writing. These include the product approach, the process approach, and the genre approach (Badger and White 2000; Jordan 1997; Hyland 2002; Tribble 1996; and Nunan 1999). According to Faroog, Uzair-Ul-Hassan and Wahid (2012), a genre is a text either spoken or written that serves a particular purpose in a particular context and is composed of a series of conventions.

Product approach mainly focuses on the written product rather than the process to produce a good written text. In this approach, writing concerns the knowledge of structure of a language, and writing development is a result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher (Badger and White, 2000). In addition, Jordan (1997) indicates that the students are required to focus on a model, form, and duplication. Thus, the students study model texts and attempt various exercises that enable them draw attention to relevant features of a text, and then rewrite them in their own writing. However, Badger and White (2000) point out that this approach gives little attention to audience and the writing purpose since learners and instructors tend to overemphasize on the importance of grammar, syntax, and mechanics. Similarly, Myles (2002) confirms that if students are not exposed to written model texts, their errors in writing are more likely to persist. The product-based writing is also associated with weaknesses that, process skills such as pre-writing, drafting, evaluating and revising are given relatively minimal role, and the knowledge and skills that learners bring to the classroom are undervalued.

On the process approach, Hyland (2002) indicates that it focuses on how a text is written instead of the final outcome and has a major influence on understanding the nature of writing and the way writing is taught. Rewriting, revision and editing are essential parts to writing in this approach. Similarly, process writing enables the

students to make clear decisions about the direction of their writing by certain procedures like discussion, drafting, feedback and revision choices (Jordan (1997). Tribble (1996) explains that when using the process-based approach to teaching composition, students should first brainstorm in small groups the topic to be discussed in writing. This is followed by making an outline of the essay. The final stage is editing the essay by the writer himself or herself to eliminate any language errors. Boughey (1997) points out that process approach is one of the best methods of teaching writing. He notes that students are able to improve their writing abilities step by step since teachers will guide them through the whole process of their writing tasks by giving them feedback and enough time and opportunity through peer and teacher review. Contrary to the process-based approach, Badger and White (2000) again argue that learners have to spend quite a long time to complete a piece of writing, which may decrease their learning motivation and therefore impede other types of writing. This statement is buttressed by Freeman and Freeman (2004) that it is time consuming when dealing with large classes.

To alleviate the weaknesses associated with this approach, Badger and White (2000) suggest that teachers should provide learners with some examples of the text type to allow them have a clear understanding about the aim and framework of a particular writing type. Also, that teachers not to spend too much time on one piece of writing and should train students to develop a concept of audience by taking turns to comment on their collogues' writing. That, it is therefore important language teachers adopt this method to improve students' writing.

The other approach as earlier on been mentioned which is prominent in the history of teaching writing, is the genre approach. Nunan (1999) notes that the genre approach to writing emphasizes the need for studying different types of texts as he

explains that different genres of writing are typified by a particular structure and by grammatical forms that reflect the communicative purpose of the genre. According to Faroog, Uzair-Ul-Hassan and Wahid (2012), genre is a text either spoken or written that serves a particular purpose in a particular context and is composed of a series of conventions. The idea behind this approach is that writers write not only for their own enjoyment, but also in different contexts, for different purposes and in different ways. Matsuda (2003) mentions specific genre construction as a help to learners to come up with appropriate actual writing using real situations outside the classroom. Students' awareness of such writing conventions like organization, arrangement, form, and genre is increased. This is supported by Flowerdew (2000) that the aim of the genre approach in writing is to assist students master the convention of a particular form of genre that is relevant to their specific situation. However, this approach has its own critiques. There is lack of consensus as to how effective this approach could be. Badger and White (2000) point out that, the genre approach undervalues the writing skills which learners need to produce a written product and ignores the writing abilities they have in other areas. Gao (2007) supported this statement to say that the genre approach over-focus on the reader while paying less attention to learner expression. Another reason is that learners may not have enough knowledge of appropriate language or vocabulary to express what they intend to communicate to a specific audience. Paltridge (2004) also says that fusion of textual and socio-cultural knowledge makes the identification of the exact knowledge a difficult task.

The ideal approach which is also considered as the most effective and successful in the teaching of writing is the eclectic approach. The eclectic approach, also as process genre approach, combines process theories with genre knowledge. This approach draws ideas from genre approach like knowledge of context, the purpose of writing, and

certain text features and keeps part of process philosophy such as writing skill development and learner response (Badger & White, 2000). To explain this, the eclectic approach gives individual learner's opportunities to develop their creativity and also helps them fully understand the features of target genres (Kim, Y. & Kim, J., 2005). Giving the knowledge of form and language at the same time helps the students to understand how a particular form functions in a particular context; in this way, learners' writing proficiency can be enhanced. To Badger and White (2000), the approach focuses on the development of learners' communicative competence.

Giving more light, Nyasimi (2009) accentuate the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated in this approach in such a way that they complement each other leading to effective composition writing. For instance, in the English language syllabus, it is recommended that class readers and literature set books should be used as sources of writing tasks. This means that through reading of such literary set books, the learner is exposed to new vocabulary, new sentence structures, different registers and good models of language use. Thus, what learners read could form the basis of their oral presentations or essay writing. Critically examining all said with regards to the various teaching approaches, the overall picture shows that there is some disagreement as to what will be the most appropriate approach towards the teaching of writing.

A study by Ogalo (2011) showed teachers did not integrate teaching approaches due to large class size and time. According to Badger and White (2000), classroom learning takes place when teachers draw out the potential of students as well as provide appropriate input to them. It also noted that the development varies between different groups of students because they are at different stages of their writing development. For example, students who have knowledge on the production of the particular genre, and

are skilled in it, may require little or no input. Some may be aware of how the potential audience recognizes what is written, while another group may lack knowledge of what language is appropriate to a particular audience. Thus, these two groups will require different input. The teacher is, therefore, required to assess the needs of the particular group to determine the kind of input needed.

The lapses in all the approaches called for suggestions in different direction. Boughey (1997) stated that teachers should rather guide the students through all the stages of the writing process to achieve desired results by giving them feedback and enough time and opportunity through peer and teacher review. Similarly, Jarvis (2005) also argued that employing effective measures to improve motivation to learning involve providing rewards for achievement for learners, displaying exemplary learner's work on school interactive boards and making positive comments on learners' written work and verbally reinforcing good language responses as part of instruction.

According to Kroll (2003) there are two major components that are most essential for improving students' composition writing skills which include the provision of the feedback on students' written assignments, and assessment. Kroll (2003) mentions that feedback on students' written assignment helps improve learner's ability in any writing course. Feedback is said to teach skills that will help students to improve their writing skills to the point where they recognize what is expected of them as writers. Kroll (2003) again stated that learners should be encouraged to analyze and evaluate feedback themselves in order for it to be more effective. In addition, that it is the teacher's responsibility to help students to develop strategies for self-correction and regulation. With regards to the feedback Williams (2005) mentioned there are categories of feedback but being specific to identify two common categories of feedback that teachers give on students' written essays namely: feedback on form and

content. Williams outlined the most common methods of feedback on form to be outright teacher correction of surface errors, markings that indicates the place and type of error but without correction, and underlining to indicate the presence of errors. On the other hand, feedback on content consists mainly of comments written by teachers on drafts that usually point out problems and offer suggestions for correction. Therefore, students are expected to incorporate information from the comments when making their corrections.

To support this, Gathumbi and Masembe (2005) point out that it is important for teachers to provide regular and quick feedback to the learners. The feedback which may be either formative or summative is very important for further learning as well as contributing to writing fluency. Gathumbi and Masembe further suggest that in order to pre-occupy the learner in doing self-correction, teachers can use a certain correction code with symbols for the different types of mistakes such as poor sentence and paragraph organization, omitting needed information, misuse of sentence linkers and idea connectors, tense and ambiguity. Teachers however need to let the students understand those correction codes to effectively use the feedback for self-correction in order to become more competent in writing.

The other component to improve writing being assessment, is a crucial part of the instructional process in determining student's progress in composition writing. It provides guidance for revision, feedback to both the students and teachers that they can use to improve teaching and learning of writing skills (Kroll, 2003). According to Isaacson (1996), assessment of students' writing abilities is an integral part of effective teaching and learning. The scholar argued that a teacher cannot ensure students' success and make necessary adjustments in instruction without engaging in frequent assessment. There is an asseveration that self-assessment helps students take ownership

for their own writing and enables them internalize the skills they are learning. Effective assessment of a student's writing requires the teacher to have a conceptual model of written expression taking into account purpose, process and product.

Taking into account the purpose of assessing students' writing abilities, Airasian (1996) identifies three types of classroom assessments. The first is the sizing up assessment, commonly known as diagnostic test which is done to provide the teacher with quick information about the students' entry behaviors before planning for their instruction. The second is the formative, used for the daily tasks of planning instruction, giving feedback and monitoring students' progress. The third is the summative, which is the periodic formal functions of assessment for grouping, grading and reporting.

With this, Isaacson (1996) identifies five aspects of students' writing that a balanced assessment should consider. The first is fluency which involves the ability to translate ones' thoughts into written expression by using a variety of sentence structures and appropriate vocabulary. The second is about content which relates to the ability to organize ideas and write coherently. It is also the ability to write creatively through logical argument. Conventions which concern the ability to use the standard conventions of written English language such as correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar and readable handwriting becomes the third. Fourth aspect entails vocabulary which involves the ability to express precise meaning in a variety of writing context. This is achieved by use of wide range of appropriate vocabulary relevant to the idea expressed in writing. Last but not least, the fifth contains syntax which concerns the ability to use a variety of sentence patterns and constructions.

Another strategy to improve composition writing is said to combine the teaching of writing with the other language skills of listening, speaking, and reading. To back this statement, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) point out that for learners to become

proficient writers they require explicit mastery of the other language skills of listening, speaking and especially reading. It is said reading expose students to materials that will help build their vocabulary level. With this, Ikeguchi (1997) presented a lesson plan combining the teaching of writing with reading, speaking and listening. The lesson was presented in three phases. In the first phase, students were allowed to choose any topic of their choice that they were most interested in, and something that they wanted to know more about. Then, they were asked to look for a short passage from a magazine, a newspaper, or an article, and read thoroughly until they understood the content. Copies of the short passage were to be brought to class. The second phase was the interactive phase in which students who had chosen the same topic were called to sit together and form a group. They were then asked to take turns in reading each of their articles to the group members, while everybody else listened and then asked questions to clarify points that were unclear. The third phase was the writing stage. Students were asked to get back to their seats and write about the topic they had chosen to read. The findings indicated that students were able to write freely and expressed themselves meaningfully in writing.

Students' writing ability can also be improved by fostering their interest, motivation and enjoyment for writing, through technology (Graham &Perin, 2007). In addition, it will be convenient for language and content teachers to monitor their students from broad perspectives (Nik et al., 2010). Most importantly, it is necessary that attitudes towards writing and dealing with its issues are changed positively. Teachers must employ strategies to elicit ideas from students as to make the teaching of composition a participatory but not one-sided lesson. Moreover, instant and critical feedback needs to be given on their output so that their confidence is elevated (Haider, 2012).

Moving from the various approaches to teaching composition writing, Riley (2003:3) asserts that there are three steps in composition writing namely introductory step, the body step and conclusion. According to Riley (2003), the main forms of writing are the free and the guided. Guided composition is a technique involving devises that help students to write under the guidance of the teacher or peer students. Kemp (1994) believes that free composition is a spontaneous free flowing type of writing that is unedited and ungraded. It is also highly achieved through brainstorming.

Gebhard (2006) also emphasized that writing composition should pass four phases or stages. According to Gebhard (2006), the stages are the pre-writing stage, thus brainstorming which usually begins with an introduction to a topic by the teacher and then asking the students to think deeply of the title or the topic to collect their thoughts, list all the related ideas and words connected to the topic. Drafting (writing) becomes the second phase to build appropriate sentences which convey the thoughts; the third being the revision stage is to shape meaning and improve language; and the last but not least stage being editing, requires recognition of errors in grammar. According to John Langan, in his College Writing Skills p.4, stated grammatical errors to be "subject-verb disagreement, improper pronoun use, incorrect verb supported with specific reasons or details". According to Gebhard, teaching through these stages would help effect good composition writing.

A review of the literature shows that teaching composition at the Senior High Schools level is a challenging task and therefore using a single teaching approach may not achieve the desired learning outcome. Teachers need to incorporate the insights of the three approaches; product, process, and genre approaches into teaching in order to develop students' writing competence. Also, four steps to composition writing have

been mentioned to include the pre-writing, drafting, revision, and editing stages respectively.

In general conclusion, it is clearly shown from the related literature review that writing is an important skill that students require for their academic advancement. However, it has been noted that composition is a problem that most students face at all levels of the education system.

The study has also established various errors students make in compositions, as well as identifying diverse sources of the errors such as lack of motivation, mother tongue influence, negative attitudes toward composition, and inappropriate teaching methods among others.

In addition, the review revealed various methodologies for effective teaching of writing which process oriented approaches is said to be more successful than product-oriented approaches; not neglecting the role of feedback on students' written essays and assessment practices in essay writing.

It also mentioned wide reading for students as a strategy so that teachers need to expose learners to a variety of reading texts as sources of exposing them to new vocabulary items and sentence structures for effective composition writing.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the procedures and methods that were followed in conducting the research. It consists of the research design, the population, the sample, the sampling techniques and procedure, the data collection instruments, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall strategy that one chooses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way whereby to elicit valid and reliable information to effectively address a research problem. According to Arikunto (1996), it constitutes the arrangement of conditions for gathering and analyzing data which is relevant to the researcher in the most economical manner. It is also a programme that guides the researcher in the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting an observation made during the study.

According to Owu-Ewie (2012, p.99) there are two main kinds of research designs as cited in Mills, (2000); the practical action research and participatory action

research. Practical Action Research allows the researcher to embark on the research within his or her field of work. Therefore, this research gives teachers the chance to research in their classrooms to improve teaching and learning. Through this research, teachers try to enhance teaching learning by a systematic study of a local problem. Its purpose is to study a specific school or classroom with the view of improving practice. According to Creswell (2008), practical action research is a small-scale research that narrowly focuses on a specific problem and usually taken by teachers within a school or a district. An example is the research at hand. Thus, a teacher studies "the difficulties encounter by students in composition writing in a Senior High School".

The other kind of research design being the Participatory Action Research is a type of research which focuses on social or community orientation and emphasizes study that contributes to change in the society. This study is sometimes referred to as community-based inquiry or collaborative action research; or better still critical action research. The purpose of this study is to improve the quality of people's organizations, communities and family lives. (Stringer, 1999)

Practical Action Research is deemed appropriate and suitable for the current study because it offered the best possibility for the study as teaching learning is more practical and involves both teacher and students at the same time. This very design would help in accurate collection, analyzing and interpreting data in the course of the research. This design was also considered because it allowed the researcher obtain qualitative data with regard to challenges students face. During the research, the researcher studied the challenges that students have in English composition writing and adopted steps to help curb those difficulties as the purpose of the study was to help improve students' composition writing.

3.2 Population

According to Koentjaraningrat (1986, p89), "population is all subject involved in research as direct target or as the sources of information" In line with this, Arikunto (1996, p102) defined population as "a set of all elements possessing one or more attributes of interest".

Base on the statement above, it will help choose the population carefully according to the problem of study.

The population of the study was the students of Northern School of Business Senior High School, Tamale. The school has a total number of about two thousand and ninety (2090) students, seventeen English language teachers. Out of the students' population six hundred and ninety are year two students (690). Year- two students were appropriate for this study because they had more exposure to essay writing at their level unlike the year one students who have not been long in the system. In addition to the students, English teachers of the school served as respondents to the study.

3.3 Sample

According to Saleh (2001, p34), "actually the final purpose of a research is to investigate population. But if the population is too big to be investigated, reaching the purpose by investigating the sample is sufficient". Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a suitable sample size for a descriptive study should at least be 10% of the total population.

For the purpose of this research, a sample size of thirty (30) out of the six hundred and ninety (690) students of the year two, and three (3) English language teachers out of the seventeen (17) were considered for the study.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

This section deals with procedures which were used to sample respondents for the study. Purposive and simple random sampling procedures were considered to sample out students and teachers from the area of study. Purposive sampling involves a deliberate selection of sampling units in conformity to the decided criteria (Frankfort-Nachmians and Nachmians, 2005).

For the purpose of the research, a sample size of thirty (30) students and three (3) teachers of English language were considered in the study. The sampling was randomly done out of the population size with a YES and NO written in pieces of papers. Those who picked YES formed the sample population. The random sampling was used because it gives every student the opportunity of being selected. It was to give accurate information for the study and also to save time.

3.5 Research Instruments

The research instruments which were used to collect data were an interview schedule for teachers, a questionnaire and essay writing test for students.

3.5.1 Teacher's interview schedule

An interview schedule was preferred because it enables the interviewer to cover all the dimensions of an investigation through probing of the respondents and hence it provides in-depth information about particular cases of interest to the researcher (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). It was also considered appropriate for the study because many respondents were more willing to communicate orally than in writing and thus provide data more readily in an interview (Best and Khan, 1993). In this study a semi-structured interview was used to gather data on demographic characteristics of teachers, teaching methods, challenges students face in composition writing and measures put in place to improve students' writing abilities.

3.5.2 Students' Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a research instrument that gathers data over a large sample (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). A questionnaire containing both open and closed ended questions was used to collect data from students. This was preferred because it enables the researcher to keep respondents' anonymity therefore making it possible to elicit their responses. Questionnaire saves time and gives compatibility in the responses as there is greater uniformity in the way questions are asked. Similarly, Gay (1992) maintains that a questionnaire gives respondents freedom to express their views and also make suggestions. It was used to collect data on demographic characteristics, difficulties faced in essay writing, causes of writing difficulties, strategies employed in writing composition and suggestions on how to improve upon essay writing.

3.5.3 Essay Writing Test

An essay writing test was used to determine the challenges students face in essay writing. The schedule contained four areas of communicative ability assessed in essay writing, ranging from introduction, content, grammar (language use) and conclusion.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

Data collection refers to the gathering of information to serve or prove some facts (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). It involves the real process of going to the field to get the required information from the selected population.

Data analysis deals with the process of data classification, data coding, data entry and analysis in order to make interpretation possible. It is also concerned with the statistics that are used to analyze data, that is, the organization, interpretation and presentation of collected data (Oso and Onen, 2005). In the study the primary data was students' scripts which were analyzed for students' mistakes depicting difficulties in their writing. A pattern was drawn from the samples of mistakes in the essays for a better

appreciation of the problem. The second data involved a questionnaire which elicited the views of students; and teachers' interview on the difficulties in writing composition. The responses were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis by grouping the responses provided into various themes according to the objectives of the study.

3.6.1 Pre-intervention

With the pre-intervention stage thirty form two students of the school were tested to write a letter to their friends who were final year pupils in the Junior High School to tell them why their school should be the pupils' number one choice. The essay was meant to investigate the mistakes made by students that showed their difficulties in writing. These included introduction content, grammar (language use) and conclusion.

The result depicted that students have difficulties in the above mention areas in writing. From the organization of ideas to introduction and flow in content with good paragraphing, as well grammatical accuracy and good conclusion of essays was difficult for the students.

3.6.2 Intervention

The students were assisted by the researcher on how to go about essays emphasizing much on how to organize ideas for different types of essays, to introduce the essays, build up content with good paragraphs whiles minimizing grammatical errors. Several and regular activities were carried out such as writing of class exercises, class test, individual presentation of assigned essays by reading loud to the hearing of the class among others. All these were done through process writing, not neglecting the eclectic method of teaching writing. The researcher integrated all the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in teaching. Students were usually asked to read materials of their own interest, discuss among themselves, get ideas and then write.

After all these exercises, there was evidence in their subsequent works that proved the students have improved drastically in their essay writing.

3.6.3 Post-intervention

To evaluate the work being done during the intervention stage to find out whether objectives were achieved, thus students' effective composition writing, another test was conducted. This time almost all the students were able to write good essays. There was an indication that the activities helped a lot so students have improved tremendously in composition writing.

3.8 Ethical considerations`

Ethical considerations have to do with the researcher ethical values by making sure all respondents and their responses are kept confidential. The series of questions that a researcher must ask about the research and the specific procedures included safeguarding subjects (Graziano and Raulin, 1997). The researcher ensured that respondents respect, rights to privacy and to protection from physical and psychological harm were safeguarded in the course of the study. The researcher also explained to each respondent to understand what the study was all about. Clear background information on which bases respondents could take decisions as to whether they would take part in the study or not was given. The copies of questionnaires, essay writing test and interview schedules were administered to the respondents only after their consent was obtained. In each case there was a precise briefing on the nature of information required from them by the researcher. Confidentiality of the information provided was assured and they were also asked not to give their identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses and presents the findings from the questionnaire as well as the test administered to the respondents (students), and also the teachers' interviewed base on the objectives of the study. They were thirty respondents sampled and questionnaire. They further wrote test on composition writing. Three teachers of English language were also interviewed. The questionnaire sought to gather information on difficulties students encounter in writing English composition.

The analysis is grouped into three sections. The first section of the chapter presents data on objective one of the studies, "to identify the main challenges students encounter in composition writing". In the questionnaire the students were asked about the difficulties they commonly face in their composition writing. The essay test for students equally presented the difficulties students encounter in their composition writing. Teachers in the interview were also asked to identify the difficult areas they thought students face. The interview further inquired whether they find it easy teaching composition writing. If "YES" or "NO" they should give reasons. Two responded "No" to the question with the reason that students could not construct meaningful sentences therefore found it difficult to express themselves and some students did not understand English language well. The other respondent answered "NO" with the reason that English composition relates to the narrative works of literature.

Section two presents data on the second objective, "to investigate factors that cause composition writing difficulties among students". Again, students were asked in

the questionnaire to state main causes of their inability to write well. Teachers were equally asked what hinders effective composition writing among their students.

Finally, section three data analysis is on the study, "to determine appropriate measures for the effective teaching and learning of composition writing. In the questionnaire again, students were asked of the measures taken to improve their writing; and strategies they had employed in learning how to write good essays. They were further queried on what they thought their teachers should do to help improve their essay writing skills. Likewise, the teachers were interviewed on how they could help the students out of those difficulties. Also, the methods they thought were most effective and therefore use them in teaching composition writing.

Inclusive also in this chapter are highlights as to how students faired at the pre-intervention and intervention stage after the several exercises given to them by the researcher.

4.1 The Pre-Intervention Scores

The pre-intervention was to take care of the first study objective of 'identifying students' difficulties in composition writing'. The pre-intervention was meant to investigate the mistakes commonly made by students that showed their difficulties in writing. The areas that were to be looked at included how students could do introduction of the given topic, write on content, their grammar competence level (language use), and conclusion.

At the pre-intervention stage a class test was given to students on the topic "Your friend is a final year pupil at the Junior High School. Write a letter to him/her

telling him/her at least three things about your school and encourage him/her to make your school his/her number one choice. The test was scored over thirty (30).

Table 1: Results of the pre-intervention scores

Score in range	Frequency	Grades
0-10	19	Below average
11-20	8	Average
21-30	3	Above average

The results as seen in Table 4.1 were an indication that showed many of the students did not do well in the composition writing. Out of the thirty (30) students nineteen (19) were below average, eight (8) were on average and only three (3) students were above the average.

4.2 Difficulties encountered by students in English composition writing

The analysis on this variable will be based on responses from both students and teachers and this will be supported with the findings from the literature review.
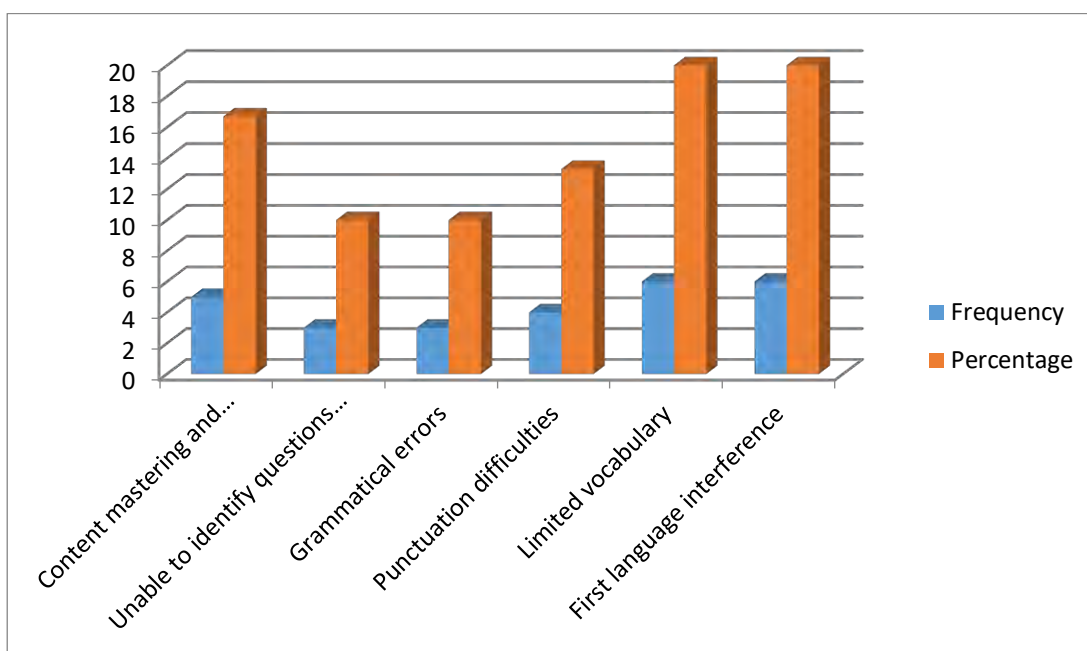
Figure1: Difficulties encountered in composition writing.

Among the thirty (30) respondents, five (5) of them representing 16.7% indicated that they face difficulties in content mastery and paragraph developing. The respondents who chose unable to identify demands of questions and how to go about it were three (3) representing 10%. Three (3) of the respondents representing 10.0% also stated grammar errors (tenses, sentence structure) as their area of difficulties in writing composition. Thirteen-point three percent (13.3%), thus four (4) respondents wrote punctuation inability as their headache in English composition writing. Six (6) respondents also representing 20% toned to limited vocabulary as a challenge. With first language (L1) interference, six (6) respondents representing 20% went in line to that as a hindrance to their effective composition writing. On the area of spelling mistakes, one (1) respondent representing 3.3% selected that as a challenge to writing composition. Last but not least, two (2) representing 6.7% responded that feedback which should have served as an evaluation machine for students to assess their

performance is not given by teachers which serves as a limitation to good essay writing. The scores were sum up to 100, meaning the data validity is 100%.

The results from the data being students' difficulties in composition writing implies that students actual face various degrees of challenges at different stages of composition that affect their writing competence. The most prominent difficulties in composition writing among students according to the questionnaire were limited vocabulary and L1 interference respectively. Both had the scored of twenty percent (20%) each, an indication that first language interference and limited vocabulary are the most prevailing difficulties students face in composition writing. L1 interference negatively affect students' essays because almost all the local languages if not all are morphologically different from English language. Also, there is an implication that writers would not be able to flow well in their essay writing if they are deficient in vocabulary. Next in the rank was content mastering as a challenge to students' writing which scored sixteen-point seven percent (16.7%). It is enormous that most students do not just do well at all in their essays as content mastering is the engine to students writing. As Stalnaker (1951, p.774) commented that, "abilities to organize, to write clearly, etc., cannot at this time be measured independently of the topic in which the writing centers". After content mastering followed punctuation difficulty as a writing challenge. This variable had a score of thirteen-point three percent (13.3%) showing relatively difficulty in students' writing. Rumki (2005), buttressed this point to say that wrong or omission of punctuation interrupts the flow of ideas and change the meaning, but properly used punctuation not only helps readers understand writer's message but also makes them clipped to one's writing. One of the variables being demands of essay questions, also had a percentage of four (4%) which significantly counts. Because it is one of the crucial stages in writing as without the understanding demands of questions, a writer would not know how to go about the writing. Likewise, the remaining variables

of grammar errors, spelling mistakes and feedback cannot be under estimated. Not with standing these, a survey conducted by Farood (2012) on students' difficulties in L2 writing conforms with the above research identified challenges to establish that students encounter difficulties in composition writing due to a number of factors including lack of vocabulary, L1 interference, grammar structure incompetency, spelling disorders and illogical ideas sequencing.

Students' challenges in composition writing from teachers' responses were also represented in Figure 2 below:
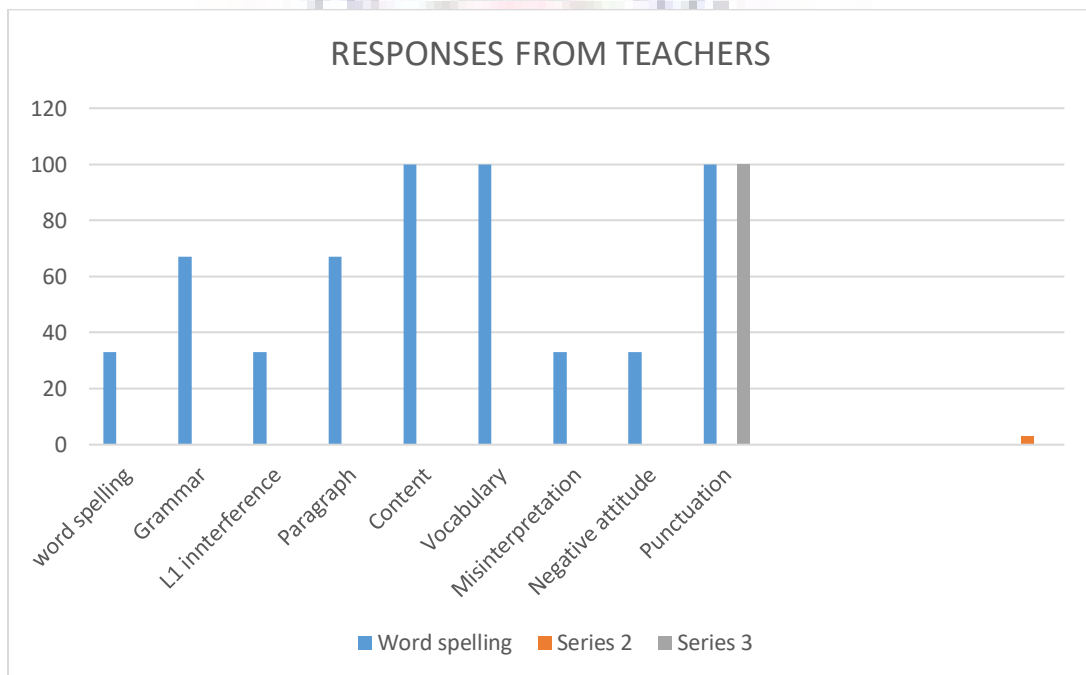
Figure 2: Difficulties of composition writing.

Based on the data obtained from the three (3) teachers, one (1) respondent representing 33% of the sample size stated that students encounter difficulties in word spelling. Two (67%) respondents said students' difficulties in writing are as a result of grammatical errors. First language (L1) interference got one (1) subject representing (33%). Two subjects responded to paragraphing difficulties as one of the worrying issues in composition writing. This variable therefore scored 67% responses from the

respondents. All the three (3) subjects representing (100%) equally went in one direction for content mastery as another great challenge to students' composition writing. Limited vocabulary was also said to be students' difficulties in writing which gained the affirmation of all the three (3) respondents, therefore got 100%. In addition, one (33%) of the respondents stated inability of students to identify what is demanded of a given question therefore misinterpretation of essay topic sets in as a challenge to their writing. One of the subjects, representing 1/3 (33%) of the sample indicated negative attitudes of students towards composition writing as another challenge. To quote few of the responses as to what causes students' writing challenges, a teacher said, "These days students don't know books. All that they know is finger pressing on that horror we call phone; they don't read so what will they write?" Another teacher mentioned that "students have negative attitudes towards English in general. They feel it is a difficult subject, so they don't like it" So when asked what was the way forward, both responded "students' reading".

Analytically, the responses from the various respondents are just same with the students' responses except one element, negative attitude of students towards composition writing as an aspect and even the subject as a whole. During the teachers' interview session, the researcher realized three problems were paramount across all the three subjects' responses which scored 100% respectively. They were content mastering, limited vocabulary and punctuation as challenges to students writing. This triggered the researcher to further find out from one respondent why those problems came about. According to the respondent, most students did not value reading texts because they did not think that reading helps in building their writing competence. As a result, they demonstrate a low level of content mastery whenever they were writing essays. The English language as a subject per say calls in the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, where reading and writing are paramount.

Therefore, if one cannot read, one cannot write effectively. They resorted to their mother tongue transfer when they were short of appropriate words in attempting to express their ideas in the writing, therefore demonstrated poor word choice. Some of the common mother's tongue transfer they did were, *"I was just standing my standing"*, meaning he/she was of no wrong or was innocent; *"When I wake up in the morning, I bathed myself water"*; *"Me myself I am going and I am coming"*.

The findings from the teachers' interview has indeed revealed that many students showed low level of content mastery and organization of ideas and also limited vocabulary; as well as poor paragraph development, poor word choice, use of wrong grammar especially wrong tenses, and also lacked logical argument and coherence. Nunan (1989) endorsed that writing is an extremely difficult cognitive activity which requires the writer to have control over various factors without which can cause challenges.

4.3 Causes of difficulties in students' composition writing

Keeping the objectives of the study in mind, the second objective was to investigate causes of difficulties in composition writing among students. Among the responses to the causes include inadequate research to this aspect, inappropriate instructional methods, dominance of teachers during composition lessons, students' lack of reading, social media's negativities, L1 interference, students' unpresentable essays, and rote learning. The researcher has therefore presented these responses into three broad categories namely, instructional methods, grammar errors, and lack of reading in the table below:

Table 2: Causes of difficulties in composition writing among students

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Instructional methods	1	33.3
Grammar errors	1	33.3
Lack of reading	1	33.3
Total	**3**	**100**

From the data though the causes have been grouped into three main categories: instructional methods (inadequate research, inappropriate teaching methods, teachers' dominance in class, and rote learning), lack of reading, and grammar errors, it has been revealed that there are various causes of difficulties in writing among students. One (1) respondent representing 33% answered to instructional methods, one (1) also, representing 33% responded to grammar errors, and the other stood to students' lack of reading habit. This made up the total sample size of the three teachers.

Referring to the instructional approaches to the teaching and learning of composition writing, the study revealed that some teachers agreed that though they may know some of the appropriate teaching methods to composition writing, certain unfavorable conditions like large class size, inadequate instructional resources, and above all, technical expertise in the subject area compelled them to resort to approaches that are easy to handle. Another reason as a cause to students' composition writing difficulties given by a teacher is that students lack the habit of reading. Through reading that students are exposed to literature that will help their language competence which will in turn reflects on their writing abilities. Students grammatical errors has also cause them not to write with accuracy and fluency. Due to mistakes according to the findings, students write with uneasiness making them produce essays that are not good enough.

Information gathered is that, a respondent said composition writing has not been given much attention with regards to researching for appropriate teaching methods. Questionnaire item (4) was "What do you think are the causes of students composition writing difficulties?" A respondent said:

"There has been no much research into writing, though writing is not a disease that will attract the society including donor agencies to research for preventive or curative effects, but society has forgotten that writing is the tool to everything, including that disease research."

Another respondent added that *"writing is overlooked because when one is able to put a pen on paper thinks writing has been done, but until one arranges ideas in meaningful words, there is no writing"*

Writing has been over looked as many see it to be a simple skill because students started writing when they could not even get the meaning of what they were doing, so did not know writing is done with expertise; not just scribble what comes to mind without proper structural and ideas organization. It is regarded as a secondary skill to speaking by many. The responses given as much not given no composition writing research is evident in Taylor (1978) statement that there have been calls for concerns with regards to research on students' writing techniques.

The fact that research on writing had not been given much attention, this has reflected negatively on the appropriate instructional methods to be used by teachers for effective teaching of composition writing, which has drastically affected students. This statement is evident, as earlier been mentioned in literature by Ahmad et al. (2013) that teaching strategy which does not conform to students' learning styles and cultural backgrounds impedes learning, where composition writing is of no exception. So did Aronoff & Rees- Miller (2007) accentuate that writing is not a natural activity, so explicit

instructions are required for learning this skill. Writing has not gotten the maximum and appropriate instruction that it deserves.

Another respondent who chose lack of reading habit among students said writing is not beefed up at the academic life of students. The respondent said it has been noticed that most students could not read and that affected their writing.

Similarly, another cause of students' inability to write effectively as a response from the last subject was students' numerous grammatical errors in their composition writing. The respondent mentioned that most students were challenged in subject-verb agreement, verb structure, tenses. The use of tenses like tense substitution, tense sequence, tense marker, and uncertainty of perfect tenses were said to be their weakness, therefore poor essay writing. For example, item two of the questionnaire asked students "which specific area(s) of essay writing creates difficulties to you? A respondent stated that students are not able to match verbs with subjects. Students make sentences like "The children was coming from the farm", "The childs are coming", "We was coming to school", "The rain was coming and I tell mama to collect the clothing" The data further showed that teachers did not promote full class participation in the teaching and learning of written composition. According to the data collected, teachers rather dominate composition writing lessons instead of making lessons learner centered, which did not give room to students to individually actively participate in composition lessons. The dominance by teachers prevent students from exploring their talent in writing. Students did not have the opportunity to develop their writing skills, instead, they only become passive learners and this practice of dominance goes a long way to negatively affect their essay writing. The statement of Mercer and Mercer (2004) cannot be overlooked in this direction that writing is a literacy skill and a complex form of self-expression. It is an exhibition of cognitive, visual, conceptual and motor potentials

Significantly, the study discovered first language (L1) interference also, as a hinderance to students' composition writing. Students consciously and or unconsciously resorted to their mother tongue when they were challenged especially with regard to tenses and vocabulary. Students processed their thoughts and ideas in the local language, then did 'direct translation' (word to word presentation of sentences). Students were influenced by the local language without considering the morphological patterns in English language. These hinderances therefore resulted in unpresentable essays. However, this should not be the case as Kleisar (2005) declared that grammar is more than just a set of rules; it is an ever-evolving structure of a language.

Practice neglect by students in composition writing was another clear cause area of hindrance to students' competency in writing. The studies showed that the cause of their inability in composition writing was because most students did not practice it, therefore this made them weak in that aspect. Students were not unveiling themselves to both receptive skills and writing practices, instead, they relayed on only the reception point of acquiring composition writing skills which was not even adequate for students. Exposure to both receptive skills and writing practice were required to develop one's writing ability. The amount of these skills provided to learners both inside and outside the class was not enough to master the skill of composition writing.

4.4 Methods used in teaching composition writing

Strategies used in teaching composition writing were found to include: question and answer, group discussion, peer teaching, brainstorming, lecture, demonstration and oral presentation.
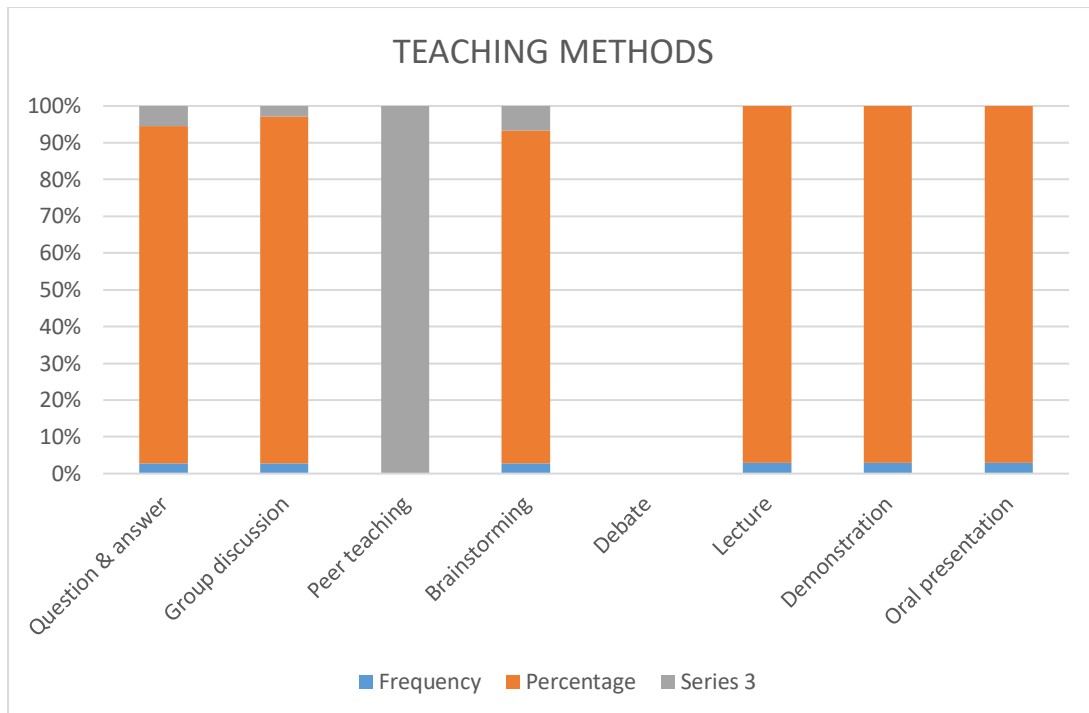
Figure 3: Methods used in teaching composition writing.

The results reveal that some teaching methods are used more frequently than others. 2(67%) teachers indicated that they used group discussion, brain storming, demonstration, and oral presentation. Out of the 2 teachers, one used the methods frequently and the other sometimes. 1(33%) teacher frequently used question and answer method; and 1(33%) teacher also frequently uses lecture method. Reinforcing this observation, further probing in interview made a teacher comment that:

"Lecture method is preferred to any other teaching method because most students remain passive during the lesson for the fear of grammatical errors and can only contribute when they are asked questions which students even barely do and this compel us resort to lecturing''.

Based on these results the most frequently used methods in teaching composition writing included: question and answer, demonstration, oral presentation and brainstorming.

4.5 Measures to curb difficulties in composition writing

Measures to curb difficulties in students' composition writing was the last objective of this research. It was to find solutions to the many difficulties encountered by students in their composition writing. The analysis is based on strategies taken by both teachers and students to improve on composition writing.
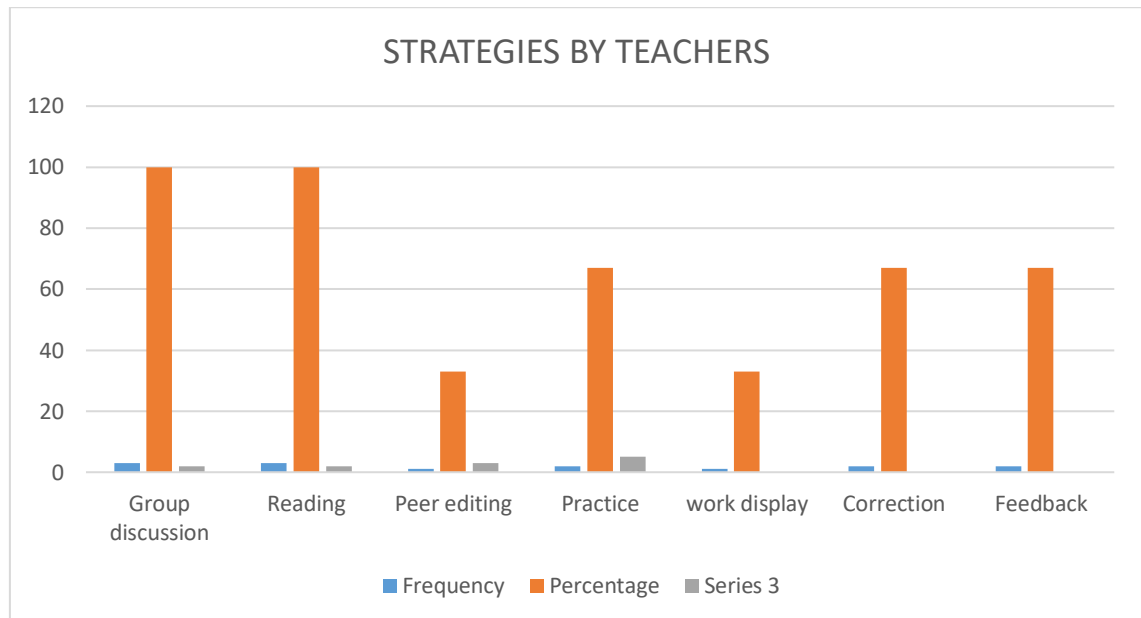
Figure 4: Strategies used by teachers to improve students' composition writing

All the three respondents said composition difficulties could be solved if students would always have group discussion of how to go about assigned composition with the guidance of their teacher before writing, it would help. So, this variable had 100% support. The three respondents (100%) equally encouraged reading widely other written text among students. One teacher encouraged peer editing in essay writing representing 33%. All the three respondents agreed on rewarding students' best written essays. Two respondents said teachers should encourage students to frequently practice essay writing. According to the respondents, well written essays by students should be displayed on class notice boards to motivate other students to write good essays. Two of the respondents said that students should also be encouraged to make correction on their essays. Provision of feedback on students' written essays was also suggested.

The results of the findings indicated that teachers are bent on measures that would help improve students' composition writing. All the three respondents therefore agreed that teachers should use group discussion in the instructions of composition writing, students reading widely on various texts, and rewarding students' efforts on essays. These variables therefore scored 100% to mean they are the assumed most effective strategies to improve composition writing. Practicing, correction, and feedback were the variables that came next with the affirmation of two (2) respondents, scoring 67% respectively. The least-responded variables were peer editing and work display which scored 33% respectively.

With reference to the findings, it is evident that teachers employ different intervening measures to improve composition writing among students. This has sided with Boughey (1997) who endorsed that students should be guided at all stages of the writing process in order for them to be successful in their writings by giving them the necessary feedback and enough time and opportunity through peer and teacher review. Similarly, Jarvis (2005) emphasized that students are motivated to do well in their writings when teachers employ effective teaching measures and provide rewards for learners' achievement.

Table 3: Strategies to curb composition writing difficulties from students' perspective

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Group discussion	4	13

Peer teaching	3	**10**
Reading	7	**23**
Organization of ideas	5	**17**
Notes taking	1	**3**
Clarification	2	**7**
Revision & Practices	3	**10**
Editing/Proof reading	5	**17**
Total	**30**	**100**

The strategies put by students to improve upon their composition writing skills are detailed as group discussion, peer teaching, reading, idea organization, notes taking, clarification, revision and practice, and proof reading.

Base on the data collected, group discussion had a frequency of four (4) respondents represented as 13% of the sample size of thirty (30) students. Peer teaching got three (10%), reading got a response of seven (23%), organization of ideas attained a mark of five (17%), note taking had one (3%), clarification got two (7%), practice three (10%) and proof reading, five (17%).

Analyzing the data based on the suggested strategies given by the students, it was found that reading is the highest strategy students adopted to reduce difficulties in composition writing which seven respondents opted for. According to them, reading widely would expose them to more vocabulary and make them accurate in sentence formation. Five students also opted for idea organization for essays. The students said their challenges were much into these areas so they prepared themselves on how to organize ideas for their essays. According to them, they had learnt to organize ideas based on related topics for their essays. Equally, five students suggested proof reading to improve their competency in composition writing. Four students selected group discussion as a strategy to help them improve in their composition writing. Peer teaching and practice had three (3) respondents each. They claimed collogues' teaching would help them understand better as they are free to speak and ask questions among

their peers and could equally practice what they learnt freely. Two students responded that they would ask for clarification from teachers if they did not understand anything concerning composition writing. Lastly, one subject said notes taking would be of help to solve composition difficulties because revision could be done reaching out to the notes.

4.6 The Post Intervention Scores

The statistics in Table 4 depicts how students performed after the post intervention exercises. It was realized that students improved credibly after the intervention exercise. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the students crossed average in the test after all the exercises and activities on composition writing.

Table 4: Results of the post-intervention scores

Score in range	Frequency	Grades
0-10	4	Below average
11-20	6	Average
21-30	20	Above average

The above was as a result of the constant practice students had in English composition writing. The students were taken through all the aspects of composition writing and were allowed to do free writing to develop their creativity in writing. The aspects included the topic, audience, purpose, thesis, content, and structure. After which they had to write an essay on a given topic, which they did marvelously well considering all the aspects of composition.

4. 7 Summary on data analysis

To sum up for this chapter, data was analyzed based on the objectives of the study which included difficulties of composition writing among students, causes and remedies. Some of the challenges were content mastering, question demands, idea organization, grammar errors, among others. The causes were enumerated to include students' lack of reading, limited vocabulary, first language(L1) interference, and

inappropriate instructional methods. Both teachers and students suggested remedies which notable among them were the following: reading, group discussion, peer teaching and practice, proof reading, rewarding, and feedback.

In all, teachers as well as students have the great responsibilities to result to good essays as teachers are supposed to use appropriate instructions to guide students to write well; and students making unceasing efforts to learn and produce competitive essays.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is on the summary of the study and presents conclusions drawn from the research work. The chapter moves further to give recommendations and suggestions regarded as remedies to improve students' composition writing.

5.1 Summary

The study has its ultimate goal of establishing the causes of composition writing difficulties among students; in the Northern School of Business SHS. The study was shaped by three main objectives among which were:

- To identify the main difficulties students' encounter in composition writing.
- To investigate the causes of composition writing difficulties.
- To establish appropriate strategies to curb students' composition writing difficulties.

At the initial stages of the study, students were facing difficulties with regard to writing good essays. After the intervention test was implemented, it was revealed that about 87% of the students sampled for the study could now compose essays well with ease. This is an indication that when students are generally given opportunities to practice what they have acquired from the interventions given them; they will be able to improve upon their writing.

The study looked at the difficulties students' encounter in their composition writing and notable among those difficulties were, the difficulties in identifying demands of questions, organization of ideas for the essay, limited vocabulary level, formation of acceptable sentences, developing paragraphs and building up complete essays.

The study further studied the causes of students' difficulties in writing where the findings showed the main causes to difficulties were as a result of lack of reading among students, mother tongue (L1) interference to effective composition writing and inappropriate approaches to, and methods of teaching composition writing.

Students being aware of their weaknesses suggested remedies that will help them improve in composition writing. Teachers also gave their suggestion on how teachers can help students in composition writing using appropriate teaching methods and strategies to teach. Those who had challenges with regard to idea organization as well as limited vocabulary which were prominent among the difficulties suggested they would read widely to build up their language. Same suggestion was given by the teachers. Teachers also resolved to use appropriate approaches to teaching composition writing which included the process approach and strategies like group discussion, brainstorming, peer teaching but to mention few. Both students and teachers equally mentioned they would devout much time to the teaching and learning of grammar aspects to help improve students' competency in composition writing. L1 interference in composition writing would be taken care of by critically examining the syntactical and morphological differences between L1 and L2 to linguistically treat them in class to curb those menace. On the part of grammatical errors in students' work, both students and teachers concluded on equally enforcing grammar rules that students need to write good essays.

5.2 Recommendations

Though a number of researches have been conducted on composition writing difficulties, the teaching of composition writing in our schools has not gotten the appropriate instructional approaches and methods to make its teaching effective. Most

teachers still used the traditional ways of teaching composition writing. They teach to the test and are more product- oriented teachers without much concentration on students to let them get more meaning to what goes into composition writing. The process approach has been neglected by most teachers in the teaching of composition writing. As suggested by many writers in the literature, I therefore suggest that the teaching of composition writing should be based on process approach and because students are not having the reading habit, genre approach should be added. Therefore, the eclectic approach (process approach and genre) should be adopted as it was mentioned to be the most effective approach to teaching composition writing.

It is also appropriate for students in the Senior High Schools to understand the detailed structures of various compositions to have good essays. Students should be allowed to develop their own creativity through free writing. They should also be encouraged to widely read various text materials to improve upon their language. More practice on writing should be done. Also, corrections, proof-reading as well as teachers' feedback should be perk high.

If all the afore mentioned activities and practices are given attention, composition writing will get a face lift.

5.3 Conclusion

The challenges associated with the writing of composition among students of SHS, a study of Northern School of Business, Tamale-N/R has been investigated. The main aim of conducting this research was to find out the main causes of the difficulties

after using questionnaire and testing for students, and interview for teachers to find out students' challenges. Activity-base method and strategies were also used in the attempt to address the challenges.

It was realized after the intervention and other activities that there has been significant improvement in students' composition writing skills. However, in spite of the above observation, the findings could not be fully conclusive since the study was limited to only one out of the numerous second cycle institutions. The study could have adopted any other method as there are many dimensions, but adopted this method which serve as a guide to teachers to help students improve their competency in composition writing.

Although the researcher does not intend generalizing, it is with fervent hope that this study leads to the need of an extended study in terms of geographical area, sample size and other factors besides the classroom. These could include students' socio-economic background, former schools before the SHS level among others that may equally cause difficulties in composition writing.

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APPENDIX A

PRE-TEST

Dear John,

I am very happy to write you this letter. I hope every thing is going on well by the grat of GOD. I am also doing well by the most of GOD and reasource why I am writing this letter to you is that I went your make Northern school of B Business your first choice to

First of all in Northem school ofa Business we don't have ware Problem because most of the school is lacke water in they school but most I can tell the last time we thers have water Problem in school. And mostly if water is to not in school the student would not like to go school we don't & saleing and beCause of I like you to come to Nobisco.

Secondary and would like tell you that we have good teachers not we just have by they gulify teacher and die how to teach in tense of leanung They don't joke acerving if we come to Prep in the night they master are teching to help the school student. One day they also be like or the would be more than master.

Candidate's No. .... Page No.................Question No. ....
Do not write in this margin
Write on both sides of the paper
Do not write in this margin

Hartinthly of the school is happen in item of sports in most school Can not help from people but our school is haviing a Profenal training teacher who would as P.E and the help to Exceorise your Body from any big sikenases and you would be saved or well and if you can Pay ball if you come to our school you likely to fate get Ekolomip and this help us to well in the school and by grast of God hope you let Northern School of Business to be you first choiche and if you come I would like to introduce more than as do.

To end my letter hope gettring rich your mother and father for me.

Thank You

Your's Ever

John

$$\frac{1}{10} \times 50 = \frac{5}{50}$$

C - 2
O - 1
E -
MA - 1
5

Dear Ibrahim,

I am very happy to write to you this letter. I hope every thing is going on well and how is the studies, if every thing is normal, the reason why I am writing to you this letter is to inform you about the school you should choose as your first choice. I will encourage you to choose my school Nobisco. the reasons why I want you to choose my school are academic excellent, nature of the school and sports.

firstly, academic excellent. What I mean by academic excelente is that my school is one of the most biggest school in Northern Region that has many brilliant students, the masters teaches students how to write, read and understand that help most of the students to be good in terms of academic work. Also, our students do go for so many competitions with other schools like science and maths quiz, debating and others. so I am encouraging

you to make it your first choice so that you will get and attend it easily.

Secondly, nature of the school. What I mean by nature of the school is that the school is arranged very well starting from the classrooms, administration, dormitories, dinning hall, the school mosque and churches etc. All these are arranged in other order so that it can help students to learn and do other stuffs as expected.

Lastly, the last thing I will like to talk about is sports. Nobisco is one of the schools that do not joke with sports. We have so many games like football, handball, valley ball, short put ete and many more. We also play matches with other schools like Tamasco, Bisco and so on and we do win them because we don't joke at all.

In Conclusion, I think academic exellence, nature of the school and sports are the reasons why I want you to come to my school, Northern school of Business. Thank you.

Your friend,
Mohammed Abdul - Hakeem
(Hasny - J).

$9/10 \times 50 = 45/50$

APPENDIX C

TEACHERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The main purpose of this study is to solicit information on difficulties students face in writing English composition in the Sagnerigu district, especially Northern School of Business, Tamale. And to offer interventions and recommendations for the improvement of composition writing among students.

The response you provide shall be strictly for the purpose of this study and shall be treated with utmost confidentiality that it deserves.

Answer the following questions as candidly as possible. Tick [√] where applicable.

SEX: M [ ]   F [ ]

 Academic qualification:

Diploma   [ ]

Bachelor's degree   [ ]

Masters' degree   [ ]

Number of years of experience in the field as an English language teacher:

1. What are some of the difficulties students encounter when writing essays?
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

2. a) Do you find it easy when teaching English composition writing?

        Yes   [ ]   No [ ]

b) Give reasons for your answer.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………..........

3. Which areas of essay writing do your students find most challenging or difficult?

………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………

4. What do you think are the causes of difficulties in essay writing among your students?

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…..
....

5. How do you help the students to come out of those difficulties in composition writing?

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………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………

6. a) Which of the following methods do you use to teach composition writing?

Question and answer   [   ]

Group Discussion   [   ]

Structured Peer teaching   [   ]

Brainstorming [   ]

Debate [   ]

Lecture [   ]

Demonstration   [   ]

Oral presentation   [   ]

6. b) How often do you use that/those method(s)?

Frequently [   ] Sometimes   [   ]   Rarely [   ]   Never [   ]

6. c) If any other method(s) use in teaching English composition writing, do state.

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…………………………………………………………………………………………

7. What can be done to curb this problem of composition writing difficulties?

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…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX D

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this study is to make findings into the problems that you, students in Northern School of Business Senior High face in composition writing. The responses obtained from this study will be useful in improving and enhancing the teaching and learning of essay writing in secondary schools. Your responses will be treated confidentially and shall be used strictly for the study.

Please you are therefore requested to complete this questionnaire as best as you can, by placing a tick [√] on the statement that is applicable to you or filling in the spaces provided.

1. What challenges do you commonly face in essay writing?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

2. Which specific area(s) of essay writing create(s) difficulties to you?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

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……………………………………………………………………………………………

3. What are the measures you have put in place to solve such difficulties?

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……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

4. a) Which of the following strategies do you commonly employ in learning how to write good essays?

i. Reading widely other written materials in English e.g. newspapers, storybooks etc. [   ]

ii. Ask teachers for clarification of concepts not understood.   [   ]

iii. Revising work learnt in class.   [   ]

iv. Planning or organizing ideas before writing.   [   ]

v. Writing extra essays and giving them out for marking.   [   ]

vi. Making corrections to rectify mistakes on written essays.   [   ]

vii. Proof reading written essays.   [   ]

viii. Role play.   [   ]

ix. Group discussion.   [   ]

x. Peer teaching.   [   ]

4. b) How often do you use them?

Frequently [   ]   Sometimes [   ]   Rarely   [   ]   Never [   ]

4. c). If any other strategy (ies), do state.
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………

5.   What do you think your teacher should do to help improve your essay writing skills?
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
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……………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you for your cooperation

APPENDIX E

ESSAY WRITING TEST

Time: 40 Minutes

Question: Your friend is a final year pupil at the Junior High School. Write a letter to him/her telling him/her at least three things about your school and encourage him/her to make your school his/her number one choice.