

An Investigation of the Current Status of Teaching Composition Writing

(A case study: Secondary schools- The Red Sea State, The River Nile State and Khartoum State)

Dr Amin Mohamed Ahmed MohyAldin

Dr Yasser Othman Jamaan Omer

Abstract

This paper aims to look at the present situation of teaching composition writing in three states, namely, The Red Sea State, River Nile State, and Khartoum State. The study problem lies in that students face difficulties in writing a composition which are related to the content, organization and expression of composition writing. The research has adopted the descriptive method since it suits the nature and aim of the study. In order to carry out this methodology, the investigators used structured interviews of fifteen questions to obtain information from teachers of English at secondary schools in these states about composition writing and an observation checklist to observe what actually done by the teachers of English when they teach their students a composition lesson. The study comes up to very significant results. The most important ones are: students confront many and various difficulties when they attempt to write an English composition and that neither guided nor free composition writing can achieve the main objectives of teaching an English composition. Based on the study results, the study recommendations are suggested. The most significant ones are: composition writing should be as realistic as possible as it is a mean of communication and teachers should bear in mind that the two types of composition, guided and free, are different and that acquiring one doesn't ensure improving the other since students will acquire what they have practised.

Keywords: composition, secondary schools, communication

1. Introduction

Communication is the successful transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver. Whenever communication takes place, of course, there is a sender/encoder and a receiver/decoder. This is the case even when a writer writes a composition from here the writer assumes that there will be a reader one day and that reader will be performing a communicative act when reading the composition.

2. Context of the Study Problem

When students write in a foreign language, the purpose of the writing activity is to catch grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. Under these circumstances, sometimes the only writing students do is to write out grammar exercises which are disguised as composition writing, those are called guided writing, in which students are given a short text and instructed to change all the masculine pronouns to feminine ones or to change all singular nouns to plural nouns or to change from present tense to past tense. The students do not create the texts themselves, because a more traditional philosophy of teaching language has persuaded teachers that students are not ready to create a piece of writing; they are only ready to manipulate forms. The writing is carefully controlled so that the students see only correct language and practice grammar structures that they have learned. Students learning a foreign language often do not do real writing at all even if they can already write in their first language.

In other, more advanced, classes following the same philosophy, students are assigned composition or other kinds of texts to write. Most often in these classes, the poor teacher takes home many students' exercise books at right and carefully marks all the grammatical and mechanical errors in their writings. When the exercise books are returned to the students, often the students are asked to take their exercise books home and correct all the errors and may recopy the texts onto clean sheets. The focus in these types of composition writing exercises is primarily on language structure. Students get good marks if they write compositions with as few errors as possible. In order to avoid errors, then students naturally write very cautiously and conservatively in their foreign language. If what they have to say does not fit with what they already know how to say, they simply write something easier, something they can control. The result can be a student's composition writing that is crippled, filled with clichés, and very boring both for the student who is writing and for the teacher reading all those exercise books.

3. Questions of the Study

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of guided composition writing?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of free composition writing?
3. What are the students' problems in composition writing?

4. Hypotheses of the Study

- i. Guided composition writing has demerits and merits.
- ii. Free composition writing has both advantages and disadvantages.
- iii. There are some problems that are faced by students related to the content, organization and expression of composition writing.

5. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to find a more effective method for teaching composition to EFL students. The method aims at showing students the difference in purpose between teaching composition in a foreign language and in the mother tongue. The latter aims at the development not only of correct but also free, fresh, imaginative writing.

6. Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is that it seeks to help resolve the dispute among foreign language methodology experts and teachers over the method to be followed in teaching composition. Since neither the free composition nor the guided composition can alone realize the ultimate goal of teaching composition, hence a new method will be recommended. Composition writing provides students with physical evidence of their achievement and this, in turn, helps them to determine what they know and what they do not know. Additionally, composition writing can enhance students' thinking skills. Finally, it can foster students' vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and punctuation use.

7. Literature Review

The composition as a Process

Gorman (1999:138) defines composition as "the production and arrangement of written sentences in a manner appropriate to the purposes of the writer and the function of what is written". The investigators deem that composition writing is a complex activity requiring a variety of skills. Hudson (1983:36) states that composition is any organized, self-contained piece of writing written for special purposes. In the researchers' opinion, the term is frequently used for writing assignments, where it usually means a self-conscious process in which students may make thoughtful decisions concerning what they say, and how to organize and develop their ideas and what they use.

John Langan (2000:13) argues that in addition to believing that writing composition is a natural gift, many people falsely believe that writing composition should flow in a simple, straight line from the writer's head onto the written page. Form the researchers' point of view, composition writing is seldom an easy, one-step journey in which a finished paper comes out in a first draft. The truth is that writing a composition is a process of discovery that involves a series of steps, and those steps are very often a zigzag journey. The skills-based approach views writing composition as a collection of separate skills, including letter formation, spelling, punctuation, grammar, organization and the like. This approach also purports writing a composition as a product-oriented task. In this respect, Mc Laughlin et al (1983:42) state that writing a composition, like many other complex tasks, requires that learners organize a set of related sub-tasks and their components. In contrast, the whole language approach views writing composition as a meaning-making process, which is governed by purpose and audience rather than by compositional rules. From the viewpoint of the researchers, a thorough definition of composition writing should involve both skills and meaning. This is precisely the perspective taken by Krashen (1984:28) who states that:

Writing composition competence is necessary but is not sufficient. Writers who are competent, who have acquired the code, may still be unable to display their competence because of insufficient composing processes.

Efficient composing processes, writing performance can be developed via sheer practice as well as instruction.

Ross W. et al in their book (1986:18) state that, Writing and Skills describe the three stages involved in composition writing process as rewriting which includes all the preliminary things students do to get started writing, the writing stage involves putting their ideas into sentences and then into paragraphs and post writing includes changing or adding to their first draft. It also involves sharing their writing with an audience and having others help them revise and edit their compositions. Finally, post writing means polishing the final product by proofreading and making corrections in grammar, mechanics and spelling.

In the researchers' opinion, Ross W. et al give the complete definition of composition writing process because their definition includes all the requirements of the activity.

Hennings (1986:15) stresses the components of composition writing process as the importance of rehearsing ideas before writing by fast storming and categorizing ideas, the malleability of the first draft, the steps to take in revision the pleasure of sharing ideas through writing.

From the investigators' viewpoint, the whole work- the finished product- must demonstrate a certain degree of taste, originality, creativity, and harmony; it is this degree that indicates the artistic value of composition.

Joseph O'dengo (1980:214) depicts the process of writing a composition in a very striking way; he says, "it is the task of writing a composition which forces you to organize your own thinking and develop your own point of view on issues".

To the researchers, students expressing themselves, ideas, new information, or whatever, in written form, is really a 'life-skill' which they will need in almost every area of work. Composition writing gives them practice and develops in them the skill to express themselves.

Mary S. Lawrence in her book Writing as Thinking Process (1987:3) states the general principles of composition writing process, she says:

The text is based on an approach to writing
which is semantic and cognitive - providing
for active transfer of each student's knowledge
of grammar and vocabulary; it bridges the
gap between controlled writing and free writing

Lawrence shares the researchers' opinion that the process of writing composition involves composing. It also involves communicating. Most of the writing people do in real life, is written with a reader in mind; a friend, a relative, a colleague or a particular reader. Knowing who the reader is, provides the writer with a context without which it is difficult to know exactly what or how to write. And yet it is possible to find writing tasks in some teaching materials which do not specify a context to help the student. In other words, the selection of appropriate content and style depends on a sense of audience. One of the teacher's tasks is to create contexts and provide audiences for writing. Good writers can be characterized as people who have a sense of purpose, a sense of audience, and a sense of direction in their writing.

From the researchers' point of view, the act of writing differs from that of speaking in that it is less spontaneous and more prominent, and the resources which are available for communication are fewer because people cannot - as they do in conversation - interact with

the listeners and adapt as they go along. For this reason, the conventions of writing tend to be less flexible than those of speaking, and the language which is used tends to be standardized. Geoffrey et al (1980:116) set out the process of writing composition by stating that "when we write, unlike when we talk, we are engaged in an activity which is usually at the same time both private and public".

Francaise (1996:62) defines controlled composition as "all the writing your students do for which a great deal of the content and/or form is supplied". Controlled composition writing is opposite to freewriting, he adds, in free composition writing, students generate, organize, and express their own ideas in their own sentences.

The researchers consider that as with any free composition writing task, with guided composition too, students should be able to discuss, make notes, share findings and plan strategies together before they begin to write. Karen Greene (1983:109) stresses the definition of parallel composition writing by saying, "parallel composition writing, in a way, the freest kind of controlled composition writing". In the researchers' view, instead of making change in a given passage or writing according to an outline or given sentences, students read and study a passage and then write their own on a similar theme, using as a guide the vocabulary, sentence structure, cohesive devices, and organization of the model passage.

Arthur Brooks (1986:29) elevates the status of controlled composition by stating that "controlled composition is a useful tool at all levels of composition teaching and not just in the early stages before students have gained enough fluency to handle free composition".

The researchers see that, it is with that word 'enough' that the difficulty arises. How much language acquisition is enough for a student to be able to write few sentences? Teachers let students speak their new language as much as possible, they give them exercises for practice, they encourage them to try to express themselves, and they are delighted if students understand what they say. Teachers give them help as they go along, correcting grammar, supplying an idiom, suggesting a word. In writing, too, students need the same opportunity to get words down on paper as soon as possible and to try out the written language.

Brooks goes on to support his preference to controlled composition and added that "controlled composition gives students focused practice in getting words down on paper and in concentrating on one or two problems at a time".

From the researchers' viewpoint, for the teacher, controlled composition is easier to mark and less time-consuming, so more can be assigned. If the student is steered away from choosing content or what to say about a topic because it is supplied, then both the student and the teacher can devote full attention to mastery of the focal point of the controlled composition, whether that is the use of past tense ending, plural or the tenses used in indirect speech.

Hedge (2000:148), on the other hand, describes carefully the characteristics of good writers of composition, she says:

Good writers appear to go through certain processes which lead to successful pieces of written work. They start off with an overall plan in their heads. They think about what they want to say and who they are writing for. They then draft out sections

of the writing and as they work on them
they are constantly reviewing, revising,
and editing their work.

In other words, the researchers agree to her description and characterize good writers as people who have a sense of purpose, a sense of audience, and a sense of direction in their writing. Unskilled writers tend to be much more haphazard and much less confident in their approach.

Frank Smith (1982:444) highlights the advantages of free composition as,

"it helps students to discover the things they can write
about within a general theme. It also obliges students
to redraft thereby highlighting the importance of
redrafting in the process of composing"

The researchers think that the process of composition writing as Smith puts it consists of three major activities or groups of activities: pre-writing, writing and rewriting, and editing.

Hedge (1988:146) defines free composition as "a technique which has the main purpose of generating ideas". In the researchers' view, this technique tries to overcome the problem of the writer's 'block'. It has sometimes been called speed writing or quick writing because its main feature is writing as quickly as possible without stopping. Its other main feature, a product of the speed, is that the writer concentrates on content rather than on form. In this way, the primary focus is on getting as many ideas down on paper as possible. At a later stage, quality can take over from quantity in a process of selection and redrafting.

Tribble (1997:103) also defines the process of composition writing in a skilful way, he says "it includes all of the preparatory work a writer does before beginning writing, as well as the work that he or she does while writing and during revising and editing".

The researchers believe that it is now generally accepted that most writing processes are cyclical and non-linear rather than simple and linear. Learning to write is not just a question of developing a set of mechanical 'orthographic' skills, it also involves learning a new set of cognitive and social relations. A version of this view is put thus by Kress: "command of writing gives access to certain cognitive, conceptual, social, and political arenas".(1989:46). Commenting on this, the researchers think that, the person who commands both the forms of writing and of speech is therefore constructed in a fundamentally different way from the person who commands the forms of speech alone. Zamel (1983:19), and Raimes (1985:187) shared a description of the process of composition writing as being "recursive and complex". In the researchers' opinion, although there are identifiable stages in a composition, typically writers will revisit some of these stages many times before the composition is complete. On the other hand, Hedge (1988:23) expresses an opinion which is shared by most commentators on the process of composition writing when she says:

"good writers tend to concentrate on getting the content right first and leave details like correcting spelling, punctuation, and grammar until later".

The investigators see that such an approach to preparing for writing reduces the emphasis on the actual composition, stresses rather the importance of good preparation. If writers have a

clear sense of direction, based on an explicit understanding of the structure, they are going to write and on the preparation, they have carried out in the context of this understanding, the composition itself can cease to be dependent on invention alone and become much more a process of systematic assembly.

Bialy Stock and Ryan (1985:207) state that the process of composition writing "depends on more detailed analyzed knowledge". Brooks (1964:167), on the other hand, describes the process of composition writing in a very cunning and different way, he says:

Writing is highly personal affairs, in which the learner must respect all the mandatory features of the target language code as it appears when written, while at the same time being permitted and encouraged to exploit the volitional and creative aspects of the new language to the extent that his ability and his experience permit.

Samonte (1976:11) states that composition process "is the production of a sequence of sentences arranged in a certain order, and linked together in certain ways to form a coherent text". From the researchers' point of view, such an organization of sentences into a coherent text enables the writer to communicate successfully with the reader through the medium of writing.

8. Methodology and tools

The researchers adopt a descriptive methodology. There are some reasons for choosing this type of methodology. Because the researchers know some aspects and dimensions of the problem, they want to study and at the same time want to reach clear, accurate and detailed knowledge of the problem. Furthermore, this methodology is compatible with the aim and nature of the study.

To look into the genuine situation that prevails in some Sudanese secondary schools when teaching composition, the researchers used two different types of investigation. These tools include a structured interview and an observation checklist. The structured interview was distributed to teachers and inspectors of English at some Sudanese secondary schools. The interview consists of fifteen questions. These questions are about the different aspects of the process of teaching composition. Its principal aim is to obtain information about the teaching of this important skill. In order to draw a complete and clear picture of what is happening in classes when teaching composition writing, a format of observation checklist is designed. The observation checklist consists of twenty items that cover the different facets of the role done by the teachers and it is used to investigate the role of the teachers when teaching their students a composition lesson. This observation checklist is also used in twenty classes. Teachers' role or job is investigated through three stages that is to say, before they come to class, when they are inside their classrooms, and after a composition lesson.

9. The Procedure

To tackle the problem of this study, two steps will be taken:

1. Conducting a field study in the present situation of teaching composition writing using tools such as a structured interview and an observation checklist in the secondary level schools in three states, i.e. , Khartoum state, The River Nile state and The Red Sea state.
2. On the basis of the results of the field study, the recommendations are suggested.

10. Research Population

It includes the following:

1. Some Sudanese secondary schools in Khartoum State, the River Nile State and the Red Sea State. There are about forty Sudanese secondary schools. The number of students who are under investigation is about one thousand secondary school students both boys and girls.
2. Fifty teachers who are teaching English at secondary schools.
3. Ten inspectors of English Language at the secondary stage.

The forty secondary schools include both male and female students. They are academic, commercial, and technical secondary schools. The criterion upon which these schools are chosen is a geographical one. The field survey took place two years ago. It took about one year to finish the study.

11. Detailed Analysis of the Structured Interview

The researchers arranged the answers to all of the questions into categories. The similar answers for each question form a category. This category is given a suitable name according to what is included in it. Some questions consist of a different number of categories. The number of teachers who selected a particular category is indicated clearly in front of it. Now let us move to the structured interview for analysis, discussion and interpretation.

1. What are the aims of teaching composition?

The options for this question are:

a. Distant communication	70%
b. An effective way for helping students learn a language	10%
c. Integration of the language skills	8%
d. Comprehension	5%
e. Consolidation of learning	7%

It is clear that the most favoured aim is distant communication whereas the least favoured one is that of comprehension. This indicates that teachers think that the most important aim which can be achieved through composition writing is communication.

2. What types of written English will your students need to understand?

The categories of this question are as follows:

a. Informal English	20%
b. Formal English	35%
c. Communicative activities	45%

It is obvious that the most favored type of written English is included in the category of communicative activities, while the least favored type of written English is included in informal English category.

It seems that these are the various types of written English that Sudanese learners in secondary schools need to understand. However, are all these types of written English suitable to Sudanese secondary school learners? Which of them has the greatest importance and the least importance? Not all of them suitable for Sudanese secondary school learners of English. For example, informal English is not suitable for them. So the researchers agree with the teachers of English who replied to this question in their opinion of choosing communicative activities first, formal English second, and informal English last.

3. How do you link written work with your main course?

The categories of this question are as follows:

a. Textbook materials	55%
b. Creation of new materials	20%
c. Language aspects	15%
d. Integration of the skills	10%

The researchers notice that the majority of the teachers preferred linking written work with the main course through what included in textbooks, while the minority preferred linking it with the main course via integration of the four skills. In the researchers' opinion, teachers who think that linking written work with the main course is preferable, have the reason that it connects students with what is included in the textbook.

4. What would you say the sub-skills of writing are?

The categories of this question are three in number. They are:

a. Aspects of language	55%
b. Attitude toward writing composition	42%
c. Transcription	3%

The researchers observe that the majority of the teachers mentioned the sub skills that appear in aspects of language category, whereas the minority cited those included in the category of transcription. It has been observed that teachers succeeded in identifying most of the enabling skills of composition writing even though there is a vital question that imposes itself here. This significant question is how to bridge the gap between an analysis of writing skill and actual classroom teaching?

5. What are the general principles of teaching composition writing?

The answers to question five are categorized into four broad groups. They are:

a. Aim	40%
b. Interest of materials	30%
c. Presentation and practice	28%
d. Sufficient time for answer	2%

It is obvious that the majority of the teachers suggested the principles that are included in the aim category, while the minority proposed those which appear in the category of sufficient

time for answer. It has been observed that writing skill or composition writing has its own peculiar essentials. The foremost principle that teachers stated must be put into consideration is the definite aim that each writing activity or exercise implies. Teachers must know exactly what that activity or exercise should achieve. These aims of the written activities should be based on the needs of the pupils (e.g. what they find difficult) and the syllabus. When entering classes to teach a composition or a writing lesson, pupils should be given a purpose for each written activity before they start writing. They should know what they are writing for.

Also writing activities should teach and not test. Checking pupils' answers should be done to help them make progress: teachers should not make their pupils feel they have failed an exercise. Writing activities to learn. Moreover, they should progress from the simple to the more complicated as the course proceeds and the pupils learn. Different kinds of writing practice should allow the pupils to develop skills and knowledge similar to those of native speakers. To do this pupils' participation must be encouraged and used as often as possible.

6. What types of written exercises do the course books provide to help students practice the writing skills they need?

The categories of this question are two in number. They are as follows:

a. Textbook exercises	80%
b. No exercises	20%

It is apparent that most of the teachers mentioned the types of writing exercises included in the textbook category, whereas a few of them stated clearly the unavailability of exercises in the course books.

It is found that it is the teachers' responsibility to supply their pupils with suitable writing materials to help them practice the writing skills they need. Writing should be taught and practised.

7. What are the potential problems that are encountered by Sudanese secondary school pupils in composition writing?

The replies to this question are categorized into three main categories. They are:

a. Content	70%
b. Organization	20%
c. Expression	10%

It is obvious that most of the teachers announced the problems or difficulties that related to the content area, while a few of them indicated the problems that have a relationship (connection) with the expression category.

This indicates that students face many difficulties in getting the content of their composition right.

8. Can you state some ways of solving these problems?

The same categories have been given to the answers to question eight.

a. The content	55%
b. The organization	25%
c. The expression	20%

The researchers find that the majority of the teachers suggested the solutions concerning the organization, however, the minority recommended the solutions related to the expression category. This indicates that organization is of a paramount significance to composition writing.

9. What percentage of the teaching time do you suggest should be given to composition writing?

The categories of the answers to this question are nine in number. They are as follows:

a. 25% of the teaching time would suffice	40%
b. 60% of teaching time should be devoted to composition writing	20%
c. 50% of the teaching time should be given to composition writing	17%
d. 30% of the teaching time should be appropriate to composition writing	12%
e. 20% of the teaching time is sufficient for composition writing	5%
f. 40% of the teaching time should be allowed for composition writing	2%
g. 5% of the teaching time should be certified for composition writing	2%
h. 80% of the teaching time should be specified for composition writing	1%
i. 10% of the teaching time should be taken up by composition writing	1%

Most of the teachers preferred that composition writing should be given 25% of the teaching time, while very few of them suggested that it should be given 80% or 10% of the teaching time. In the researchers' view, the percentage of 25% is suitable since it allows time for other language skills to be practised.

10. Is it important to teach composition? Give reasons.

The categories of the answers to this question are five in number. They are:

a. Communication	40%
b. Psychological need	30%
c. Help to memory	15%
d. Information organization	5%
e. Accuracy development	10%

It is clear that the majority of the teachers mentioned the ultimate aim of composition writing, while the minority cited the role of composition in information organization. It is found that composition writing is one of the aims of teaching/learning English. It is a means of remembering what you have read and helps comprehension and makes it faster. Besides, it raises students' standard and enables them to master English. This leads to creativity and generates confidence in the pupils' abilities when they write English.

11. What makes writing difficult?

To this question, the answers are categorized into four categories. They are:

a. Psychological difficulty	50%
b. Linguistic difficulty	30%
c. Cognitive difficulty	15%
d. Affective difficulty	5%

The researchers noticed that most of the teachers attributed the difficulty of writing to the psychological factor, whereas, a very few numbers of them said that affection affects students' writing. In the researchers' opinion, giving the pupils plenty of group preparation, planning and discussion before they begin to write can solve these difficulties. Also by revising or pre-teaching the vocabulary, structures and cohesive devices before the pupils begin to write. Furthermore, by allowing the pupils to choose the topics they write about or by choosing topics that teachers sure will interest and motivate them.

12. Which do you prefer, free composition or guided composition?

The teachers' answers to this question are classified into two categories. They are:

a. Free composition	30%
b. Guided composition	70%

It is evident that most of the teachers of English at secondary level schools, prefer teaching guided composition to free composition. From the researchers' point of view, neither the free nor the guided composition type can achieve the main objective of teaching composition. Yet, each has strengths as well as weaknesses.

13. From your own point of view, what are the strengths of free composition?

The teachers' responses to this question are grouped into three groups (categories). These are:

a. The practice of a particular skill	15%
b. A clear aim in mind	20%
c. Identifying areas of pupils' misunderstanding	65%

It is apparent that the majority of the teachers who state that pupils' areas of misunderstanding as the uppermost, while the minority state the practice of a specific skill. In the researchers' view that free composition fails to achieve its objectives. This failure is due to the basic tenets of the free composition itself and its inappropriateness for the situation of FL learning in Sudan.

14. In your opinion, what do you think the weaknesses of guided composition are?

The categories of the teachers' replies to this question are three in number. They are as follows:

a. Untrue communicative activity	30%
b. Demotivation	15%
c. Failure of objective	55%

It is conspicuous that most of the teachers state the failure of guided composition to achieve its principal objective, whereas a few numbers of them declare that it restricts or hinders free expression. In the researchers' opinion, the two types of composition, guided and free, are different, and that acquiring one does not ensure improving the other. Students will acquire what they practice.

15. What do you do about your pupils' errors in composition writing?

Teachers' answers to this question are classified into three categories. These categories are:

a. See errors as friends and not as enemies	50%
b. Establishing the causes of errors	40%
c. Let pupils identify and correct errors	10%

It is evident that half of the teachers stick to the category of looking at errors as friends and not as enemies, while few teachers favoured the category of allowing pupils to identify their errors and correct them. From the researchers' point of view, the principal job for the teachers of composition is not to search for errors- that, after all - is what pupils should be doing before they hand in their exercise books to teachers. But, obviously, when FL pupils write, they do make a lot of mistakes, and it becomes necessary for the teachers to devise ways for dealing with the errors so that they do not become the sole focus of a piece of writing. A specific assignment will call for its own schedule and method of error correction.

12. Summary of the Results of the Structured Interview

The researchers arrive at the following results:

- a. The most significant aim of teaching composition at the secondary stage is distant communication.
- b. Informal English is not a suitable type for written English at secondary level schools.
- c. It is preferable to link written work with the main course through what is included in the textbooks.
- d. Enabling skills of composition writing is of paramount significance in writing a composition.
- e. The main principle on which composition writing relies is the definite aim that it implies.
- f. Writing exercises included in the textbook are suitable and sufficient for helping students practice the writing skills they need.
- g. There are many difficulties that are faced by Sudanese secondary school students in writing the content of their composition.
- h. Organization is of greater importance to composition writing, so most of the solutions given by the teachers pertaining to this area.
- i. A composition writing activity should be given 25% of the teaching time.

- j. The utmost importance of composition comes from its being a medium of communication.
- k. Most of the difficulties encountered by the students in composition related to the psychological factor.
- l. Most of the teachers of English preferred teaching guided composition to free composition since scoring is an easy task for them and students make fewer mistakes.
- m. Teachers' majority state that identifying students' areas of misunderstanding is a top advantage of free composition activity.
- n. Failure of guided composition task ensues from its being unable to realize its main objective.
- o. Half of the teachers of English in secondary schools, in this research, consider students' mistakes in composition writing as friends and not enemies.

13. The Detailed Analysis of the Observation Checklist

As concerns the checklist that deals with the teachers' role when teaching a composition lesson to their pupils, the researchers would like to make a clear and full picture of **What Actually Done by the teachers**. This can be realized through different texts (compositions) given by the teachers. By analyzing the observation checklist, the researchers have come to these conclusions:

No	Item	Number of Teachers	Percentage
1	Type of composition used by the teachers to practice composition writing - Free composition - Guided composition	5 15	25% 75%
2	Control exercised over the linguistic aspect and the topic of the composition - Linguistic aspects of the language - Topic of the composition	13 7	65% 35%
3	Pupils provided with a model of some type with directions for manipulation in rewriting the model	6	30%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Missing words - Parallel paragraph - Rearrangement of sentences 	4 10	20% 50%
4	<p>Topics selection according to the variables that affect our teaching of composition (such as the age, sophistication of the pupils, etc)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our students' age and sophistication - Teachers who do not use topics that appropriate for the pupils' age and sophistication 	6 14	30% 70%
5	<p>The preparatory stage of a composition lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give this stage its due attention and prepared themselves and their students for it - Do nothing in this stage 	7 13	35% 65%
6	<p>Raising students' motivation to write in English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whenever possible - Rarely encourage their students to write in English - No encouragement at all 	8 9 3	40% 45% 15%
7	<p>Teachers' intervention while writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers who always intervene while writing - Teachers who occasionally intervene while writing - Teachers who do not intervene at all 	7 10 3	35% 50% 15%
8	<p>Type of the writing material to be written</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing materials that allow students to be exposed to the various types of composition - Writing materials which do not allow students to be exposed to the to the types of composition 	6 14	30% 70%

9	The number of times of composition writing - Teachers who allow their students to write composition only once - Teachers who allow their students to write composition several times - Teachers who allow their students to write composition many times	15 4 1	75% 20% 5%
10	Grading of the writing materials that are given by the teachers - According to the level of the pupils in terms of difficulty - Are not in accordance with the level of students in terms of difficulty	7 13	35% 65%
11	Adoption of the audio-visual aids - Most of the time used the audio-visual aids - Sometimes used the audio-visual aids - No use of the audio-visual aids at all	3 5 12	15% 25% 60%
12	Teachers' job is to provide their students with the kinds of knowledge that are necessary for successful composition writing - Always give their pupils the kinds of knowledge necessary for successful composition writing - Sometimes give their pupils the kinds of knowledge necessary for successful composition writing - Never provide their pupils with the kinds of knowledge that enable them to write successfully	7 8 5	35% 40% 25%
13	Teachers' role is to help their students know that composition writing should be as realistic as possible	1	5%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always help their students know the realism of composition writing - Sometimes help their students know the realism of composition writing - Never help their students know the realism of composition writing 	7	35%
		12	60%
14	<p>Integration of free composition writing with other language skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers always let their pupils know that free composition can only be developed with the help of other skills - Teachers sometimes allow their students know that free composition can only be developed through the aid of other skills - Teachers never permit their students to know that free composition can only be developed with the help of other language skills 	8	40%
		9	45%
		3	15%
15	<p>Flexibility with students' answers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Satisfied with a response that sensible in the context - Insisted on a unique correct response 	9	45%
		11	55%
16	<p>Correcting composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers correct all mistakes - Teachers correct some mistakes - Teachers never correct students' composition exercise books 	11	55%
		7	35%
		2	10%
17	<p>Teachers use abbreviations or symbols characterizing different types of error</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers who always use a marking code - Teachers who at a time use a marking code - Teachers who do not use a marking code at all 	7	35%
		10	50%
		3	15%

18	Students' self-correction of composition - Teachers who allow for self-correction whenever is possible - Teachers who rarely allow for self-correction of composition - Teachers who never allow for self-correction of composition	8 9 3	40% 45% 15%
19	Teachers' discussion and analysis of students' common errors - Teachers always review with the class the common errors they have come across in their composition books - Teachers sometimes discuss and analyze with the students the common errors they have come across in their composition books - Teachers never revise with the pupils the common errors they have made in composition writing	3 6 11	15% 30% 55%
20	Reinforcement of some grammatical constructions or other items involved in composition writing - Teachers give the class exercises (oral or written) with the purpose of re-teaching - Teachers do not ask their students to correct the mistakes pointed out by them	8 12	40% 60%

14. A Summary of the Results of the Observation Checklist

To sum up the results of the observation checklist, the researchers have arrived at the following:

1. Guided composition is used by most of the teachers.
2. Control is exercised over the linguistic aspects of the language by the majority.
3. Pupils are often provided with rearrangement of sentences with directions for manipulation in the rewriting stage.
4. Most of the teachers do not employ topics that fit in with their students' age and sophistication.
5. Most of the teachers do not give the preparatory stage its deserved attention and prepare themselves and their students for it.

6. Some teachers rarely encourage their students to write in English.
7. Most of the teachers occasionally intervene while writing.
8. Most of the teachers do not give their pupils the type of writing material that allows them to be exposed to various types of composition.
9. Most of the teachers do not allow their students to write composition many times.
10. Grading of the writing materials according to the students' level, is not practised by the majority of the teachers.
11. Most of the teachers do not use audio-visual aids.
12. Most of the teachers sometimes give their pupils the kinds of knowledge necessary for successful composition writing.
13. The majority of the teachers never help their students make their composition writing realistic as far as possible.
14. Some teachers sometimes allow their students to know that free composition can only be developed via the aid of other language skills particularly reading.
15. Insisting on a unique correct answer is adopted by most of the teachers.
16. Most of the teachers prefer correcting all the mistakes in the pupils' composition.
17. Some teachers occasionally use a marking code that is familiar to their students.
18. Some teachers rarely allow their students to correct their composition by themselves.
19. The majority of the teachers never review with their students their common errors in composition.
20. Reinforcement of some grammatical constructions or other items involved in the writing of composition is not given by most of the teachers.

15. The Recommendations

In this section of the research paper, the researchers would like to present the recommendations of the study which are based upon the results given by the research study.

Now the researchers are going to state the recommendations, which they hope that teachers, students, and all those who have a concern of English language teaching as a foreign language, particularly teaching composition writing will take them into account when they want to deal with this very significant skill.

The Recommendations are:

1. Teachers and students should bear in mind that composition writing is considered an effective means of communication.
2. Communicative writing activities should be given.
3. Written work should be linked with the main course since it connects the students with what is included in the textbook. The gap between an analysis of writing and actual classroom teaching should be bridged.
4. Teachers should know exactly what a composition writing activity should achieve. The aim should be based on the students' needs and the syllabus. Students should be given a purpose for each composition activity before they start writing. They should know what they are writing for.

5. Composition writing activities should teach and not test. Teachers should not make their students feel they have failed an activity. Composition writing activities to learn and should progress from the simple to the more complicated as the course proceeds and the students learn.
6. Students should be given different kinds of writing practice to allow them to develop skills and knowledge similar to those of the native speakers and their participation must be encouraged and used as often as possible.
7. Students should be encouraged to deal with the subject selected with a degree of adequacy giving their general abilities and the information available to them and saying what they want to say with a measure of clarity.
8. It is recommended that composition writing should be given 25% of the teaching time.
9. It is recommended to use composition as a means of remembering what students have read, helping their comprehension and making it faster.
10. Teachers should bear in mind that the two types of composition, guided and free, are different and that acquiring one does not ensure improving the other since students will acquire what they have practised. Moreover, neither the free nor the guided composition type can achieve the main objective of teaching composition. They both have strengths as well as weaknesses.
11. It is recommended that teachers should devise ways of dealing with their students' errors in composition writing. A specific composition writing task will call for its own method of error correction.
12. Teachers should give their students composition topics that cope with their age and sophistication, as this will help them write reasonable compositions.
13. The preparatory stage in teaching composition writing is of paramount importance; therefore teachers should give it its deserved care and prepare well themselves and their students for it.
14. Teachers should give their students the necessary help they need during composition writing.
15. Variety in the topics of composition is important; so students should be given adequate practice in the various types of composition writing.
16. Grading of the writing materials according to the students' level is very essential; therefore teachers should take this point into consideration when they give their students a composition lesson.
17. Audio-visual aids play a significant role in the teaching of composition writing. Thus teachers should not ignore these important aids because their ignorance will result in poor teaching of this essential skill.
18. Teachers should supply their students with the necessary kinds of knowledge for composition writing since this will facilitate the practice of this necessary skill.
19. Composition writing should be as realistic as possible as it is a means of communication.
20. Free composition writing is a very complicated and advanced skill; therefore it should be developed with the help of other skills, particularly reading.

21. Flexibility with the students' answers is required as it gives them confidence in themselves and avoids frustration. So teachers should be flexible with their students' answers.
22. Teachers should correct some of the mistakes and let their students know the correction of the others. They should also use symbols that are familiar to their students and help them with correcting their mistakes by themselves. Moreover, each teacher should develop his/her own correction symbols and give them to his/her students at the beginning of the course.
23. Teachers should review with their students their common errors in composition since this will provide them with feedback on their composition writing.
24. Teachers should allow their students to write composition many times since writing is a skill and should be practised many times in order to master it.

16. Conclusion

Almost any written exercise is in fact composition when a pupil is asked to supply a missing word, he/she is completing the composition of a sentence; when he is asked to change a statement into a question, he/she is composing a new sentence. Composition in the usual sense of the word is therefore only a connected form of the written exercise.

The distinction between "composition" and "exercises" probably has to be made in practice, but it is nevertheless an unreal distinction at bottom, which may explain why a pupil will often complete with ease and correctness such a beginning as "if I had a lot of money" when the question is labelled linguistic exercise but will construct the same sentence wrongly when he is working under the label of composition. All the teacher can do is to try to make the pupil understand that every sentence he makes or completes in speech or writing is an exercise in English composition.

The aim of written composition, using the word from now on in the accepted "school" sense as part of an English curriculum, is to give pupils practice in using in a connected form of the vocabulary and structural knowledge they have obtained, and to help "fix" this knowledge. There is a difference in purpose between teaching composition in a foreign language and in the mother tongue, the latter aims at the development not only of correct but also free, fresh, imaginative expression. The former must aim lower, at correct construction and connection of sentences. In English composition, the pupils, especially the beginner, must not be troubled searching his mind for what to write. So, the subjects of composition must be familiar to him/her, drawn from his/her own life and experience. This should continue right through the secondary school course.

References

Bialystock, E. and Ryan, E. (1985). *A metacognitive framework for the development of first and second language skills*. In D. Forrest- Pressley, G. MacKinnon, and T. Waller (Eds.) *Metacognition, Cognition and Human Performance*. Vol. 1 (ppt 207 – 252). Orlando, FL.: Academic Press

Brooks, A. (1986). *Language and Language Learning*. New York. Harcourt, Brace and World.

Brooks, N. (1964) - *Language and Language Learning*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.

Francaise, G. (1996). *Developing Writing Skills*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Geoffrey, et al. (1980). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. London: Henley and Boston

Gorman, T., and M. Walsleben (In press) (1979). *Advanced Reading and Composition skills*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall. (Prepublication version available from VCLA Book Store)

Hedge, T. (2000). *Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Hedge, T. (1988). *Writing*. Oxford University Press

Hennings, D. (1986). "Remembering Foreign Language Vocabulary: Acoustic and Semantic Parameters", *Language Learning*. 23:2

Hudson, H. and Imhoof, N. (1983). *From Paragraph to Essay*. Harlow: Longman.

Joseph O'Dengo (1980). *Study Skills for Students of English as a Second Language*. London, Longman

Karen, G. (1983). *Essay Writing*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Krashen, S. (1984). *Writing: Research, Theory and Applications*. Torrance, CA: Laredo Publishing Co., Inc.

Kress, G. (1989). *Learning to Write*. London: Routledge and Keg and Paul

Lawrence, Mary S. (1987). *Writing as a Thinking Process*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press

Mc Laughlin, B. Rossman, T., and McLeod, B. (1983). Second Language Learning: An information processing perspective. *Language Learning*. 33(2), 135 – 158

Raimas, A. (1985). 'What unskilled ESL students do when they write: a classroom study of composing'. *TESOL Quarterly*. 19/2: 229 – 58

Ross, W. et al. (1986). *Writing and Skills*. New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, Inc.

Samonte, AL. (1976). *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. RELC Journal I (1)

Sharwood- Smith. (1976). *New Directions in Teaching Written English*. Forum XIV (2).

Smith, F. (1982). *Writing and the Writer*. London: Heinemann

Tribble, Christopher. (1997). *Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zamel, V. (1983). 'Responding to student writing'. *TESOL Quarterly*. 16/2: 79 - 101.

John Langan. "*EFL pointers*". 2000. [online] www.mhbe.com