

# Investigating Why Senior High School Candidates Perform Poorly in the Essay Writing component of The English Language Paper at the WASSCE, Ghana.

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**Abstract:** This quantitative survey case study of some selected schools in two school districts in Ghana investigates why many WASSCE candidates do not do well in composition writing, an aspect of the English language paper, at the senior high school level. The study found that insufficient time allocated to the teaching of composition, the inability of teachers to mark students' exercises and guide them through the necessary corrections and interventions, the trend of large classes' size were key factors for the poor performance of students at the WASSCE. The studies further found the overburdened extra-curricular activities which made it difficult for teachers to complete their schemes of work, as part of the problem. Additionally, high level of apathy among students in reading books and writing of compositions, coupled with inadequate reading materials were the other factors. The conclusion drawn from this study is that when teaching and learning processes are given strong commitments by teachers and students, and if there is application of appropriate methodology and sufficient time allocation to this subject area, the performance of students in English composition writing will be enhanced.

**Keywords:** English Language, Senior High school, Students' learning outcomes, West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations

## I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Language, the very essence of our humanity, is also an important and effective tool for both social interactions and communications. Whether as individuals or members of a social group, our ability to function effectively depends primarily on our language skills - especially communication.

The word *language* comes from the Latin word *Lingua* which means tongue (Kari Darko, et al). All creatures communicate, but only humans communicate with language. It is language, more than anything, which distinguishes us from other species. Without language, we would not be human; we would not have been able to create human society, we would live isolated as roaming predators forced to rely on our own experience and not have any sense of who we are – no sense of history, no sense of anything to come (Kari Darko, p.9). Without language we will not be able to express our wishes.

All these forms of socialization and process of interaction come about through our sense of communication. The main function of language, is to communicate, but in order to carry out this function, there must be a means or channel through which Language can be conveyed from one person to the next. This *Channel* is speech. Languages may have an additional Channel through which to communicate through language. That Channel is called *writing*. Men speak in utterances and write in sentences. Our ability to write well in sentences forms the basis of our written communication. We need to express ourselves for others to understand us. This comes through the way we put pieces together through writing to make sense. This is what we call composition. (Kari Darko, 2005)

In the light of the above, the West African Examination Council (WAEC), the most widely used examining body in the country, ensures that questions are set to reflect the various basic grammatical structures that Ghanaian students are expected to acquire during the various courses of our study. This study is therefore intended to provide a basic background on which linguists can stand to examine the effect, if any, of how the language is taught in our Senior High Schools. The students' participation and the materials at their disposal have effect on the standard of English the Ghanaian students are expected to speak or write at the Senior High School level.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

English plays a vital role in the life of mankind throughout the world. According to "David Crystal, English language expert and author of *English as a Global Language*, there has never before been any language that has been spoken by more people as a second than a first. In Asia alone, the number of English users has reached 350,000,000. This figure is approximately the combined population of the United State of America and Canada (Crystal, 1997). In South Africa, "many blacks have adopted their own version of English-laced with indigenous words, as a sign of freedom - in contrast to Afrikaans, the language of oppression". Carla argues that "all languages are words in progress but English's globalization, unprecedented in the history of languages will revolutionise in ways we can only begin to imagine." David Crystal has said that "English has become the common linguistic denominator. "In Africa, the

major language that facilitates cross border communication is the English language and Ghana is no exception. At the turn of independence, Ghana adopted the English language as her official language. Today, it is the official language of government, business and a medium of instruction in schools. Since English language is used as the medium of instruction in the schools, it is expected that anybody who goes through the formal system of education should be able to speak and write the Standard English well. Students should be able to use the language to express themselves in a clear, legible and comprehensive way.

However, this is not the case. For instance, of late, there has been a public outcry about the falling standard of the English language as spoken and written by students of the Senior High Schools and even in the tertiary institutions. In fact, Africanus Owusu Ansah in his feature article titled "Who Owns the English Language (2)" (Monday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2005, page 17) has said that some of the problems why most students fail the English language paper can be attributed to the wrong word used.

Ghana national language policy uses learners' mother tongues to scaffold English language acquisition and English learning at the primary schooling, while using only English language as a medium of instruction from the secondary school level (Opoku-Amankwa 2009; Owu-Ewie., 2006; Yevudey 2017).

Senior High School (SHS) is a 3-year general upper secondary education in Ghana. The SHS curriculum is composed of core subjects, and elective subjects (chosen by the students). The core subjects are English language, Mathematics, Integrated Science (including Science, ICT and Environmental Studies) and Social Studies (Economics, Geography, History and Government). Students then choose 3 or 4 elective subjects from 5 available programmes: agriculture programme, general programme (divided into 2 options: arts or science), business programme, vocational programme and technical programme (WAEC, 2018).

English language paper is one of the core subjects that are taken by all candidates writing both the internal and external examinations at the SHS level. It is mandatory for all candidates irrespective of the candidate's area of study (General arts, general science, technical and vocational). The SHS Education ends at the final external examination known as WASSCE that is organized by The West African examination council (WAEC) for students in Ghana, Nigeria, The Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone— formal British colonies - English speaking countries (WAEC, 2018).

The English language paper comprise of three sections – paper I, 2 and 3; all of which must be taken. Paper 1 and 2 are combined as a composite paper and it is taken at a sitting. Paper one (1) consists of eighty (80) multiple-choice questions, all of which must be answered within one hour for eighty marks. Paper two (2) consist of five essay topics and a passage each, to test candidates' comprehension and summary skills. Candidates are expected to write an essay on one of the topics and answer all the questions on comprehension and summary

passages. This paper will last for two hours and carries 100 marks. It is interesting to note that the essay topic selected by the candidates earn them a total mark of 50 out of the 100 mark for the whole paper two. Paper 3 consist of sixty (60) multiple-choice items on test on orals for the candidates in Nigeria, Liberia, and that of listening comprehension for candidates in Ghana, The Gambia and Sierra Leone. All the questions will be answered in 45 minutes for 60 marks (WAEC, 2018).

The WASSCE is graded as; A1 (excellent), B2 (very good), B3 (good) C4-C6 (credit), D7 (pass), E8 (pass) and F9 (failed). To secure an A in English Language paper, a candidate needs to have a minimum score of 75% across all the three parts of the examinations.

The WASSCE serves as the basis for transition to tertiary education and other non-tertiary/ post-secondary training programmes, including enlisting in security agencies, Journalism and broadcasting, etc. Students are admitted into the tertiary institutions based on their performances at the WAASCE. This should include passing the entire four-core grade for applying to a bachelor's degree programme with at least grade C4-C6 (credit) (WAEC, 2018).

The West African Examination Council (WAEC) examines Senior High School (SHSs) candidates' competencies, in at least seven (7) disciplines across different programmes at the end of the 3-year SHS education, to serve as the basis for admissions into tertiary and other post-secondary training programmes in Ghana. According to the annual WAEC Chief Examiners' reports, SHS candidates' performance in English language keeps deteriorating (WAEC, 2018). The loopholes have always been pointed out by the Chief Examiner in his reports. For example, in July 2018, the chief examiner stated in his final report that; candidates' poor command of the English language adversely affects their understanding in answering the questions set in some cases, for example, English language (Core) 2 (WAEC, 2018).

As we study the chief examiner's report and some publications by the educational analyst, in our quest to finding out the possible causes of this downward trend, we realised, through observation, and from the chief examiner's reports for the past ten years, that the students' ability to construct simple expressions that will aid them to communicate through essay writing in examination is very weak. The effect of these poor constructions in language that is not standard will be assessed to determine the extent to which it may be a contributory factor to the falling standard of English in general and why some students write poor essay in the SHS WASSSCE leading to their failure to be specific.

### *1.2 Research Question*

The following questions motivated us to investigate the trend of this poor performance of some candidates at the SHS level.

- a) What factors contribute to the poor performance of many candidates in the composition writing at the SHS level in the WASSSCE?

- b) Are the teachers who teach the English language using the right methodology?
- c) Do the teachers who teach the English language have the literature in English and language background: are they trained to teach Language?
- d) What are the academic levels of the teachers in the individual schools?
- e) Are there adequate teaching and learning materials for teachers and students in the various schools?

### 1.3 The Purpose and the Significance of the study

This project is undertaken for several purposes. Among such reasons is to find out the factors responsible for the poor performance of many candidates of the SHS in Essay writing /composition. In other words, are there some specific purposes for this phenomenon?

The second reason is to analyse whether using the right methodology, is the pre-requisite step, to the candidates' ability to write good compositions. In other words, are the teachers using the right methodology?

Thirdly, the study will seek to find out whether the teachers who teach the English language were properly trained as English language teachers.

Fourthly, the study will also find out if the composition writing is specifically given specific allocation on the school's instructional timetable.

Lastly, it will find out the way forward to arrest the situation of this phenomenon in the said districts to be specific and the nation in general.

We believe that the findings and the recommendations of the study would be relevant in the following ways:

In the first place, it will lead to good performance in essay writing to be specific and improvement in English language in general. This will only occur if the stakeholders of education ensure that the right methodologies are used in the teaching of composition writing: by adopting the right approach. This can be done if there is constant discussion of the problems, in-service training, workshops, etc. that will create the enabling platform to discuss the problem affecting the phenomenon.

Secondly, the study seeks to recommend the remedy for the loopholes in the English language in general and the composition writing to be specific.

Thirdly, it will also seek to pinpoint some petty mistakes - omissions and commissions that are likely to be made; wrong methodology, apathy to marking of students' exercises, irregular administration of composition exercises, no enforcement of reading, poor or lack of good library facilities, etc.; which teachers are likely to ignore. We believe that these suggestions would be added to, the number of suggestions that has already come out and if stakeholders are serious, they would, through this study find a lasting solution to the problems.

### 1.4 Significance of the study

The researchers believe that the findings and the recommendations of the study would be relevant in the following ways:

In the first place, it will lead to good performance in essay writing to be specific and improvement in English language in general. This will only occur if the stakeholders of education ensure that the right methodologies are used in the teaching of composition writing; by adopting the right approach. This can be done if there is constant discussion of the problems, in-service training, workshops etc. that will create the enabling platforms to discuss the problem affecting the phenomenon. Lastly, the study seeks to recommend the remedy for the loopholes in the English language in general and the composition writing to be specific.

### 1.5 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study should have been carried out in the whole country or better still, the Ashanti region of Ghana. But due to the large number of regions and categories of the districts in Ghana, the researcher chose to focus on two districts in Ashanti region. These Districts are Ejisu-Juaben and Afigya-Sekyere. However, the study was limited to some selected Senior High Schools: ten schools in all.

The researcher also operated within the parameters of the possible causes or factors that accounted for the poor performance of the writing of composition.

Following the background section, Section 2.0 reviews related literature on the topic. Section 3.0 presents the methodology used for the study. This includes research design, population and sample; instrument used for data collection and analysis procedure. The results are presented in Section 4.0, while Section 5.0 presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the study.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature on why candidates in the Senior High School (SHS) perform poorly in the English language. The review will be conducted under the following sub-headings;

1. English as a second language (L2)
2. The role of English in Ghana
3. The status of English in Education
4. The language syllabus (basic and SHS)
5. The problems in the teaching of English (Language policy)
6. Appropriate methodologies for the teaching of English language

### 2.1 English as a Second Language

Ghana has several dialects, which prior to the advent of colonial rule, were used and are still being used in our daily transactions. Meanwhile, English language is the second language (L2) used officially in daily transactions. Ghana adopted English as a second language after her attainment of independence. The British, Ghana's colonial masters, in their bid to socialise easily

with the local people, set up schools to train Clerks, Catechists, Interpreters and others, to speed up their business (Nukunya, 2005). It is to be noted that communication, the live-wire of every business, was initially hampered because of language barrier. Upon attainment of independence therefore, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah made an attempt to adopt a common indigenous language for the country, but these attempts failed (Sackey, 1997). English therefore, became the only option of a language that can be used by educated Ghanaians across the country.

The language, to date, is given very high recognition in administration, international trade and in the schools. However, English is only spoken by those who have gone through formal education and the majority of Ghanaians speak their own indigenous languages (Ocran and Etsey, 2004).

Up to date, there are many people in Ghana who still think that our indigenous languages should form the bedrock of our educational system and even administration. The question is which of our numerous dialects should be adopted? Though it is still being debated at the national level, what is important is that for now our national language is English.

### 2.2 The Role of English in Ghana

As has been stated hitherto, English as a second language plays a very important role in both our national and local lives. It is the official language of the government, administration, the learned professions, business and the media. It is the language used for international communication and also the most dominant language of the internet (<http://www.microsoft.com>).

In Ghana, English is the medium of instruction for formal education at all levels except from basic 1 to 3. The success in any form of education, training and work in general depends on ones' ability to understand and use English language more effectively. It is for this reason that English, the second language, is one of the major subjects of study in Ghanaian schools (JHS English syllabus, p.ii).

The use of English as L2 has vehemently penetrated into our political lives, where even currently, our national assembly (parliament) uses English as a medium of communication and in transactions of business outside the country.

The role of English can be summarized as follows;

- (a) Medium of instruction in all subjects except vernacular, after the first two or three years of primary education.
- (b) Social Functions, such as weddings, some church ceremonies, etc. Services, when conducted in English, are often supplemented with vernacular sermons and hymns. Even the conservative Roman Catholic liturgy has recently adopted, among other things, the Twi incantations of adoration (awensem), to add arched-solemnity to the post-consecration supplication. If the lilting humming of the seraphic 'awensm' does not transport the worshipers out of this world, it is hard to imagine what else would!

- (c) Journalism: there used to be two newspapers that were written in vernacular: the Amansuon (Fante) and the Nkwantabisa (Twi). These have been discontinued. Currently, all national newspapers, apart from "Graphic Ns[mpa]" are written in English. (emphasis mine)
- (d) Administration and all official business in the urban as well as the rural areas. Although some rural areas use their vernaculars for day-to-day administration, all reports on all local proceedings are written up in English. This means that all reportage, be it urban or rural is presented in English.
- (e) Correspondence: Letters are written in English. Personal letters to family, official letters to public figures, as well as formal letters to all and sundry are written in English. Those who cannot write English themselves go to the registered "letter writers" who translate their clients' vernacular diction into English. (Sackeyfio Afarley, 1996).
- (f) Last but not least, the use of English is gradually creeping into our religious lives. Today, religious services are conducted in English and some local assemblies are run in solely English. (Nukunya, 2004).

### 2.3 The Status of English in Education

On the field of education, almost all the subjects studied use English as a medium of instruction. In fact, right from Basic 1 to 3 English is taught as a subject but from basic 4 upwards, it is both taught as a subject and used as a medium of instruction (English syllabi for primary and JHS).

In our recent past and even now, there has been a lot of brouhaha about the fallen standards of English language. "Some have categorically attributed this in full, to the teachers' inability to enforce the speaking of the English language in our basic and secondary school levels, while others partially blame the teachers who teach English and non-availability of materials". The foregoing argument, though not important to the topic above, partly explains why English language has "a high status" in Ghana.

It is the official language for communication, such as speeches, reports, and discussions at meetings or as a medium of instruction in the classroom (Sackeyfio Afarley, 1996). From the above, one realises that deficient of the language would not allow many to participate in official transactions.

In most of our Ghanaian schools, especially private schools, we always come across the old Ghanaian phraseology "SPEAKING OF VERNACULAR IS ABOLISHED", "NO SPEAKING OF FANTE HERE", "SPEAK ENGLISH". What the above phraseologies seek to emphasis is that "owing partly to the diversity of their first language background and partly to their knack of speaking English as a matter of courage, these students use their second language regularly in all situations. In this way, they provide themselves with the persistent practice that a learner needs in the ideal second language situation".



Prof. Naa Afarley Sackeyfio says “such students have in their nursery days, been taught the rhyme

*Good, better, best,  
May I never rest,  
Till my good is better  
And my better best,*

And, you can see for yourself how they fair eventually. They are the candidates who come out with best grades, their constant practice in English having made them perfect.....as promised by the adage ‘practice makes one perfect’”

It is still debatable, as to which language should be used, when two educated Ghanaians who speak the same language meet in informal situations. Naa Afarley Sackeyfio argues that “Among educated Ghanaians who speak the same native language, the only acceptable language of conversation in informal situations is the vernacular”.

Again, she adds that “speaking English to friends, or even to more acquaintances should one know that they speak the native language is considered offensive, affected, uppity, or even downright rude”.

“English can, therefore be described socially as a *language of distance*. One speaks it to people in different social classes when one wants to maintain respectful distance and avoid unwelcome familiarity ... many teachers speak English to students, who, they know very well, speak the same native language as them.....”

In defending the view that English only should be used in our schools, Prof. Naa A. Sackeyfio says:

*English, then, is a language of distance. The trouble is this. The teacher knows only too well that he cannot allow his Students to acquire spoken English from a distance. No Language can be acquired from a distance. The learner has to be immersed, and allow to steep in English language and its culture if he has to be true bilingual. And that is what the teacher aims at for his ward ... and hence the ‘English only’ regulation.*

The popularity of English language cannot be questioned. In fact, according to Naa Sackeyfio, “the Anglo-vernacular is what the educated Ghanaians speak in everyday communication --- in schools, shops, and within the family. It is the language of jokes at parties, and in all other relaxed, elitist situations”. Even though vernacular is accepted on unofficial basis – our daily conversations, arguments, etc. in our university campuses, and so on, Prof. Naa A. Sackeyfio says people prefer “the same mixture, with a thicker sprinkling of English words and constructions which is normally the medium of academics arguments on the university campuses at semi-official meetings” (p.10)

Again, it will not be surprising to “see top government officials, at a meeting or conference room, or even at a conference table, in florid Anglo-vernacular”. A senior executive might declare;

Mbom, with regard to ndz[mba ]’]daae no, mefeel d[ [y[

There has been over- invoicing ara yie. Ntsir no h]n prices  
No dze *wone*inflate

But hear what Prof. Naa A. Sackeyfio says “but as soon as the scheduled meeting officially starts, say with the tinkling of the table bell ..., the medium of communication switches to English. Our senior executives will then translate his declaration above into impeccable English thus;

Yes, as I was saying, with regard to the items we ordered from you, I feel that there has been some over-invoicing, and, therefore, the lists have been inflated.

As regards the automatic switch from one language to another, Prof. Naa A. Sackeyfio says “the automatic switching from one language code to another is, therefore, determined mainly by the level of official users of the situation in hand.

Can the above situation have an influence on the Ghanaian student as regards teaching and learning of the Essay writing in schools? Yes! The switch code does. According to Prof. Naa Afarley Sackeyfio;

*The teacher should always remember this fact when he comes to teach essay writing and register appropriateness he will find this phenomenon a ready reference point for his explanation, because the Ghanaian child sub consciously operates the feature of language adjustment. The only difference is this: whereas in essay writing, the teacher will be trying to make the child weave his way in and out of various registers within the same English language, in the real life of an average Ghanaian, ‘the code-switching’ occurs amidst various language -forms.... with vernacular at one end, English at the other, and the hybrid Anglo-vernacular in between them. (Sackeyfio, p.11)*

The status of the English language is not only rated in Ghana alone. In fact on the international front, the language is given much prominence. According to a recent British Council report, as was written by Africanus Owusu-Ansah and published by the Daily Graphic Monday Edition on May 22, 2005, in his column “The English Language”, “Two billion people are expected to study English within this decade and about half the world – about three billion – will be able to speak it”

Indeed, in that same publication, the writer quoted David Crystal, author of “*English as Global Language*” as “there’s never before been a language that is spoken by more peoples as a second language than the first”. To further concretise this claim, the writer said “In Asia alone, the number of English users has reached 350 million people; this figure is approximately the combined population of United State of America, Britain and Canada”. this indeed reiterate the fact that English language is not only given prominence in African countries, but it is also prominent across the globe. In fact, the above researcher said “English has become the common linguistic denominator.” Again, he opines, “In oxford, the teachers tell the students, “you need two things to succeed: English and computers” In sum, it is clear that English

language usage cuts across all facets of life. Hence, Africanus Owusu Ansah says:” the point of global revolution in which hundreds of millions of people learn English, the planet’s language for commerce, technology, and empowerment is unprecedented”.

#### 2.4 The English Language Syllabus

After 1957, Ghana officially opted to retain English, the colonial masters’ language as the official language of the country and medium of instruction from primary four (Sackey, 1997). All these were an attempt of the then government to stabilize the educational policy regarding which language could be used as a medium of instruction in schools (George, 1976; Sackey, 1997).

English from that moment has become an important subject in the curriculum of Ghana’s educational system. As an official language that is learnt through formal structures, it must have a formal laid down plan known as the syllabus. The English syllabus is laid out as follows;

- a) The English language syllabus for primary school is organized in a way that English language instructions are generally split between reading, grammar, writing and composition and library (primary school English syllabus, 2001). Although it is clearly stated in the syllabus that “the subject English integrates the receptive and productive skills in the teaching and learning of English” (Primary School English syllabus 2001 p.2) in practice, there is little integration in the teaching of various aspects. It has been noted that the five hours a week allocated in the weekly schedules for English teaching is split among the skill with each discreet skill taught in isolation (Ocran and Etsey, 2007). As Kraft (2003) pointed out, the syllabi follow the traditional pattern with little or no connection to the standard world. One hour, for instance is allocated to the teaching of vocabulary and comprehension.
- b) The Junior High School (JHS) English Language syllabus has almost the same allocation as the primary school one. It recognizes the status and roles the language plays in all aspects of our national lives.

The syllabus has therefore been designed to assist the pupil to

- develop the basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing
- cultivate the habit of, and interest in reading
- communicate effectively in English

From the foregoing argument, it is clear that the subject aims at integrating the receptive skills (listening and speaking) and productive skills (writing and composition) in the teaching and learning of English in the five sections indicated below:

|           |                        |  |
|-----------|------------------------|--|
| SECTION 1 | Listening and speaking | oral/speech work conversation  |
| SECTION 2 | Grammar                | language structure   |
| SECTION 3 | Reading                | silent reading, reading aloud, reading comprehension and summary writing |
| SECTION 4 | Composition            | narrative, and descriptive writing, letter writing and summary writing   |

- c) The SHS syllabus seeks to reinforce what was laid down from the basic level. Apart from the general language policy, the SHS syllabus believes that language is a key issue in our existence. It is the very essence of our humanity and an important as well as effective tool for socialization. As individuals or members of a social group, our ability to function effectively and efficiently in almost all spheres of lives depends fundamentally on our language skills (SHS Syll. P. 11).

It therefore aims amongst the following:

- Reinforce language skills and competences acquired at the JHS level.
- develop further the language skills and competences acquired which were acquired at the JHS level
- Raise students’ level of proficiency in English usage and their ability to communicate with other users of English.
- Enable all Senior High School products to deal effectively with the accumulated knowledge through the speaking and writing of English.

What is more interesting is the scope of the content of the SHS syllabus. The study of English, at this level, comprises language and literature. The language component is an integration of the receptive and productive skills in English. The emphasis is laid on the speech work, grammar, reading for comprehension and summary and composition writing. The literature component, on the other hand, introduces students to oral literature and written literature (SHS Syll. p.11).

The organisation of the syllabus is structured to cover three (3) years of Senior High school. Each year’s work has been divided into sections with each section containing a number of units. These are structured as follows:

Listening and Speaking, Reading and Comprehension, Summary writing, Grammar, Writing (composition), Literature and Poetry.

Having spelt out the various components clearly in the syllabus, what is left is the allocation of “time” to deal with each of the above components.

The English syllabus (p. x) says “the course is designed to be taught in forty (40) weeks for each of the three years. English has eight (8) periods of 40 minutes each per week. Six of the periods should be devoted to English language while the remaining two (2) periods should be used for literature in

English”. Allocation of periods per week for the three years of SHS for English and other subjects/items are as follows:

|                               | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| English                       | 8      | 6      | 4      |
| Physical Education            | 3      | 2      | 2      |
| Lib.w/k(Reading and research) | 3      | 2      | 2      |
| S BA Project                  | 3      | 2      | 2      |
| Worship                       | 2      | 2      | 2      |
| Free period                   | 1      | 1      | 1      |

From the above allocations, it is clear that English takes precedence over all the other subjects at the SHS level.

“The concept of profile dimension was made central to the syllabuses that were developed from 1998 onwards. A “dimension” is a psychological unit for describing a particular learning behavior. More than one dimension constitutes a profile of dimensions. A specific objective may be stated as follows: The students will be able to *describe ... etc.* Being able to “describe” something after the instruction has been completed means that the student has acquired “knowledge”. Being able to explain, summarise, give examples, etc. means that the student has understood the subject taught. Similarly, being able to develop, plan, solve problems, construct, etc. means that the students can “apply” the knowledge acquired in some new context. Each of the specific objectives in the syllabus contains an “action verb” that describes the behaviour the students will be able to demonstrate. After the instructional “knowledge”, “application”, etc. are dimensions that should be the prime focus of teaching and learning in schools. In English, two profile dimensions and four skills have been specified for teaching, learning and testing.

The profile dimensions are:

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Knowledge and understanding     | 40% |
| Use of Knowledge                | 60% |
| The four skills are as follows: |     |
| Listening and comprehension     | 10% |
| Reading comprehension           | 30% |
| Speaking                        | 30% |
| Writing                         | 30% |

The profile dimensions and the skills may be combined as follows:

Listening - Knowledge and understanding  
 Reading – Knowledge and understanding  
 Speaking – Use of Knowledge  
 Writing - Use of Knowledge  
 (SHS Syllabus p. xii)

Under the distribution of examination marks across profile dimension, the “productive skills which embody “writing” and “speaking” takes a greater percentage over the Receptive skills which has “listening” and “reading”. The use of knowledge has

a total mark of 150 and percentage weight dimensions of 60 as against 100 and 40 respectively under the knowledge and understanding.

This is further complimented by the allocations of marks on the marking scheme. The composition alone takes fifty (50) marks out of the total hundred (100) marks (final marking scheme Nov./Dec. 2007, p.2) it is clear again that the experts in the language have a certain basic aim. For example, under “the general rules of the marking of composition “(final marking scheme, 2005), the purpose reads “The paper is designed to test the candidate’s ability to use English as an effective means of communication in a given situation and the candidate’s ability to express himself clearly, and coherently in a manner appropriate to the audience, purpose, topic and situation”.

### 2.5 The Problems in the Teaching of English

As has been noted early on, students in Ghanaian schools are second language learners (L2). The syllabus shows a clear evidence of overloading of content to be taught at each grade level and a little connection across the content to be taught. Many teachers do not have enough time to complete the syllabus or the reading text assigned to them (Kraft, 2003). It is clear from the above that teachers at the next level start with a new book or material whether students have mastered the previous and often the essential skills or not. The results of the Criterion Reference Test (CRT) indicate that by primary six (6), a large majority of Ghanaian children are hopelessly lost ((Kraft, 2003, p.46).

#### Limited Teaching Materials

One of the problems students face as second learners of the language is the lack of enough reading materials in the schools. In many classrooms, the prescribed books are insufficient, so students cannot take the few books home to practice what they have learnt.

#### Pedagogical Issues

These have to do with the teaching methodology. Many studies that were done in Ghana confirmed that the failure of students in learning the English language could be attributed to the current teaching methods being used in the classroom today (Kraft, 2003). Bezanson and Hawkes (1972), described the teaching methods of Ghana as being “the traditional, whole-class, teacher-dominated type. The early stages of reading often consist of “alphabetic” and of much “look-and-say” work with words and sentences mechanically repeated, especially in English”. As Dzamshie (1997), puts it, the teaching of English in Ghanaian classrooms is more analytical, and grammar based rather than meaning- oriented.

#### Large class sizes

Large class sizes are big issues in most schools. Teacher-student ratio is such that teachers cannot relate to students averagely as prescribed by the curriculum. This, coupled with the dilapidating nature of our school structures makes the teaching of language very problematic. (Kraft, 2003)

## 2.6 Social and Psychological Factors

As has been pointed out already, English is used in Ghana as a second language. Researchers have found out that learning a second language has distinct similarities with learning a native language (Gibbons, 1991). Researchers again have shown that the basic stages of second language learning are similar to those of a first language learning (Hakuta, 1986, Mclaughlin, 1984).

A critical observation reveals that children, who begin to learn English as second language learners, behave like the L1 learners in the first stage, reproduction stage. They listen to speakers of English but find it difficult to express themselves. As they progress and continue to hear the second language spoken around them, they pick up and use few words at the early reproductive stage. English language learners (ELL), who reach speech emergency stage, attempt to use the language but with many errors. At this stage, they try to make their own words but make a lot of mistakes as they communicate in their new language. As Etsey and Ocran (2007) have noted, "with continuous support from the adult in their environment, they progress into the intermediate stage when they gradually acquire the facets of the English language. Naturally, as they practice speaking the language they come out of all the errors without anyone correcting them and further learn to communicate with others using the conventional language of the community".

Though the acquisition of L1 and L2 through the stages of language acquisition looks similar, researchers have found out that there are important differences between the L1 and L2 acquisition processes. Schumann (1994), an environmentalist researcher, has identified and discussed two factors: the social and the psychological factors.

### 2.6.1 The Social Factor

The social factor explains how social factors influence people's attitudes towards the acquisition and learning of particular languages. The social factors come to play when we are thinking of which language has power over the other and more valued and which one is powerless and not valued. According to Schumann, if a learner who is a minority develops a social distance towards a target majority social group, it will be difficult for this learner to learn this majority language and culture, and appreciate how powerful that language is perceived.

A typical example is that of the language learning situation in Ghana. English has been recognised as a language of power and prestige, a national language and that makes people want to learn it. But our Ghanaian languages are viewed and treated as a low status and that is why some children do not want to learn to speak it or even write it. It is a fact that even young children quickly pick on the fact that what they are and what they speak are not valued. Thus, children are discouraged from speaking their own language and also from speaking a second language.

Another contribution of Schumann's theory is that the greater the social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty the learner will have in learning the second language

and conversely the smaller the social distance, the better and easier it will be for the learner to learn the language.

The conditions that exist in the language learning situation affect the learner. If a learner is faced with all kinds of discrimination and hardship from speakers of a particular language, she might not have the zeal to learn the language.

### 2.6.2 The Psychological Factor

The psychological factor comes into play when the language learner has a psychological distance from the target second language and culture. This can be explained in three ways. The first, is the way motivation affects learning a language. Schumann, a second language researcher, found out that learner's motivation affects the learning of a language. Children who are motivated to learn a second language because they know the benefits they will derive from learning it, do better and are likely to learn the second language better than those with low motivation.

Secondly, learners' attitudes affect the way they learn a second language. If a learner develops a negative attitude toward the language, the culture and the speakers of a second language he has to learn, it is likely she will have problems in learning the language. For example, if Akan speakers have some negative attitudes towards Ewe speakers, there is no way the Akan speaker would want to learn Ewe and vice versa. However, a learner with positive attitude towards the second language and its culture is more likely to learn the language faster and better. Thirdly, a condition that can cause learner (who is a new comer) to find it difficult learning a language is when she expresses a culture shock. When newcomers are made to face all kinds of hardships in learning a language, they might develop a psychological distance towards the learning of the target language.

### 2.6.3 The Dominance of the Native Speakers

This factor explains the importance of how the community supports language learners. Both children and adults learn a second language faster when they live among the native speakers of the language.

Various researchers suggest that the process of learning a native language is not very different from learning a second language (Fitzgerald, 1993, Gibbons, 1991; Freeman and Freeman, 1996, Alderson, 1984).

## 2.7 Appropriate Methodology for the Teaching of the English Language

Undoubtedly, methodologies as to the teaching of any subject are very important. There have been many differing suggestions as to what particular methodology to use to teach essay writing. The bottom line is that adopting the right methods in the teaching of essay writing is very paramount. As Naa Afarley Sackeyfio puts it in her book LET'S TEACH ENGLISH



*Mounting arguments to persuade the teacher of need for essay writing to be taught will be tantamount to our Preaching to the converted.*

The interesting thing is that “everyone accepts that essay writing should be taught” says Naa Afarley Sackeyfio, but what particular methodologies are appropriate, is our concern.

*2.8 The Various Schools of Thought and Their Recommendations*

The ideal composition must have (i) something to say and (ii) a decent way in which to say it (Afarley Sackeyfio, 1996).” The two basic requirements of a good composition have given rise to two opposing schools of thought. Each school argues vehemently on which of the requirements should enjoy pride of place above the other” says Naa Afarley Sackeyfio.

(a) *Structural accuracy* “On one hand are those who argue that structural correctness is supreme”. They assert and rightly so, that, “unless the language used is structurally accurate, communication may break down altogether, so that the writer’s ideas, no matter how lofty they are conceived in our mind will fail to get themselves through to his reader”

This structurally accurate school supports its argument with “hordes and hordes of nonsensical prose written by students”. “And any teacher knows that such nonsensical pieces sell a million for a penny in any pile of exercise books” says Naa Afarley. Sackeyfio.

*(b) The Content School*

On the other hand are those who believe that “the content of an essay is the most important thing about it”. They quote the very first definition of the genre thus:

An essay is one individual view On a specific topic

What we derive from this definition is their conviction that it is the ‘*whatness*’ of the essay that matters, not the ‘*hownes*’ of it. This school cites cases of accurately constructed pieces which say absolutely nothing as proof that matter should come first, not structure (Afarley Sackeyfio, p.265)

*(c) The happy medium*

To quote, Prof. Naa Afarley Sackeyfio,” The unbiased teacher knows that the average student is half-way between these two extremes: he has pretty little material to say to the world, and this little he re-communicates in usually incorrect language”. His teacher’s task is, therefore, two-pronged: the teacher has to get his student

- a) to express wholesome matter, in
- b) high quality language

According to this “most teachers consider both ends of the task equally important. The methods and the techniques of attaining the two ends, however, seem to be up with different schools of thought”.

*2.7.1 Types of Controlled Composition.*

One of the well –known methodologies is the controlled methodology. “It is those who believe that grammatical accuracy is the first goal of a composition that we owe the many exercises in controlled composition” says prof. Naa Afarley Sackeyfio.

*(a) Copying exercise*

The simplest and the most rigidly controlled exercise, is copying. here, students are made to copy into their exercise books compositions that they have built up orally, and which their teacher has written up sentence by sentence, on the blackboard, as good contributions came up from the floor. “By the time Ghanaian students get into secondary school, they have, hopefully, passed this extremely manipulative stage. Hence, the domain of using copying is the more elementary stage of the primary years or at the most unfortunate, the junior secondary school” (Sackeyfio, 1996).

(b) According to prof. Naa Afarley Sackeyfio, some teachers start the senior secondary form one (1) students off with completion exercises. These are as she says, ideally, based on the grammar lessons that students have had previously. In this way, the composition lesson becomes a grammar lessons. Quite a simple completion drill for, say, the very start of senior secondary school could ask students to fill in the blanks in a text with there was, there were, they were, there, since, and any, like the following;

*Completion Exercise A1: FRAME*

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Mr. Freeman’s Exercise A1: Frame             |  |
| <b>Instruction:</b>                          | Fill in the gaps with the most suitable Verb, Verb Phrase or word from the list. |
| .....  |  |
| .....  |  |
| <u>List of Test Items</u>                    |  |
| <u>Text</u>                                  |  |
| Freeman, The Headmaster looked up.           | Mr. Kofi   |
| there was                                    | ..   |
| ..... many people standing on the            |  |
| were   | stage. But   |
| there weren’t ..... girls among              |  |
| them.  |  |
| There were                                   | Mr. Kofi   |
| Freeman, felt uncomfortable that ..... there |  |
| so many boys around him. He                  |  |
| some   |  |
| wished..... were.....of his                  |  |
| any  | more   |
| sober girls among them. He looked around     |  |
| were   | to see if  |
| ..... another teacher anywhere around.       |  |
| there were                                   | there wasn’t   |
| ..... He Sensed that.....                    |  |
| there were                                   |  |
| ..... Mischief afoot. Whenever in a silent   |  |
| was  | group.   |
| ..... boy pretending to look sweet,          |  |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| any                                      | he         |
| could bet .....up to no good.....mon     |            |
| there was                                | key tricks |
| and .....number of pranks.....about      |            |
| no                                       | to be      |
| sprung upon him. That .....for sure! His | School,    |
| Accra Academy, .....no exceptional!! His |            |
| boys.....skitt ish!                      |            |

(p.266)

Another completion exercise is the Now-controlled-Now-free sentence exercise. This is basically one-sentence controlled. The-sentence- free Exercise: as the name suggests, this exercise consists of a test in which one sentence is given by the teacher, while the next is provided by the students.

*Exercise C1: Frame*

|  |  |
|--|--|
| B. The War –Clans March In Earnest   |  |
| Traditionally, this is how the seven war-clans organize themselves for the march through town. |  |
| Each war- clan wears uniforms made in its own special colours.                                 |  |
| .....  | Each war-clan organizes its member’s into groups, according to their ages and sex  |
| .....  |  |
| .....  | First come composed, middle-aged daddies followed by sedate middle –aged mummies.....  |
| .....  |  |
| .....  | Second come lusty young studs in their twenties, followed by buxom young ladies in the same age bracket.   |
| .....  | Third range and stamp boisterous , adolescent lads and their shapely, fiery lassies.....   |
| .....  |  |
| .....  | Fourth come a bunch of under-twelve ; sprightly , young boys followed by budding young girls , their lines not as orderly as those of the Older marches,.....  |
| .....  |  |
| .....  | And, finally, you won’t believe this! But the marchers keep diminishing in size and age , until toddler, clutching toy muskets, constitute the rear guard..... |
| .....  |  |
| .....  | Whatever will these natives think up next I wonder? Yes, wherever indeed!  |
| .....  | Toddlers in the rear guard, protecting the clan from behind.....!!   |

(p.271)

This technique has a lot of advantages. It is obvious that no group of students can tackle this type of exercise without doing a deliberate preparation for it in the class. The teacher would have done this type of exercise with his students in class several times before. He must have told them the following;

- (a) The next sentence always enlarges upon some aspects of the preceding given sentence in the text. Another way of saying this is that the student’s own contributed sentences should always be a development of the sentence before it. This enlargement of what has gone before has an obvious implication for paragraph development
- (b) The kind of details to be supplied by students will also have to be determined in the oral Composition that precedes writing. Unless the teacher controls just which feature of the given *sentence* he wants his class to enlarge upon, students could go haywire and turn up with all sort of haphazard details. According to Prof.Naa Afarley Sackeyfio, too much license, when students are ill prepared to fly off on their own, would lose them the whole purpose of this exercise
- (c) The restriction of details in quality throughout the single exercise is also useful for the teacher in the area of consistency in paragraph development. For example the teacher may decide for the class that their next sentence should concentrate on the way different groups march.
- (d) The one -sentence controlled, The Next-Sentence-Free Exercise, provides guidance for style development. With the teacher at the controlled-sentence, his given sentences will be setting the atmosphere for his peculiar style.

Another technique the experts prescribe for teaching of composition is the ‘Picture Technique’. The ‘Question- and-Answer’ technique is usually listed under the ‘Guided Essay’ group. It is only slightly different from the picture technique in which the students are shown the interesting picture to study, discuss, and use as background material. The questions that follow the examination of the scenes in the picture are just like those put together in the question-and-answer technique. Sometimes, the teacher lists the questions as they occur spontaneously on the chalkboard. Students answer them one by one, just as they do in the question- and- answer situation. And then, unorderly arrangement is cleaned off from the blackboard; a more orderly sequence is written up, with teacher’s eye firmly fixed on the advantages the new order has for commendable coherence. Finally, students are allowed to compose their write-ups from the answers that they have given to the questions.

Another technique for the teaching of composition is the ‘Filmstrip Visual Aid Technique’. In well-equipped schools, instead of the simple, single picture, a filmstrip may be used. After it has been shown to students, an Oral Composition is built around what students have just watched. Extensions to the theme are encouraged through the active use of imagination, and associations of detail to the scenes. Students are encouraged to tell their own versions of the filmstrips’ theme in their own words. While the discussions go on in class, every one chips in into the correction game. If a student makes mistakes; a grammatical mistake, he may be corrected by the teacher, or sometimes by one of his own colleagues., In all oral

preparation, therefore, there is a clear concern with the way things are said.....and therefore, with the medium. (Naa Sackeyfio, pp.288).

The list goes on and on as regards the teaching methodologies and their techniques. The common ones are the 'Controlled Writing', the 'Guided Composition' and the 'Free composition'. However, the above methodologies have their various techniques. To sum up, we have,

- a) copying exercise
- b) the completion exercise
- c) now controlled now free sentence exercises,
- d) The expansion Exercise
- e) The Quasi-Synonymy Exercise
- f) Register. Audience-Specified Writing
- g) The Question –and -Answer Exercise
- h) The picture technique
- i) The Filmstrip Visual Aid Technique
- j) The -story-Ending- Technique and so on.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methods and techniques used in this quantitative survey case study are detailed in this section. It begins with the delimitation of the area of study, the sample and sampling procedures, then the instrument and finally the data collection.

#### 3.1 Delimitation of the Study Area

This study was intended to find some of the causes of the poor performance of many candidates of SHS in the writing of composition. Again the researchers wanted to find out whether the problems could be attributed to poor methodology used by teachers or to the fact that teachers who teach the English language do not have literature in English background. It focuses mainly on the teachers, students and headmasters in the selected schools.

The Ejisu-Juaben and Affigya -Sekyere Districts were chosen because among other things they were closer to the districts in the Kumasi Metropolis and also since they are outside the metropolis they are likely not to be over staffed in term of teachers. Again, in term of the quality of teachers they were not like the schools in the Metropolis. Infrastructure wise, they are far behind their counterparts in the Kumasi Metropolis. Lastly, the researchers chose the two districts because of the scattered nature of the schools in the districts: the distance between each of the schools is quite far. This was to make sure that the researchers travel a lot within the towns and villages to get them acquainted with the socio-economic conditions of the people and its impact on education. The districts were also chosen because they have a number of both private and public Senior High Schools. None of these schools were single-sex school.

#### 3.2 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Our sample for the study is;

- a) English teachers from the following Senior High Schools: Affigyaase Secondary Commercial Senior High School, Westphalian Vocational and Technical

Senior High School, Dadiase Agricultural Senior High School, Tweneboah Koduah Senior High School; all in the Affigya -Sekere District. The rest are: Ejisuman Senior High School, Ejisu secondary Technical Senior High School, Juaben Senior High School, Bonwire Secondary Technical Senior High School, Akyinakrom Senior High School and The Church of Christ Senior High School; all in the Ejisu-Juaben District.

- b) Headmasters in the above mentioned senior high schools and
- c) Some students from the selected schools.

In all, forty respondents from the selected schools comprising of 20 English language teachers, five headmasters and 15 students were selected randomly to be interviewed. Most of the 15 students selected were in their final years. This is because they make up the entire entity having passed through form one and two. The few others who were not form three students were selected because researchers wanted to find out if the right foundation has been laid in forms one and two. Two teachers from each school were also selected. These teachers were all teaching in form three. The five Headmasters were from five schools among the lot. Other major criteria used were:

- a) observation and
- b) interviews

Some teachers were observed during teaching to find out if they use the write methodology. This was to confirm what they have put down in the questionnaire. By this, the researchers sat in the lesson and observed the teaching and the learning process. This result will be captured in the findings.

Interviews were conducted by randomly selecting some students. This was done to find out if students speak Standard English. This was done by engaging them in conversation. Teachers were also tested in this direction. The results again will be in the findings.

The questionnaire was the main research instrument that was used for the data collected. It was designed to afford the respondents the free will to give the necessary information that is required for the study. The respondents were assured of the purely academic value of the study and also that their responses would be treated with maximum confidentiality and anonymity.

This instrument offered the chance to collect different views from as many students as possible. The questionnaires incorporated both close-ended and open-ended items. The respondents were required to tick [ ] the most appropriate responses from the range of preferences. The open-ended questions were to allow the respondents to express themselves in writing; this also helped to check their grammatical mistakes and construction.

Three different questionnaires were designed. The distributions were; one questionnaire for student respondent, one questionnaire for the teacher respondent and another questionnaire for the headmaster respondent.

The students' questionnaires contained fourteen (14) questions: seven of them were open-ended questions with the rest being close-ended which the students were supposing to tick [ ].

The teachers' questionnaire had thirty-five questions in all. Out of this number, twenty-two of them were closed-ended type of questions; twelve were open-ended type of questions.

The headmasters' questionnaires had sixteen (16) questions in all, ten (10) of them were the closed-ended type of questions while the rest were the open-ended type.

In all, the open-ended type of questions was used to allow respondents to express themselves in writing. The aim was to check spelling, constructions, concord and other grammatical techniques.

With the teachers' questionnaire, the first four (4) questions sought to know the background and level of education of the teachers and the number of years spent in the service. The next twenty (20) questions sought to find out the teaching methodology of the teachers, the teaching-learning materials teachers use, in-service training they have had after school, the class size, the reading materials in the school, and teachers' additional responsibilities. The next ten (10) questions sought to find out the community's cooperation and supervision if any. The headmaster's questionnaire sought to find out among other things the number of students in the schools number of teachers, especially, English teachers, the in-service training that the teachers get, the performance of the schools for the past five (5) years, and the supervisory roles of these heads of schools.

The students' questionnaire also sought to find out the following: the number of days they attend school, their reading habit, their participation in the school's writing and debating clubs (if any), how often they go to the library and what they spend their leisure time on.

Finally, the respondents' opinion was sought as to what can be done to improve teaching and learning in general and English language specifically.

### 3.2.1 Administration of the Instrument

A letter of introduction from department of English was given to the headmasters of the various schools. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents personally by the researchers. Due to the time constraints the questionnaires could not be left with the students to be collected at a later date. At the time researchers visited the schools, the students were about to leave for a vacation holiday and were busily writing examinations. The Teachers were busily supervising and marking scripts of students. The students answered questionnaires in the presence of the researchers.

The headmasters and their assistants were greatly of help to us. Teachers were also helpful because even at the time of administering the questionnaires they were busily marking students' scripts, but they could attend to us. But there were few bad nuts among the lot which will be captured later. Respondents asked questions to seek for clarification on items

they did not understand, hence, questionnaires were completed within a short time.

### 3.3 Limitation of the Study Area

The researchers encountered some problems in the administration of the questionnaires. At Ejisu Secondary Technical School, the headmaster prevented the researchers from administering the questionnaires upon excuse that the researchers did not come at the appropriate time. At Westphalia Vocational and Technical Senior High School, the researchers were nearly beaten by one of the teachers simply because the headmaster summoned a meeting of the staff to meet the researchers. Again, due to the sparsely nature of schools in the districts, researchers had to travel sometimes for a whole day in their bid to administer questionnaires. This was indeed, time consuming since it was at the expense of their lectures. The least said about their monetary matters, the better.

Lastly, researchers had to travel as far as to the University of Cape Coast, to look for materials for the literature review: locally, headmasters were reluctant in releasing materials to them.

## IV. RESULTS

This study aims at finding out the reasons why many students of SHS in Ghana perform poorly in composition writing in the WASSCE. This chapter however, is basically about the analysis of Data that has been computed from the gathering of questionnaires for the study. The instruments used were questionnaires. The information was in the form of frequency distribution tables, pie and bar charts that were done with the help of Statistical Package of the Social Scientists (SPSS). The analysis, however, includes the assessment of educational background and qualification of teachers, assessment of the quantity and quality of English language teachers; their commitment to teaching, and teachers' commitment to extra-curricular and part time activities and their effects on teaching. Again, it will also include the headmasters' assessment of the students' performance in the WASSCE for the past four years, teachers' views on how students are committed to their academic work, especially, their approach to composition writing. It also takes a look at how the arrangement of the schools' general time table affects composition writing, the large class size and its effects on teaching and learning and if the headmasters play supervisory roles well. That is, if he or she really checks students' exercise books to find out if these exercise books are marked and corrections effected.

Lastly, the study also looked at the level of performance of students in composition writing, responses on how students use their leisure time, and the number of books they read for a specific time period, as well as whether or not students write compositions on their own. It also sought to find out the consequences on these students if the above expectations are low or absent.



4.2 Assessment of the Level of Performance of Students in English Language Composition

There is a general perception that the level of performance of students in English language, especially, composition writing is falling. In order to ascertain this assertion, this study sought to find out from the headmasters of the studied schools how candidates from their schools have been performing in recent past in the WASSCE examinations. The year of our Lord 2004 through to 2008 academic years were assessed. The result as shown in Fig 1.1 indicates a trend of lowering performance. The highest performance (what can be described as “good” in terms of quality) represents 52.63%. There was no “excellent” and only 15.78% was recorded as “very good”.

Fig 1: Headmasters’ Views on the Level of Performance of Candidates in English Language in WASSCE from 2004- 2008

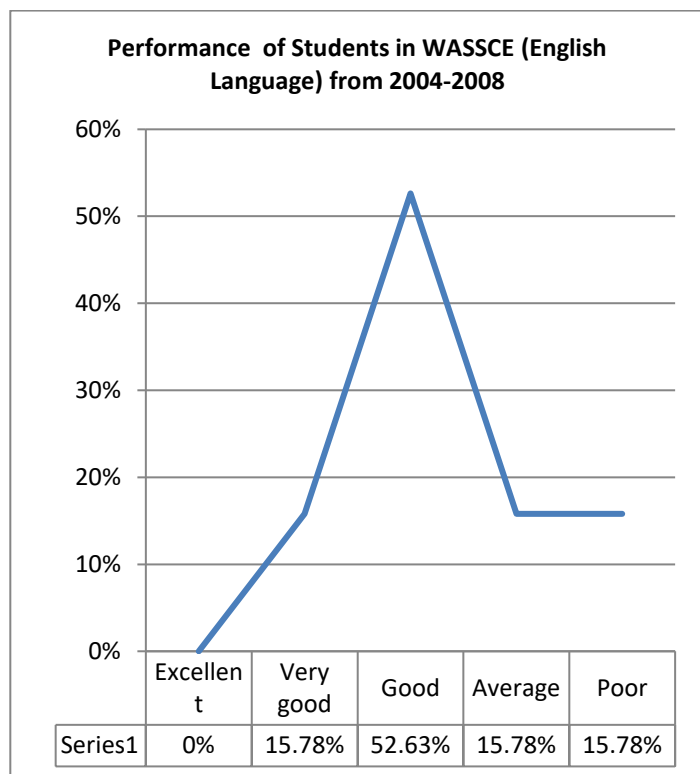
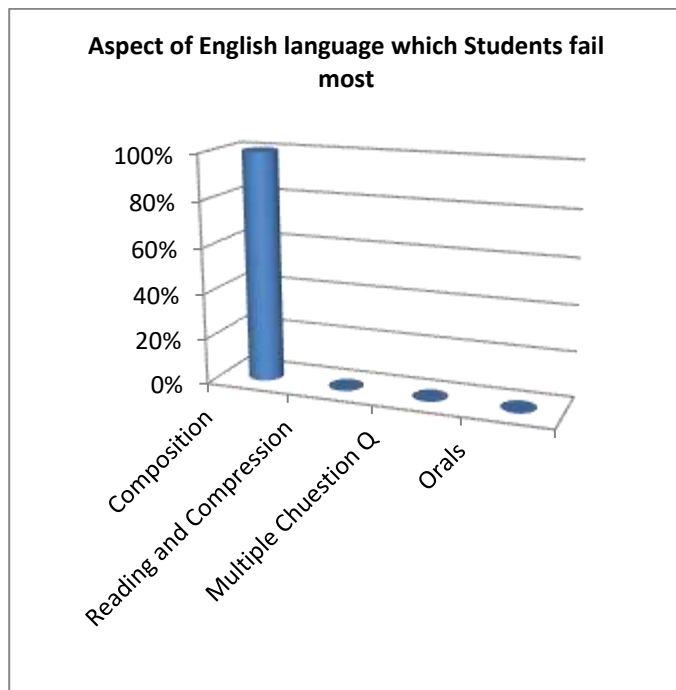


Fig 1 Source: Field Survey, April 2009

This further led the researchers to find out what aspect of the English language paper the students mostly fail in mock examinations in schools. It was realised that it is the Composition aspect. Fig 1.2 depicts that almost all (98.70 %) of the headmasters interviewed attested to this fact. This gives clear indication why most students perform abysmally in English Language, and probably the other subjects in WASSCE. Since this can be attributed, partly to their weakness in composition writing.

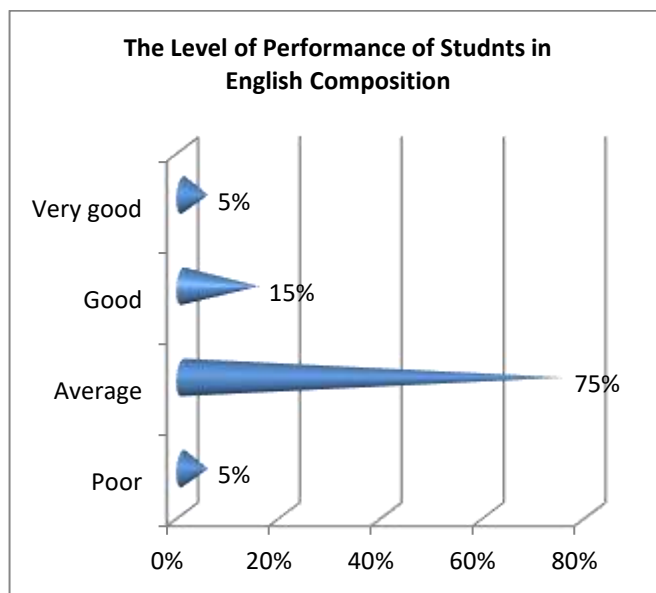
Fig 2: Headmasters’ views on the Aspect of English Language Students Fail most in Mock Exams



Source: Field Survey, April 2009

The researchers also sought the views of teachers on the performance of students in English composition. From Fig.3, Seventy-five (75.0%) of teachers described the performance of their students in English composition as average, five (5.0%) as poor and only 15% and another 5% as good and very good respectively.

Fig. 3: Teachers’ Assessment of the Performance of Students in English Composition



Source: Field Survey, April 2009

4.2 The Level of Qualifications, Competences and Experiences of English Language Teachers

The availability and the quality of teachers are very essential ingredients in the impartation of knowledge from teachers to students. These also have a direct impact on the performance of students in examinations. For this reason, this study tried to find out whether there are enough teachers, especially English language teachers in the schools, their level of competence, qualifications, experiences as well as their commitment to teach.

Student –teacher ratio is one of the two indicators of measuring the quality of education, hence this study sought to find out the teacher-student ratio in the schools. It was realised that teacher-student ratio, especially in English language is very high in the schools. For example in Ejisu Secondary Technical school, there are five (5) teachers handling English in a school of a student population of about 1500, giving a ratio of one English language Teacher to about 300 students. This is far above the prescribed ratio of 1:25. This imbalance is the cause of the large class sizes (over 60 students) in all the schools.

With regard to the quality of teachers teaching English language, it was revealed that out of the total number of twenty (20) English language teachers, almost all are duly qualified (refer to table 4.1), only that some of the teachers are not trained specifically to teach English. As shown on Fig 4, in Dadease Agricultural SHS, there are only three (3) trained English language teachers out of the six (6) teachers handling English. The same situation pertains to Tweneboah Koduah SHS.

It was further revealed that, the quality of English language teachers in the schools is being hampered by the lack of refresher courses for the teachers. When the views of the English language teachers were collated on the number of in-service training they had undergone per term, the results as captured on Fig 4, shows that apart from Ejisu Sec-Tech, none of the other schools have had even one for term.

Table: 4.1: Qualifications of English Language Teachers in Schools

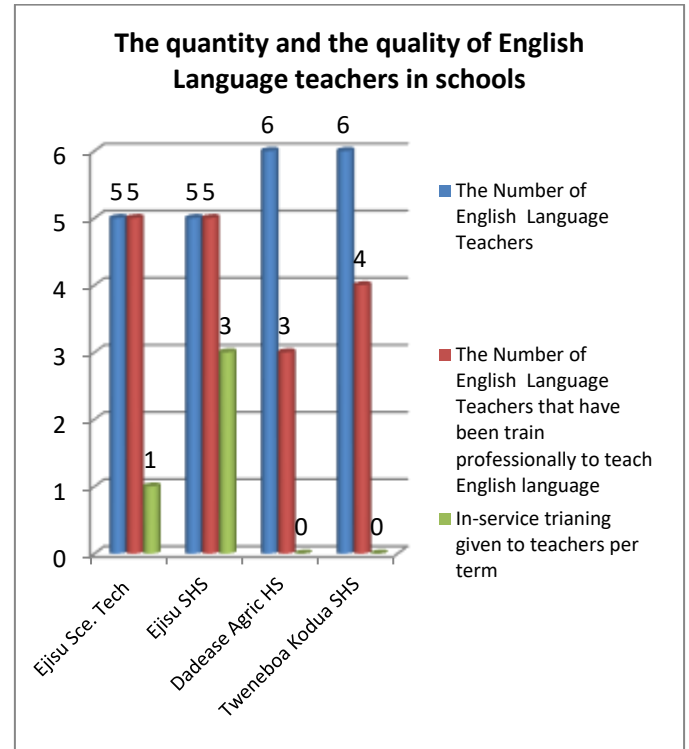
| Qualifications of English Language Teachers | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| SHS Certificate                             |           |         |
| Certificate A, Post Sec.                    | 3         | 15.0    |
| Bachelor of Arts                            | 11        | 60.0    |
| Total                                       | 20        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April, 2009

“Experience they say is the best teacher”, therefore, one would expect that with the necessary experience and exposure teachers would do better in teaching composition to be specific and English language in general. In terms of experience, it was established that, forty- five (45) percent of the teachers handling English language have taught for over six (6) years, thirty-five (35) percent for between 5-6 years; and (ten) 10% percent have served for between 3-4 years and 1-2 years

respectively. The level of experience of English language teachers as captured on table 4.2 can be described as fair.

Fig 4: The Quality of English Language Teachers



Source: Field Survey, April, 2009

Table: 4.2: Level of Experience of English Language Teachers

| Years Served | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 1-2years     | 2         | 10.0    |
| 3-4years     | 2         | 10.0    |
| 5-6years     | 7         | 35.0    |
| Over 6years  | 9         | 45.0    |
| Total        | 20        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

4.3 Assessment of the Methodology Used by English language Teachers in Teaching Composition

The methodology of teaching English language is very crucial to the understanding of the subject by learners. The Methodologies used by teachers in recent times have been questioned by experts in the language like Professor Naa Afarly Sackeyfio. To find out whether teachers are using the right methodology to teach, the views of English language teachers in the study area were sought. As depicted on table 4.3, it was found out that Discussion and lecture methods ranked number one, followed by activity and guided composition approaches. The least applied methodology is Sample and exposure methods.

Table 4.3 Methodology use by Teachers to teach English Language composition

| Methodology                    | Tally             | Frequency | Ranking |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Discussions and Lecture method | #####<br>##### ## | 12        | 1       |
| Activity Method                | ##### ####        | 9         | 2       |
| Sample Method                  | #                 | 1         | 4       |
| Exposure to some occasions     | #                 | 1         | 4       |
| Guided Approach                | ##### ####        | 9         | 2       |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

With regard to the medium through which teachers pass knowledge on to the students, teachers were asked about some of the teaching materials that they use in their teaching process. They mentioned materials like Newspapers, Syllabi, the teacher’s Guide and Textbooks, Cardboard and chalkboard illustrations, envelopes and stamps as well as other authoritative sources. The various materials used by teacher have been ranked on table 4.5.

Table 4.4: Teaching materials use by Teachers to teach English Language composition

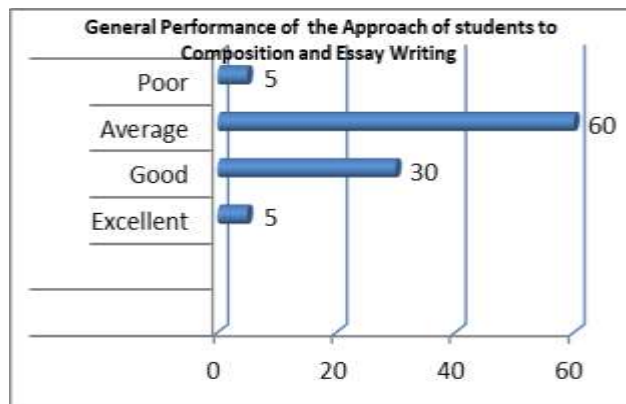
| Teaching materials                         | Frequency | Ranking |
|--|-----------|---------|
| News papers                                | 10        | 2       |
| Syllabi, the teacher’s Guide and Textbooks | 12        | 1       |
| Cardboard and chalkboard illustrations     | 2         | 3       |
| Envelopes and stamps                       | 4         | 4       |
| Other authoritative sources                | 10        | 2       |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

#### 4.4 Stakeholders Commitment to the Teaching and Learning of English Composition in School

The success of candidates in passing examinations does not only lie solely on the quality of the teachers that teach them, but also partly on the level of commitment of students to the learning process. This research finds it necessary to seek respondents’ views on this matter. And in order to get a fair assessment the views of teachers were sought concerning the approach and attitudes of student to composition and essay writing. Table 5 summaries these views. Five per cent (5% ) described the students’ approach as poor, 60% as average, 30% said their students’ approach was good and another 5% said their students approach was excellent. From the fore going, one realizes that majority of the students have a poor approach to essay composition writing; no wonder they do not do well in composition writing in WASSCE.

Fig 5: Teachers’ Views on the Approach of Students to Composition and Essay Writing



Source: Field Survey, April 2009

“Practice they say makes a man perfect “Therefore, the researchers wanted to find out whether students themselves write composition at leisure time. From table 3.6, it is realized that only one student representing 5% write essay very often, seven (7) students representing 35% write quite often, eight(8) students representing 40% write once a week, four(4) students representing 20% do not write at all. It could be inferred that students also contribute to this poor performance.

Table 4.5: Teachers’ view on the Frequency of Students writing Compositions on their own

| Students write compositions on their own | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Very often                               | 1         | 5.0        |
| Quite often                              | 7         | 35.0       |
| Once a Week                              | 8         | 40.0       |
| Not at all                               | 4         | 20.0       |
| Total                                    | 20        | 100.0      |

Following the argument above, the researchers sought to find out teachers’ responses about what students use their leisure time for. This was against the backdrop that during vacations and weekends students do not use their leisure time profitably

Table 3.7 illustrates these findings. Out of the twenty (20) respondents, only three (3) teachers representing 15% held the view that students use their time to study, seventeen(17) Teachers representing 85% said students do not use their time to study. This, we can infer that most students do not study during their free time, therefore, they do not practice what they are taught at school.

Table 4.6: How Students use their Leisure time

| Students use their Leisure time profitably | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Yes  | 3         | 15.0    |
| No   | 17        | 85.0    |
| Total                                      | 20        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

In order to get a balance view on students' approach and interest in composition writing, the researchers sought to find out from students' own perspective. As depicted on table 4.8, it became clear that students devote little time to English composition as compared to the other aspects of the Language. Only 17.6% of the students interviewed said that they devote much time to the learning of English Composition than the other aspects, as against 52.9% for Reading and Comprehension.

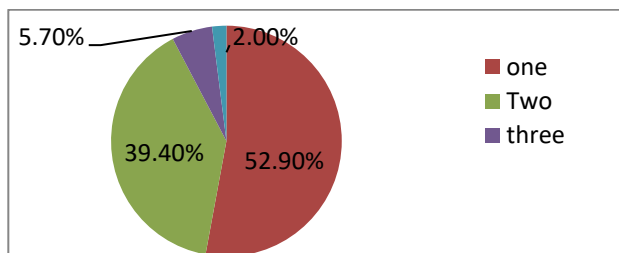
Table 4.7: Students' Responses on the aspects of the English Language they often spend their Time on

| Aspect of the English Language Students spend their Leisure time on | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Grammar   | 4         | 23.5    |
| Composition   | 3         | 17.6    |
| Literature  | 1         | 5.9     |
| Reading and Comprehension   | 9         | 52.9    |
| Total   | 17        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

There has been a general outcry about lack of reading habit on the part of students in the current dispensation. This situation, according to experts, serves as a contributory factor for the poor performance in language in general. The reading of novels has a direct impact on the skill of writing composition as it affords students to amass more vocabulary from them so as to be able to express themselves very well. In the light of this the study sought to collate the views of students with regard to the number of novels they normally read per week. The results as displayed in Fig. 5, show that more than fifty per cent of students read at least a novel a week. Though the result shows some level of interest in reading, it is still inadequate.

Fig 5: Number of Novels Students Read per Week



Source: Field Survey, April 2009

Also the role of the teachers in preparing students for examinations is very central to the performance of students in examinations. Hence, there is a need for this study to assess the role of teachers in this regard. It is a generally held view that teachers do not give enough compositions in class, let alone marking them and seeing to it that students do corrections. It is against this backdrop that table 3.8 seeks to illustrate these findings from the perspective of the students. It is deduced that 29% have been given only one(1) essay exercise in a period of one month, 23.5 % have written two(2) essay exercises ,17.6% have written four(4), and 5.9% have written six(6).This

explains students apathy towards composition writing. This is clearly not a good practice for students to pass their examinations.

Table 4.8: Students' Responses of the Number of Compositions they have written in a month

| Numbers of Compositions | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1.00                    | 5         | 29.4    |
| 2.00                    | 4         | 23.5    |
| 3.00                    | 4         | 23.5    |
| 4.00                    | 3         | 17.6    |
| 6.00                    | 1         | 5.9     |
| Total                   | 17        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

Seeking a balance view from the teachers, Table 4.8 is replicated by table 3.9. This table explains the number of compositions teachers have conducted with the students in a term. Within a term, it is realised that 45% conducted between 2 to 4 exercises, 40% conducted over six times, and 15% conducted between 4 to 6 times. This, however, vindicates the claim that there are few exercises teachers conduct with the students, thereby making them ill-equipped for composition writing.

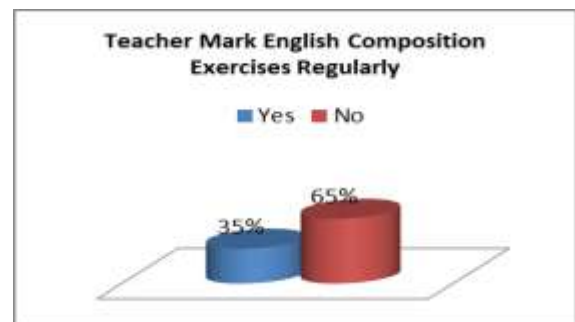
Table 4.9: Teachers' Responses on the number of Composition Exercises that they conducted in a Term

| Composition Exercises that are conducted in a Term | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| 2-4 times  | 9         | 45.0    |
| 4-6 times  | 3         | 15.0    |
| Over 6 time  | 8         | 40.0    |
| Total  | 20        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

Students' views on how often teachers mark their composition exercises were sought. Only 35% responded positively and a whopping Sixty -five (65%) of the students responded in the negative. The result is displayed in Fig. 7. This may also explain why students give less attention to this subject area.

Fig. 7: How often teachers mark Students' English Composition Exercises

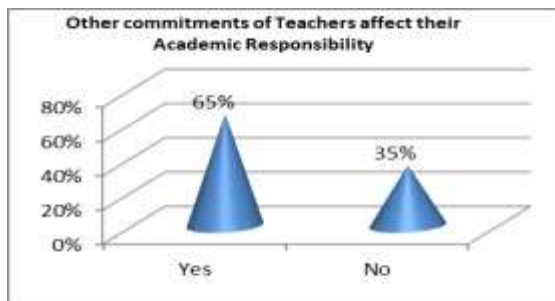


Source: Field Survey, April 2009



There is this school of thought that teachers' burden in the classrooms is becoming increasingly greater than before. This situation makes these teachers practically ineffective. This problem of over burden of teachers is being aggravated with the increasing commitments of teachers to resort to private and extra classes in addition to their instructional hours. It is against this background that the study sought to find out teachers' additional responsibilities in and out of the classroom and their repercussions on their ability to deliver efficiently. The views of teachers as displayed in Fig.8.0 seek to interpret the findings. From the table, 65% said they were overburdened with additional responsibilities which make them ineffective. The other 35% disagreed with the assertion. However, the researchers' interview with some of the teachers revealed that extra- curricular activities like sports take much of their time. However, they refuted the perception that extra classes outside the normal school' timetable affects their academic responsibility.

Fig 8: Other commitments of Teachers affecting their Academic Responsibilities



Source: Field Survey, April 2009

The study also sought for participants' view on the level of monitoring in Schools. There is a widely held view that the reason why pupils in basic private schools perform well in the BECE than their counterparts in the public basic schools is supervision and monitoring. Given this backdrop, the study tried to measure the level of monitoring and supervision in the study area. First, the views of teachers were sought about how frequent the Headmasters and the Assistant Headmasters in charge of academics check the number of exercises they conducted. Seventy (70%) of the teachers said they do it once a while, and 20% said the heads do not conduct checks at all. These responses, as shown on table 4.10, indicate a poor level of supervision in schools.

Table 4.10: Teachers' Views on how frequent the headmaster supervises their Work

| Headmaster checking the exercises conducted by teachers | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Very often  | 1         | 5.0     |
| Quite often   | 1         | 5.0     |
| Once a while  | 14        | 70.0    |
| Not at all  | 4         | 20.0    |
| Total   | 20        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

The headmasters' views on the frequency of visits by the GES official to their Schools were also sought. The result as indicated on Table 4.12 also shows a poor level of supervision by GES.

Table 4.11: Frequency that GES Official/Circuit Supervisors visit the schools

| Circuit Supervisor visiting the school | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Very often                             | 2         | 10.0    |
| Quite often                            | 2         | 10.0    |
| Once a While                           | 9         | 45.0    |
| Not at all                             | 7         | 35.0    |
| Total                                  | 20        | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

The school's timetable is very crucial to the teaching and learning. However, if the arrangement of the various components is not properly done, it will impact negatively on teaching and learning. Table 4.12 summaries the views of the English language teachers about whether the arrangement of the timetable helps in the teaching of composition. Sixty-five (65) per cent of the respondents said it does not favour teaching of composition since they have no time to mark and do corrections with students. Forty-five (45) per cent on the other hand responded otherwise.

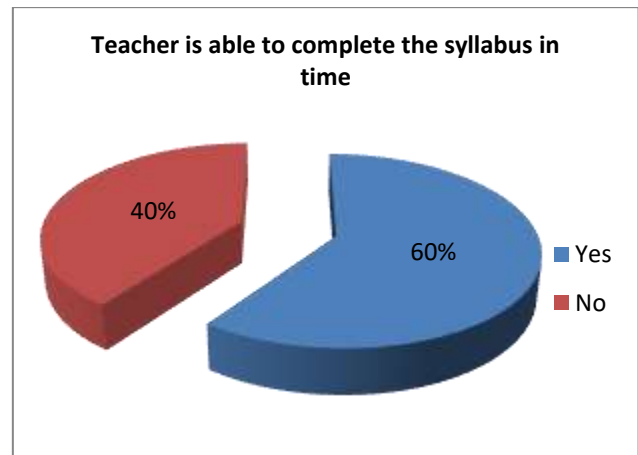
Table 4.12 the Extent the School Timetable facilitates Teaching of English Composition

| The Arrangement of the Timetable helps in the Teaching Of Composition | Per cent |
|---|----------|
| Responses   | 35%      |
|   | 65%      |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

To further ascertain the above assertion, teachers were asked whether they are able to complete their syllabus on time. Some 60% responded yes while 40% responded in the negative.

Fig 9: Teachers' Views on whether they can complete the syllabus in time



Source: Field Survey, April 2009

The research sought to establish the linkages between commitment of stakeholders to the teaching and learning

process, the level of supervision, and a well thought out timetable to the performance of candidates in examination. The responses of respondents as summarised on 4.12 show that there are direct linkages amongst availability and quality of teachers' commitment to teach and learn, to supervise, and to offer appropriate methodology and a carefully structured timetable to ensure general performance of students in examinations.

Table 4.13: The linkages between the Variables for High Performance in Examinations

| There is relationships between the availability and quality of teachers, commitment to teach and learn, supervision, appropriate methodology and a carefully structured time table to general performance of students in examinations | Per cent |
|---|----------|
| Positive  | 90%      |
| Negative  | 10%      |

Source: Field Survey, April 2009

## V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This section summarises the research findings. In the study, an attempt has been made to find out why candidates of the Senior High Schools perform abysmally in composition writing in WASSCE. Our study areas were the Ejisu-Juaben and Effigyia-Sekyerere Districts. The schools are Ejisu Secondary Technical High School, Ejisuman Senior High School, Juaben Senior High School, Bonwire Secondary Technical Senior High School, Akyinakrom Senior High School and the Church of Christ Senior High School. The rest are the Affigyaase Secondary Commercial Senior High School, Westphalian Vocational and Technical Senior High School, Dedease Agricultural Senior High School and Tweneboah Koduah Senior High School.

Teachers, headmasters and students were our respondents. However, we limited the size to twenty (15) English language teachers, four (4) headmasters and fifteen (20) students. Questionnaire was the main instrument used in the collection of Data. Three separate questionnaires were designed for teachers to find out their educational background, academic and professional certificates, and teachers' opinion on the arrangement of the schools timetable and how many times does the timetable allocate for Composition per week. The performances of the schools for the past four (4) years were sought for. Again, a number of English teachers per school were sought for. Students' population was also sought for. This was to determine the Teacher-Student Ratio. Teaching methods were sought for. The students' view were also sought for in the areas of books they read per month, composition written per week, their patronage and involvement of the school library, debate and writers clubs, etc. they participate in. The number of times teachers give compositions exercises, mark and do corrections with the students were sought for.

As regards the educational level of attainment and qualifications of English language teachers, the study revealed that the teachers in the study area are well qualified. Ninety (90%) have a bachelor's degree. Only that some of them (15%) are not specifically trained to teach English Language as a

subject. Also, the English language teachers (55%) were found to be less experienced in teaching since the majority of them (55%) have taught for less than six years.

Concerning teachers' methodology, the study has shown that teachers use the 'discussion method' more than any other method. This is followed by the 'Activity Method' and the 'Guided Approach'. The "Sample" and "exposure" methods ranked fourth (4<sup>th</sup>). With teaching materials used to teach English language composition 'syllabi' the 'Teacher's Guide' and Textbooks ranked first (1), newspapers and other authoritative sources ranked second (2<sup>nd</sup>), cardboard and chalk illustrations ranked third (3<sup>rd</sup>), while envelopes and stamps came last.

For the factors that contributed to the average poor performance in composition, the following are the contributing factors: large class size making marking difficult ranked first (1<sup>st</sup>), inadequate reading materials ranked second (2<sup>nd</sup>), insufficient time allocated to the teaching of composition ranked third (3<sup>rd</sup>), followed by students apathy towards English composition and the use of internet in sending information which does not conform to the practicability and the format of the letter writing was ranked fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) and the last. Other factors that were revealed as a contributory factor for the poor performance in current dispensation is the fact that the majority of the students (about 85%) do use their leisure time profitably. However, 85% of the teachers interviewed disputed the assertion that the use of vernacular, sometimes, by the non-English language teachers in teaching contribute to the students' poor performance in English Language.

With regard to students' approach to writing composition, the teachers assessed the students as poor to average (65%). This probably can be attributed to the insufficient time that is allocated to composition writing in English, the insufficient composition exercises given to students and the inability of the teachers to promptly mark the few exercises that they give due to the large class size in the schools.

As to whether teachers are able to complete their syllabi on time, it was found out that about half (55%) are able as against 40% who are not. However, the majority of the teachers (55%) admit that the arrangement of the school's timetable does not allow enough time to do exercises with their students in class. However, what the research team gathered from the students during oral interviews revealed that majority of the teachers do not even mark the students' exercise books, let alone seeing to it that students have done their corrections. This is probably due to teachers' commitments to other activities such extra-curricular activities and the increase in part time classes outside the schools' timetable.

Generally, the study revealed a downward trend (from good to average) in the performance of candidates in the studied area in English language, especially, the composition aspect as evident in the assessment of the schools performance between the years 2004 to 2008. The factors for the poor performance as revealed by the study have been summarised as follows;

- There is a large class size, marking the conduct of composition exercises difficult
- There is insufficient time allocated to the teaching of composition
- There is students' apathy towards English language composition
- There is inadequate reading materials
- There is lack of students participation in drama and debate (70% said no)
- Most students do not read novels (only 29% read one novel a month)
- Students do not use their leisure time well

The conclusion drawn from this study is that giving a strong commitment level of teachers and students to the teaching and learning process, and coupled with the use of right methodologies and sufficient time allocation to this subject area, the performance of students in English composition writing will be enhanced.

Therefore, the study recommends that:

- ❖ class size should be reasonable to facilitate marking
- ❖ additional time should be allocated to English language composition
- ❖ more compositions should be conducted by the teachers and marking and corrections done
- ❖ there should also be more reading materials supplied to the students
- ❖ writing and debating clubs should encouraged in all schools
- ❖ students should be encouraged to read more novels and other authoritative materials

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