



Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning Writing Skills: The Case of Four Selected Secondary Schools in Hawassa City Administration, Ethiopia

ANTENEH ASSEFA HAILE

Lecturer, School of Languages and Communication Studies, Hawassa University, Ethiopia

E-mail: antenehassefa21@yahoo.com, Tel: +251968682285

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to identify factors affecting teaching and learning writing skills in secondary schools with reference to selected schools in Hawassa City Administration, Ethiopia. To achieve this objective, the researcher employed a descriptive design. For the study, 236 grade eleven and twelve students and 22 English language teachers from these grade levels were made to fill in close-ended questionnaires. The students were selected using systematic random sampling; the English language teachers were selected through cluster sampling. Moreover, a semi-structured interview was held with 12 students among those who had filled in a questionnaire and with the 12 English language teachers. Quantitative and qualitative data were obtained and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus, the study employed a mixed approach. The findings of the study revealed that students' poor reading habit, large class-size, students' poor background knowledge, the nature of National Examinations, the insufficient time for continuous practice, low motivation of students, mother tongue interference, problems related to teaching styles, lack of trainings for teachers, limitations in the teaching materials, and the nature of writing tasks in the textbooks are the major factors affecting teaching and learning writing skills. Finally, recommendations were forwarded based on the major findings so as to minimize the factors affecting teaching and learning writing in secondary schools.

Key expressions

Factors, affecting, teaching, learning, writing, secondary schoolsINTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Foreign language teaching and learning is a complex process. “Adults devote 45% of their energies to listening, 30% to speaking, 16% to reading, and 9% to writing” (Hedge, 2000, p. 305). Writing is placed at the end because it is thought to be highly complex and difficult to master even for natives. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) say, “Probably half of the world’s population does not know how to write adequately and effectively”. Writing and learning to write has always been one of the most complex language skills. Nunan (1989) states, “It is easier to learn to speak than to write no matter if it is a first or second language.” Writing is not an easy task to achieve since it requires hard work, lengthy steps, enough time, and more practice. It is obvious that mastering EFL requires mastering the four skills. And today, none of us would ignore their importance in the educational system, but it has to be noted that writing is the most complex and difficult skill to master.

Writing is unlike spoken language; it requires readers to understand and interpret what has been written. Langan (1987) and Gunning (1998) state that writing is more complex and abstract than speaking. Moreover, Parker (1993) supports this view when he states that writing could be a torment to students. In addition, Pearsall and Cunningham (1988) advocate that writing is definitely “hard work”. Therefore, it is evidently true that writing poses a number of problems to the students, as it is a skill that is difficult to master. It is believed that writing demands a great deal of skills and conventions such as writing readiness and grammatical rules to become proficient and effective writers. Besides that, teachers too face a great challenge to teach this skill and its conventions as students may at times find them confusing and difficult to understand and write effectively in English. Therefore, writing is not just jotting down ideas but it is how these ideas are presented or expressed effectively.

The highly demanding process of writing requires a number of skills and conventions like organization in the development of ideas and information, a high degree of accuracy in choosing the right words so that there is no ambiguity of meaning and also the right use of

complex grammatical devices to focus and emphasize ideas. Besides, writing demands the writer to have a careful choice of vocabulary and understand grammatical patterns and to be able to write sentence structures that are appropriate to the subject matter.

Moreover, writing is fundamental to effective communication (Driscoll, 2012). Writing allows us to share our communication not only with our contemporaries, but also with future generations. It permits people from the near and far distance to speak to us. It is one of the language skills with multidimensional importance in various corners of human life. It is also a language skill which needs a great sort of attention to be the most successful in any academic level of learning. It is a skill which serves as a vital requirement outside the school; writing ability has a significant role on students' success.

Statement of the Problem

In countries where English is a foreign language like Ethiopia, writing in English unlike speaking, listening, and sometimes reading, is not practiced outside the class; what is learned inside the class is practiced inside and has little chance to be developed outside. Moreover, the complexity of the writing skills has led majority of secondary school students to struggle when they need to write paragraphs and essays; this will result in a poor writing.

In addition to the researcher's personal experience and the informal discussions he usually made with secondary school teachers and students, there are studies which confirm the low standard of most secondary school students' writing ability. In the context of our country, some researches disclosed that the teaching of writing is ineffective and the writing performance of students of secondary schools and higher institutions is low (Geremew, 1999, Alamirew, 2005; Desalegn, 2011).

As noted by Solomon (2004), one of the major weaknesses of Ethiopian students at different levels is writing in English and the situation is worse in secondary schools. Solomon (2004) found that most students at secondary school level do not produce written texts which meet the required standard. Moreover, Tsegaye's (2006) study reveals that most grade twelve students are unable to write a single meaningful sentence let alone large texts like paragraphs or essays.

The problem of writing in English is acute even at a university level in which students fail to cope with the writing requirements in courses they take. Along with this, Hailemariam (2012) adds that it is a common phenomenon that the level of Ethiopian students' language skill is very low after they have learnt the language from grade one to university level. Particularly, their writing skill is often found to be below the expectations and most of the problems are related to the teaching and learning of writing skills.

Furthermore, investigating this issue also arose from a personal interest in the field of education motivated by the researcher's experience in teaching the English language for more than eight years in seven different secondary schools where it has been witnessed that majority of the students and teachers face problems related to writing skills. The quality of the writing skills of students at various secondary schools is unsatisfactory since the learners even hardly write paragraphs and essays. The researcher's observations have also been supported by other teachers' point of view working in different schools. These teachers have been dismayed by the mediocre performances of their students, especially when dealing with tasks and examinations which require paragraph and essay writing, note-making, summarizing, paraphrasing, describing, synthesizing, and etc.

Consequently, what is mentioned above and the problems students and teachers at secondary schools usually face were ideal to assess and the motivations for this research. Thus, the researcher chose this topic so as to fill the gap and assess the factors affecting teaching and learning writing in secondary schools.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

This study was intended to identify factors affecting teaching and learning writing skills in secondary schools with reference to selected schools in Hawassa City Administration, Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Identify factors affecting teaching writing skills in secondary schools

- Identify factors affecting learning writing skills in secondary schools.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives of the study, a descriptive design was employed. A mixed approach was used to broaden understanding on the topic. To be specific, quantitative data were obtained through close-ended questionnaires and qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and the data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Sampling Techniques

The sampling techniques employed in this study include purposive, random and availability sampling. The selection of the grade levels as well as schools (Hawassa Tabor Comprehensive and Preparatory School, Saint Daniel Comboni Secondary and Preparatory School, Hermann Gmeiner School, and Hawassa Addis Ketema Secondary and Preparatory School) was purposive. The schools were selected due to their longer service years and high student population and the grade levels were selected for being where the researcher of this study has long been teaching.

The total population of this study was 2,356 students. Since the number of students was unmanageable, in order to obtain accurate and reliable responses, the researcher used stratified sampling. Therefore, by using the systematic random sampling technique, a total of 236 students were selected to fill in a questionnaire.

The researcher believed that this study would benefit a lot if it undertook the total teachers, 22, who were likely to have different educational level, work experience, and their own style of teaching so that availability sampling was used and the teachers were made to fill in a questionnaire.

Twelve students were selected for the interview on the basis of their ability (writing performance: low, medium, and high). Twelve teachers among the twenty-two English language teachers and 12 students among those who had filled in the questionnaire were selected for the interview.

Instruments of Data Collection

Questionnaires

As this study required quantitative data, the researcher designed two types of close-ended questionnaires: one of the varieties was designed for students and the other variety for teachers. Using questionnaires for this study helped in collecting information from a wider sample that could not be reached by interviews or observations. Kendall (2008) states that questionnaire is one of the instruments used to collect information from relatively large sample. Above all, the quantitative results that were obtained from the responses to the questionnaires helped the researcher triangulate the qualitative results secured through the interview.

The questionnaires were designed in a five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree and always to never. Students' questionnaire focuses on factors affecting learning writing and the teachers' questionnaire focuses on factors affecting teaching writing.

In order to achieve validity, the researcher's most senior colleagues were asked to comment on the questionnaires and their comments were duly addressed. Cronbach's alpha was computed on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20 to examine the reliability of the items of the questionnaires. The computation showed that the items were reliable at above 0.78. Based on results obtained during piloting the questionnaires, some of the questions were revised and amended. In addition, some technical words and expressions were translated into Amharic and attached with the English versions.

Interviews

For this study, the researcher used a semi-structured interview. In order to achieve validity, the researcher requested his senior colleagues to comment on the items of the interviews regarding content, organization and grammar and their comments were duly incorporated.

Data Organization and Analysis

Data collected from the students and teachers were analyzed and interpreted using quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. The data collected by the questionnaires were categorized into themes and were fed to the computer and then

imported to the software called SPSS version 20 for analysis. For presenting data appropriately, the researcher used percentage and frequency: with these, data cleaning was made intensively using SPSS by identifying variables and missing values. The data obtained by the interviews were analyzed qualitatively and transcribed and summarized accordingly. Then, the results were discussed and implications were drawn according to the views of the majority of the interviewees.

DATA PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION & INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Teachers' Questionnaire Data Presentation & Discussion & Interpretation of Results

In this sub-section, the teachers' responses on factors affecting the teaching of writing are presented and discussed and interpreted. The results are categorized into six themes and thus presented in six different tables below and, then, discussed and interpreted.

Table 1: Factors Related to the Learners

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Students' lack of interest in learning writing	5	22.7	13	59.1	2	9.1	2	9.1		
2	The students' stock of vocabulary	9	40.9	9	40.9	3	13.6	1	4.5		
3	The students' lack of prior knowledge on writing	12	54.5	9	40.9	1	4.5				
4	Students' poor command of the grammar	2	9.1	15	68.2	1	4.5	4	18.2		
5	The students' lack of/limited reading habit	4	18.2	14	63.6	3	13.6	1	4.5		

As can be seen from the responses to item number 1 in the table above, majority of the respondents (13, 59.1%) agreed and 5 (22.7%) of them strongly agreed respectively that

their teaching of writing is affected by the students' lack of interest in learning writing. However, 2 (9.1%) of the respondents disagreed and another 2 (9.1%) strongly disagreed that their teaching of writing is not affected by their students' lack of interest.

If students lack the interest to learn a subject in general and a productive skill, which needs a continuous practice, like writing in particular, their success will be at a stake.

According to the responses to item number 2 in the table above, the vast majority of respondents, 9 (40.9%), strongly agreed and 9 (40.9%) agreed that the students' level of vocabulary impedes the teaching of writing.

Based on the responses above, it can be inferred that many students have limitations of vocabulary; this may be because the students do not know any effective ways to study vocabulary. The researcher of this study believes that another reason that affects teaching writing in secondary schools due to students' lack of vocabulary may be because the students spend little time on studying vocabulary; they might rarely look for dictionary, and they might usually ignore new words and do not look up meaning as well as the way to use them.

As it is shown in the table above under item number 3, 12 (54.5%) and 9 (40.9%) of the respondents respectively stated their strong agreement and agreement respectively that their students' prior knowledge on writing affects the teaching of writing.

From the results above, it can be inferred that most secondary school students were not exposed for practicing writing skills in their previous grades.

As it is shown under item number 4 in the above table, majority of the respondents, 2 (9.1%) and 15 (68.2%), stated that their students' lack of good command of the grammar affects the teaching of writing. However, 4 (18.2%) of the respondents disagreed and were of the view that the students' lack of good command of the grammar does not affect the teaching of writing.

Reading is a useful tool to improve students' writing since it is the study of what is written. Some reports by Krachen (1984), as cited in Harmer (2006, p. 224), compared classes that

did more reading than writing allowing the conclusion that the reading group showed more progress than the writing ones in the writing test. That is, even if the two skills are separated, for reading is a passive activity while writing is a productive one, they are nonetheless complementary and can be closely developed. Byrne (1991, p. 22) argues “reading, of course, can be the goal in itself and in any case is likely to be a more important one than writing, but the two skills can and should be developed in close collaboration”.

“The more our students read, the more they become familiar with the vocabulary, idiom, sentence patterns, organizational flow, and cultural assumptions of native speakers of the language.” (Raimes, 1994, p. 66)

Based on item number 5 in the table above, majority of the respondents, 14 (63.6%) and 4 (18.2%), agreed and strongly agreed respectively that their students’ reading habit affects the teaching of writing. Nonetheless, 3 (13.6%) of the respondents responded undecided, which shows that these respondents were not well aware of whether their students’ reading habit affects their teaching of writing or not.

Here, it can further be explained that good writing is the result of good reading because well-read people are mostly critical thinkers.

Table 2: Factors Related to the Teacher

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
6	Lack of experience in teaching writing			5	22.7	4	18.2	9	40.9	4	18.2
7	Lack of discussion among teachers on teaching writing	7	31.8	15	68.2						
8	Lack of trainings on teaching	22	100								

	writing										
--	---------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

As can be seen from the table above under item number 6, 9 (40.9%) of the respondents disagreed and 4 (18.2%) strongly disagreed to the item. However, 5 (22.7%) of the respondents agreed that lack of experience in teaching writing affects their current teaching of the skill.

As shown in the table above under item number 7, all of the respondents stated their view that lack of discussion among teachers on teaching writing impedes the teaching of writing.

According to the responses to item number 8 above, all the teachers stated that lack of trainings on teaching writing hampers their teaching. Here, it implies that the teachers need to be equipped with appropriate trainings to acquaint themselves with the changing nature of the world and the teaching.

Table 3: Factors Related to Writing Materials

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
9	Lack/absence of reference materials	3	13.6	14	63.6	2	9.1	3	13.6		
10	The nature of writing activities in the textbook	2	9.1	14	63.6	3	13.6	3	13.6		

Accordingly, the responses given to item number 9 in the above table show that 14 (63.6%) of the respondents agreed that lack or absence of reference materials in their schools on writing hinders the teaching of writing. Three (13.6%) of them stated their strong agreement to the item. In contrast, 3 (13.6%) of the respondents stated their disagreement to the item. The remaining 2 (9.1%) respondents stated their responses as

undecided. A close observation on the above data reveals that majority of the respondents, that is, 17 (77.2%) stated that lack or absence of reference materials on writing in their schools hinders the teaching of writing.

The nature of writing activities in the textbook would possibly impede the teaching and learning process in general and the writing skills in this case in particular. If the contents of the writing lesson in the textbook and the activities therein are not timely and relevant to life, they have the chance to alleviate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. As such, teachers should emphasize the links between real life and school subjects, design assignments, and experiments that use everyday materials and situations, and use personal anecdotes (Palmer, 2007). Tasks that are meaningful to the students' real life motivate them (Frey and Fisher, 2010)

Based on item number 10 in the table above, 14 (63.6%) of the respondents agreed and 2 (9.1%) of them strongly agreed and were of the view that the teaching of writing in their schools is affected by the nature of writing activities in the textbook. Whereas, 3 (13.6%) of the respondents disagreed and 3 (13.6%) of them stated undecided on the item.

The reason for this might be the contents, topics, and exercises of writing lessons in the textbook which are inappropriately designed to effectively teach and learn writing. This result further suggests that the nature of writing activities in the textbook need amendment in order to make them largely benefiting.

Table 4: Factors Related to Testing

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
11	The nature of the University Entrance Examination	15	68.2	3	13.6	1	4.5	3	13.6		

Though the writing component in the English language syllabus of grades eleven and twelve offers 23.04% of the total contents to be taught with 88 solid periods, the writing

section of the University Entrance English Examinations failed to contain practical activities that would clearly evaluate the students' performance in the writing skills. Hence, they lacked content validity. Hughes (2004) states that a test's content validity is assured if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills, structures, etc., with which it is meant to be concerned.

As it can be seen from the table above, majority of the respondents , 15 (68.2%), stated that the nature of the University Entrance Examination strongly affected the teaching of writing in secondary schools. Moreover, 3 (13.6%) of the respondents revealed their agreement to the item. However, 3 (13.6%) stated their disagreement as the nature of the University Entrance Examination did not affect their teaching of writing.

The researcher believes that had the University Entrance English Examinations contained some writing questions confined to shorter essays with limited number of words measuring spelling, punctuation, capitalization, word power, analysis skill, and others owing to the syllabus content in order to accurately test and measure the students' writing, the teaching and learning of writing in the secondary schools would have been so effective.

Table 5: Factors Related to the Nature of Writing

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
12	The complex or challenging nature of writing skills	5	22.7	14	63.6	1	4.5	2	9.1		

As can be seen from the table above, 14 (63.6%) of the respondents agreed and 5 (22.7%) of them strongly agreed respectively that the complex or challenging nature of writing affects the teaching of writing.

Here, it can be inferred that the nature of writing affects the teaching of writing in secondary schools. The researcher of this study believes that a certain strategy needs to be employed by teachers to alleviate the complex or challenging nature of writing while teaching writing to their students.

Table 6: Factors Related to Schools

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
13	The school administration does not allow teaching writing as often as possible which later affects the teaching of writing skills.	3	13.6	15	68.2	3	13.6	1	4.5		
14	The class size impedes the teaching of writing as effectively as possible.	5	22.7	12	54.5	3	13.6	2	9.1		
15	The number of periods or the time allotted to teach writing affects the teaching of writing skills.	7	31.8	10	45.5	2	9.1	3	13.6		
16	Correcting large number of students' written tasks hinders the teaching of writing and becomes laborious.	11	50.0	5	22.7	2	9.1	4	18.2		

As shown in the table above under item number 13, 15 (68.2%) of the respondents agreed and 3 (13.6%) of them strongly agreed to the item that their school administration does not allow teaching writing as often as possible which later affects their teaching of writing.

Three (13.6%) of the respondents could not state whether their schools administrations were considered as factors to the impediment of regularly teaching the writing skills or not. The remaining 1 (4.5%) of the respondents stated their disagreement to the item.

As can be seen from the table above under item number 14, 12 (54.5%) and 5 (22.7%) of the respondents respectively agreed and strongly agreed that the class size in their schools impedes the effective teaching of writing. The remaining 3 (13.6%) and 2 (9.1%) of the respondents remained undecided and disagreed to the item respectively. Accordingly, almost all the respondents, 17 (77.2%), declared that out-numbered classes affect the teaching of writing in their secondary schools. In this respect, it can also be concluded that out-numbered class is another factor that hinders the development of secondary school students' writing ability. Furthermore, it was witnessed in the time of observation, teachers make, instead of teaching, great efforts and much energy to calm down the learners and make them behave properly.

The researcher of this study is of the view that problems related to class size are mainly linked to the school administrations that could possibly reduce the students' number and prepare a good atmosphere where the teaching and learning in general and that of the writing in particular would be as effective as possible.

As it is shown in the table above under item number 15, most of the respondents, 10 (45.5%) and 7 (31.8%), agreed and strongly agreed respectively to the item and were of the view that the time allotted to teach writing in class is not sufficient to effectively practice writing. Two (9.1%) of the respondents stated undecided on whether the number of periods or the time allotted to teach writing in their schools affects their teaching of the skill or not. Nevertheless, 3 (13.6%) of the respondents disagreed to the item.

As the researcher investigated the existing practices of most secondary schools schedules, there are 5 class periods of English every week, so every skill like writing can be taught in one period. However, the responses given by the respondents in the above table reveal that the number of periods or the time allotted to teach writing in their schools is not sufficient and affects their teaching of writing.

It is true that most secondary school students are highly interested in marks, but feedback-comments reinforce students to improve their writing level and make the teaching and learning of writing so effective. Feedback-comments are meant to highlight weaknesses and/or strengths. If comments were given on the students' written works in a regular basis, they would benefit a lot.

As shown in the above table under item number 16, 11 (50.0%), half, of the respondents strongly agreed that correcting their students' written tasks hinders the teaching of writing and becomes laborious. Moreover, 5 (22.7%) of the respondents agreed and were of the view that correcting the students' written works hinders their teaching too. In contrast, 4 (18.2%) of the respondents stated their disagreement to the item.

Based on the results above, the class observations, and the teachers' interview, it can be inferred that this problem might be attributed to the out-numbered class sizes. During the class observation, the researcher checked some students' exercise books and he almost could not find any part in the writing section corrected, marked, and given feedback.

Students' Questionnaire Data Presentation & Discussion & Interpretation of Results

In this sub-section, the students' responses on factors affecting their learning of writing are presented and discussed and interpreted. The results are categorized into six themes and thus presented in six different tables below and, then, discussed and interpreted.

Table 7: Factors Related to the Learner

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%

1	I face difficulty in generating and organizing ideas for my writing topic.	59	25.0	111	47.0	45	19.1	14	5.9	7	3.0
2	Lack of sufficient vocabulary impedes my learning of writing.	88	37.3	99	41.9	26	11.0	14	5.9	9	3.8
3	Lack of reading habit hampers the development of my writing ability.	37	15.7	122	51.7	47	19.9	29	12.3	1	.4
4	Lack of motivation in learning writing hinders my learning of writing.	36	15.3	177	75.0	22	9.3	1	.4		
5	My background knowledge on the practice of writing affects the development of my writing ability.	44	18.6	117	49.6	49	20.8	17	7.2	9	3.8
6	My first language hinders my ability to correctly write in English.	13	5.5	161	68.2	28	11.9	32	13.6	2	.8
7	Fear of making mistakes on	64	27.1	143	60.6	23	9.7	6	2.5		

my writing works affects my learning of writing successfully.											
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Based on the response to item number 1, 111 (47.0%) of the respondents agreed and 59 (25.0%) of them strongly agreed as well that they face difficulty in generating and organizing ideas for their writing. Fourteen (5.9%) and 7 (3.0%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively to the item.

The researcher believes that the students' difficulty in generating ideas may be attributed to their lack of sufficient vocabulary level as it is also stated in the table above under item number 4. The difficulty related to idea organization is most likely attributed to the method of teaching in which the students are supposed to be acquainted with. Hence, the students' level of vocabulary and teaching the strategies on organization of ideas for writing should be underscored.

As can be seen from the table above under item number 2, 88 (37.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 99 (41.9%) agreed that lack of sufficient vocabulary impedes their learning of writing. Herein, the data shows that lack of vocabulary is a serious problem that secondary school students face in learning writing.

According to the responses to this item and the results of the interview, the researcher concludes that lack of vocabulary is the biggest problem that most secondary school students face when learning writing. This later affects their study result and generates many difficulties in effectively learning writing and developing their writing ability.

Based on the responses to item number 3, 122 (51.7%) of the respondents agreed to the item and stated that lack of reading hampers the development of their writing ability.

As indicated in the table above, majority of secondary school students neglect the relationship between reading and writing. It should be noted that the two skills go hand-in-hand.

To question number 4, the responses of the majority of the respondents, 177 (75.0%) and 36 (15.3%), show that lack of motivation in learning writing hinders the learning of writing in secondary schools.

Since motivation is strongly related to achievement, students' motivation makes the teaching and learning easier and more pleasant for both teachers and students. Motivation is thought to make the learning of writing pleasant and enjoyable.

As per the data on the table above under item number 5, 117 (49.6%) of the respondents agreed that their background knowledge on the practice of writing skills affected the development of their writing ability. Moreover, 44 (18.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed that their background knowledge causes problem in the development of the skill. However, 49 (20.8%) of the respondents' responses show that they did not decide on the item.

Since writing is a productive skill, it needs a great sort of practice; however, the students' responses show that they lack good practice on the skill.

As indicted in the table above under item number 6, majority of the students, 161 (68.2%), stated that their first language hinders them to correctly write in English. The influence of first language on the learning of second or foreign language is the main concern of many researchers such as Harmer (2006b), Kroll (1997), Sadek (2007), Stark (2005), and Ghodbane (2010). Generally, foreign language teachers emphasize the need for foreign language writers to think and write as far as possible in English. Friedlander (1997) reports, "Writers do any of their work in their first language" (p. 109). It means that this way of writing will inhibit acquisition of English due to transfer of structures and vocabulary from first language in an incorrect way. Moreover, Friedlander's (1997, p. 109) study indicates that "writers will transfer writing abilities and strategies, whether good or deficient, from their first language to their second or third language."

As shown in the table above in item number 7, 64 (27.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 143 (60.6%) of the respondents agreed and were of the view that the fear of

making mistakes on their writing affects learning writing successfully. As can be inferred from the responses, the students are not of the view that mistakes are signs of learning.

Table 8: Factors Related to the Teacher

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
8	The teaching method in my school impedes the learning of writing.	49	20.8	108	45.8	63	26.7	15	6.4	1	.4
9	The teachers' way of giving feedback on my written works hampers the learning of writing.	9	3.8	103	43.6	76	32.2	43	18.2	5	2.1

As can be seen from the above table under item number 8, 108 (45.8%) of the respondents agreed and 49 (20.8%) of them strongly agreed that the teaching method in their secondary schools impedes their learning of writing. In contrast, few, 15 (6.4%) and 1 (0.4%), of the respondents stated their disagreement and strong disagreement respectively.

Based on the responses to question number 9 above, 103 (43.6%) of the respondents' responses show that their teachers' way of giving feedback on their students' written works hampers their learning of writing. Here, it can be inferred that teachers of secondary schools should be aware of the effective use of feedback.

Table 9: Factors Related to Writing Tasks

No.	Items	Responses				
		Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly

		Agree (5)		(4)		(3)		(2)		Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
10	The nature of writing tasks in the textbook impedes the development of my writing ability.	25	10.6	138	58.5	66	28.0	7	3.0	25	10.6

Teaching materials have their own influence on the successfulness of teaching and learning process. Accordingly, the responses given to item number 10 in the above table show that 138 (58.5%) of the respondents agreed and 25 (10.6%) of them strongly agreed that the nature of writing tasks in their textbook impedes their learning of writing. In contrast, 7 (3.0%) of the respondents disagreed and 25 (10.6%) of them strongly disagreed to the item.

Based on the above result, it can be concluded that writing tasks in the student's textbook are not suitable to develop their writing ability. This result further suggests that the nature of writing tasks in the student's textbook need amendment in order to make the tasks more suitable to practice the skill and make the students more proficient in writing.

Table 10: Factors Related to Testing

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
11	The testing system in my school hinders the development of my writing ability.	7	3.0	170	72.0	37	15.7	20	8.5	2	.8
12	The nature of the University Entrance Exam	10	4.2	152	64.4	63	26.7	10	4.2	1	.4

	impedes the development of my writing ability.										
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Teachers need to know how to give tests that are motivating to the students. Tests need to have thematic relevance; that is, they need to aim at checking what students have learned and whether they can apply it to real-life tasks. In addition, tests that are more demanding or challenging than anything practiced in class will have negative effects on the students' learning.

In responding to whether the testing system in their schools is considered as a factor to hinder the development of their writing ability, majority of the respondents, 170 (72%), agreed to item number 11 in the table above. The testing system of most secondary schools is emphasizing testing the language items which have strong connection with the nature of the National Examination.

Meanwhile, due to the nature of the University Entrance Examination as a factor that hinders the development of their writing ability, 152 (64.4%) of the respondents consider it as a factor.

It can be inferred from the above result that the nature of tests in the secondary schools and the National Examination meant to be factors which make secondary school students reluctant to deal with writing seriously. Since all of the items in the National Examination were multiple question type, it would be difficult for students to be engaged in the development of their writing ability. Had it not been for the nature of the testing system, the students' writing proficiency, either at paragraph or essay level would have been upgraded.

Table 11: Factors Related to Culture

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%

13	Writing culture in the society impedes learning writing which later hampers the development of my writing ability.	65	27.5	119	50.4	36	15.3	16	6.8		
14	My school's culture on the teaching and learning of writing impedes my learning of writing.	1	.4	155	65.7	45	19.1	30	12.7	5	2.1

As can be seen from the table above to item number 13, majority of the respondents, 119 (50.4%) agreed and 65 (27.5%) strongly agreed that the writing culture in their society impedes the development of their writing ability. However, 16 (6.8%) of the respondents stated their disagreement to the item. As mentioned by the respondents, it can be inferred that the writing culture of the community affects the development of their writing ability.

As can be seen from the table above to item number 14, 155 (65.7%) of the respondents responded that their schools' culture on the teaching and learning of writing impedes their learning of writing. Forty-five (19.1%) of the respondents could not decide on whether their schools' culture has an impact on learning writing or not. In contrast, 30 (12.7%) of the respondents stated their disagreement to the item.

Table 12: Factors Related to Time

No.	Items	Responses									
		Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Undecided (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
15	The time allotted for writing class is not enough to practice writing	18	7.6	167	70.8	35	14.8	11	4.7	5	2.1

	and this hampers the learning of writing.										
--	---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

As it is demonstrated in the table above to item number 15, 18 (7.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 167 (70.8%) agreed, 35 (14.8%) stated undecided, 11 (4.7%) disagreed, and 5 (2.1%) strongly disagreed to the item. Thus, majority of the students' responses show that the time allotted for writing class in secondary schools is insufficient to practice writing.

In fact, secondary school students only have one or no period for writing every week irrespective to the objectives of the syllabus and both the student's and the teacher's textbooks. Unless the students do have enough time for learning and practicing writing in the class and the teachers do have enough time to teach their students writing in effective ways; it is very unlikely to expect an encouraging output from the teaching and learning of writing.

Generally, the factors behind secondary school students' poor performances on writing are endless. However, the researcher of this study limited himself to the major ones. The majority of our secondary school students are not motivated to write and learn writing; they are not interested in reading which is the most appropriate input to improve their writing; they have lack of sufficient vocabulary to effectively practice writing; they suffer from language transfer, where they commonly use their L1 while writing in English; they suffer from the fear of making mistakes, which hinders the effective practice of writing; factors related to the students' background knowledge, method of teaching, feedback related to their written works, the nature of writing tasks, the testing system, writing culture, and insufficient time to practice writing affect the learning of writing and the development of the students' writing ability.

Results of the Teachers' Interview

All of the respondents stated that secondary school students have difficulty in expressing themselves in writing. The respondents further stated that secondary school students'

proficiency in writing skills is getting more and more deteriorated. Majority of the respondents mentioned that the students' reading habit, the poor teaching method, lack of competent English language teachers, students' poor background knowledge on writing, students' lack of interest in learning writing, unmanageable class-size, and the cultural reflection of the community towards writing contributed a lot to the deterioration of the skill. In conjunction with this, there are many research findings. For example, Mesfin (2013) revealed in his study that most Ethiopians are used to coming together, discussing their issues, and departing, which later discourages the culture of writing. He also noted that writing journals, keeping diary, and recording personal experiences are not the inherent behaviors of most Ethiopians. Furthermore almost all of the respondents mentioned the nature of University Entrance Examination as another major factor affecting the teaching of writing in secondary schools.

Based on the researcher's experience, the teaching of writing is strongly affected by students' poor background knowledge on writing, their lack of interest towards learning writing, and large class-size, which does not let the students practice the skill effectively. Besides this, most of the teachers' command of the English language is found to be poor that the researcher of this study believes to have a contribution in the impediment of the teaching of writing in secondary schools.

Four of the respondents commented that writing should be given as an independent course in secondary schools. They were of the view that doing that would enable secondary school students who are expected to join university and these respondents thought that the students would even benefit from that in their future career. Moreover, three of the respondents stated that changing the nature of the National Examinations would promote the teaching and learning of writing in secondary schools. One of the respondents noted her better experience of teaching English in Dubai and Italy where she got students excelling in writing in English due to the nature of the national examinations, which incorporate writing activities. She further noted the benefits of reducing large class-size. Two of the respondents believed the teaching of writing skills in universities has to be changed. They noted that teachers' who are graduates from universities have little time in exhibiting their skill in writing because of small number of practical courses in writing.

Hence, teachers graduating from universities should be taught the skill exhaustively during their enrollment if a change in secondary schools is to be pursued. They also recommended the teaching of the language skills in integrated form in order to promote the teaching and learning of writing in secondary schools.

Accordingly, the researcher of this study also shares the same view with the teachers' responses and he believes that there are lots of things to be done to promote the teaching and learning of writing in secondary schools.

Results of the Students' Interviews

Responding to the major factors that hamper the development of secondary school students' writing ability, four of the respondents stated that lack of practice is the major factor for the decline of secondary schools' students' writing ability. One of the respondents in particular was of the view that people do not regard writing as a culture and the social perception towards writing plays a major role for the decline of secondary schools' students' writing ability in particular and majority of Ethiopians at large. Moreover, two of the respondents stated that they have no prior knowledge on writing and they did not learn it in their previous grades which they thought would have helped them to get rid of problems related to writing at secondary schools. One of the respondents was of the view that fear of making mistakes while writing impedes the development of writing ability; two of the respondents stated that they lack interest in learning writing. In connection to this, three of the respondents stated that the poor teaching of writing in particular and the teaching of English language in general at their schools are the prominent factors for the deterioration of their writing ability. These respondents added that they could not get any teacher to help them enhance the skill though they want to do so. Another respondent in particular further stated his view that the teaching of English language in Ethiopia gives due emphasis on the speaking skill than that of the writing and students are considered efficient when they speak in English better than they write in English no matter how better they are at writing. Whereas, one respondent added that the less attention given to writing in her school impedes the development of the students' writing ability.

Accordingly, it can be inferred that the results of the students' interview and the results of the questionnaire show that most secondary school students have difficulty in expressing themselves in writing. Furthermore, the researcher has been experiencing secondary school students' difficulties in expressing themselves through writing. Hence, he believes that factors thought to be affecting need to be treated considerably.

Summary of the Major Findings

Based on the major findings related to factors affecting the teaching of writing, the results of teachers' questionnaire and interview show that their teaching is strongly affected by a number of factors, but the major ones are students' lack of interest in learning writing, students' poor background knowledge, large class-size, the nature of University Entrance Examination, lack of teachers' in-service training, lack of reference materials, cultural reflection towards writing, shortage of competent English language teachers, and the school administrators' attitude towards writing.

Based on the major findings related to factors affecting the learning of writing, the results of students' questionnaire and interview show that the major factors affecting learning writing are students' first language interference, poor reading habit, insufficient vocabulary, lack of motivation to practice writing, the fear of making mistakes in their writing, the style of teaching, difficulty nature of writing, and the nature of writing activities in the textbooks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The major focus of this study was to identify factors affecting teaching and learning writing in secondary schools with reference to selected schools in Hawassa City Administration. Based on the major findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn.

The major factors affecting the teaching of writing are lack of teachers' in-service training, the nature of writing activities in the textbooks, the students' lack of interest in learning writing, large class-size, the nature of National Examinations, the cultural reflection towards writing, and the nature of writing skill.

The major factors affecting the learning of writing are students' mother tongue interference, poor reading habit, poor background knowledge, fear of making mistakes, nature of the National Examination, and lack of motivation in learning writing.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

- Teachers of secondary schools should let the students feel secured and comfortable when they learn writing and encourage them to write even if their English is not that good, teach language skills in an integrated form, regularly incorporate the writing skills in their assessments, be aware of the advantages of feedback and the ways it is used, seriously inform the benefits of learning writing to their students and, try to make writing tasks meaningful for the students by referring to the intrinsic value of the task and the potential applications in other subject areas and outside school, and
- Secondary schools administrators should facilitate the provision of trainings for English language teachers on the effective teaching of writing skills and should think of reducing the number of students in each class. Hence, with small class-size, both teachers and students will feel at ease while teaching and learning writing.
- ✓ Textbook writers should design writing activities in the textbooks in order to permit secondary school students collaborate and communicate effectively in writing both in the classroom and outside the classroom.
- ✓ Policy makers should consider the effective teaching and learning of writing in lower grades.
- ✓ National Agency for Examination should think of the nature of the University Entrance English Examination.

REFERENCES

Alamirew, G. (2005). A Study on the Perceptions of Writing, Writing Instruction and

- Students' Writing Performance. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Addis Ababa University.
- Byrne, D. (1991). Teaching writing skills. (5thed.). London: Longman.
- Desalegn, S. (2011). A Study of the Practice of Teaching Writing Skills: the Case of Bahir Dar University. Unpublished MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Driscoll, D. (2012). United States of America Students Lack Writing Skills. Retrieved from <http://m.ocregester.dot.com>.
- Friedlander, A. (1997). Composing in English: Effects of a First Language on Writing in English as a Second Language. In B. Kroll (Ed.), Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom (pp. 109-125). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geremew, L. (1999). A Study of the Requirements in Writing for an Academic Purpose at Addis Ababa University. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Addis Ababa University.
- Grabe, W., & Kaplan, B. (1996). Theory and practice of writing. London & New York: Longman.
- Hailemariam, W. (2012). Problems Students Face in Writing: Grade Ten Students of Higher 12 Secondary School in Focus. Unpublished MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Harmer, J. (2006). How to teach English. (15th ed.). Addison Wesley: Longman Limited.
- Hedge, T. (2000). Teaching and learning in the language classroom. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kroll, B. (Ed.). (1997). Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom. (6th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Langan, J. (1987). College writing skills. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Mesfin, A. (2013). An Exploratory Study on the Implementation of the Process Approach to the Teaching/Learning of the Course Basic Writing Skills: The Case of Hawassa University. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Addis Ababa University.
- Nunan, D. (1989). Designing tasks for communicative classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Parker, S. (1993). The craft of writing. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.



- Pearsall, T. E., & D. H. Cunningham. (1998). The fundamentals of good writing. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Raimes, A. (1994). Techniques in teaching writing. (3rd ed.). Oxford: OUP.
- Stark, R. (2005). Writing Skills: Success in Twenty Minutes a Day. (3rd ed.). Learning Express, LLC, New York.
- Solomon, A. (2004). The Realization of Process Approach to Writing at the Level of Grade Ten. Unpublished MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Tsegaye, M. (2006). The Writing Problems of Preparatory Students with Reference to Injibara Preparatory School. Unpublished MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.